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Personality and Friendships



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Synonyms

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Definition

Described as one of basic human needs, friendship is one of the most important relations in people's lives and a common personal experience (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Personality plays a significant role in initiation, formation, quality, and maintenance, as well as dissolution of relationships between friends. It can also be deeply affected and possibly transformed by these relationships. In this entry, we will present the most fundamental findings about the links between

personality and friendship, focusing on the impact exerted by personality (Big Five and Dark Triad traits models) on relationships with friends.

Introduction

At every stage of life, people try to build relationships with others. Social connections are related to support that people receive and give to each other. They have positive influence on one's health, mood, and sense of belonging. Provided and received support makes relationships stronger and last longer. Definitions of friendship distinguish it from other relations, as it is voluntary, informal, pleasant, and based on reciprocity. As such, this kind of relationship is quite different from official contacts at work or bonds with family members, where there is no freedom of choice. Friendship can be described from various perspectives, one of which emphasizes the role of positive affect in a state of being friends. A friend is someone a person chooses to play a significant role in her or his life, to share time with, and to engage in various activities together.

How do people select their friends and which aspects play a significant role in the feeling of comfort and pleasure experienced in another person's company? One of the most important factors is personalities of the people searching for this type of connection (Harris and Vazire 2016). In this entry we present several traits of personality which play a vital role in choosing friends and

being chosen to be ones by others. We briefly report their role in initiation, maintenance, and dissolution of friendships, where evidence is available. We do not explicitly differentiate between actor, partner, and dyadic effects (for a systematic overview of those differences, see Harris and Vazire 2016). While many personality conceptualizations could be considered, we focus on the Big Five (Costa and McCrae 1988) and Dark Triad traits (Paulhus and Williams 2002). We chose the former as the one stemming from the most basic and established model of personality and the latter due to their pronounced negative impact on relationships.

Sufficiently stable and long-term relationships can also exert influences on personality traits (Asendorpf and Wilpers 1998; Mund et al. 2018). Emotional closeness and frequency of conflicts impact several personality traits, such as neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, making the relationship between personality and friendship reciprocal, dynamic, and complex. Close friendships provide distinctive opportunities for reinforcing dispositional tendencies and for fostering personality (or at least behavioral) accommodation or change. Preliminary evidence suggests that matched friends (e.g., two high extraverts) mutually reinforce each other's similar dispositional tendencies, while friends with contrasting personalities (e.g., an introvert and an extravert) show patterns of personality accommodation (e.g., extraverts meeting introverts close to home in line with introverts' preferences) as well as complementary reinforcement (e.g., extraverts talking more and introverts listening more when together; Nelson et al. 2011). These complex processes warrant further investigation. In this entry, however, we will focus on the influence that personalities have on friendships rather than on the one that friendships have on personalities.

The Big Five Personality Traits

Extraversion

Extraversion is related to having a high number of friends (Harris and Vazire 2016). This might stem

from the most prominent difference between extraverts and introverts, namely, extraverts' stronger affiliative tendencies expressed in their desire for company in pleasant and enjoyable situations and in the overall desire to associate with strangers. Extraverted individuals make new friends faster in novel settings, often in untypical ways (Anderson et al. 2001). They attract other people with their style, confident behaviors, and friendly expressions, such as smile signifying acceptance. They initiate interactions easily, look at their interaction partners more, are less self-conscious, and make impressions of more talkative and relaxed individuals (Back et al. 2011; Cuperman and Ickes 2009). These behavioral manifestations of positive attitudes lead to more positive perceptions of them at early stages of acquaintance and result in a higher number of people who would like to spend time with them (Back et al. 2011; Cemalcilar et al. 2018), as opposed to introverts with a pessimistic approach.

However, highly extraverted people do not select their friends haphazardly: there is no association between extraversion and the number of friends selected by individuals (Back et al. 2011). Similarity in levels of extraversion facilitates satisfaction from interactions, even in cases of two introverts (Cuperman and Ickes 2009). High extraversion is connected with reciprocal support (Asendorpf and Wilpers 1998). As the only one of the Big Five traits, it is associated with a higher frequency of meetings with friends and spending more time interacting with them (Wilson et al. 2015). Thus, friendships of extraverted people seem to be of high quality, and they involve less insecurity, more emotional closeness, more self-disclosures, deeper conversations (Wilson et al. 2015), and better conflict management. More nonkin relations are found among highly extraverted people (Wagner et al. 2014), as generally their contacts with others are more positive and their friend networks are wider.

Better interpersonal skills of extraverts might help them create more enjoyable experiences and relationships that are more satisfying to themselves (Wilson et al. 2015). Interestingly, the higher quality of their friendships is only self-reported and

not confirmed by their friends, which suggests that some other, less adaptive conduct characteristic of extraverts might cancel out the benefits of their positive behaviors towards friends (Harris and Vazire 2016). In particular, the less communal – that is, dominant and assertive – actions might be the ones driving their friends away (Harris and Vazire 2016; Wortman and Wood 2011).

Agreeableness

Agreeableness has been associated with an overwhelmingly positive impact on interpersonal relationships via friendliness, warmth, and sociability it entails (Harris and Vazire 2016; Wortman and Wood 2011). Agreeable people are focused on others and liked more (Selfhout et al. 2010), though not all studies confirm this association (e.g., Back et al. 2011). Though agreeableness does not predict initiating more friendships (Harris and Vazire 2016), prosocial and altruistic behaviors, high empathy, and focus on cooperation, observed among agreeable people, exert positive influence on selecting them as friends (Selfhout et al. 2010). However, where the encounters are too brief (such as at zero acquaintance), superficial or indirect for the advantages of agreeableness to emerge, the association is not detectable. Agreeableness turns out to be a boon for being liked in face-to-face interactions but not necessarily in social media contexts (Cemalcilar et al. 2018). Where direct interactions are not required, agreeableness appears less conducive to interpersonal attraction: online profiles of agreeable people may not provide sufficient entertainment for passive viewers. The real value of agreeableness emerges in direct contact, where some interpersonal accommodation is necessary.

Agreeable people look at their interaction partners, smile, laugh, and nod more during their interactions, providing more active acknowledgment to them (Cuperman and Ickes 2009). They are more communal: kind, polite, humble, and grateful, as well as less irritable, short-tempered, offensive, devious, suspicious, manipulative, and conceited – and thus more likeable (Wortman and Wood 2011). Similarity in high levels of agreeableness in both partners may facilitate

commencement of a friendship (Selfhout et al. 2010). However, two highly disagreeable persons are particularly unlikely to form a friendly bond. In this case similarity is a disadvantage, perhaps due to the fact that neither partner would or could compensate for the other one's disagreeableness (Cuperman and Ickes 2009). Friendships with highly agreeable people are of high quality, with deeper conversations and more disclosures, as well as more satisfying (Wilson et al. 2015). Since agreeable people are eager to forgive and use effective problem-solving strategies, conflicts do not endanger their friendships' continuation. Altogether, agreeableness is related to better relationship maintenance behaviors and higher relationship satisfaction and stability. Low agreeableness is probably an important factor in friendship ending (Harris and Vazire 2016).

Asendorpf and Wilpers (1998) described "kin attraction" among people with high agreeableness, as they tend to stay in constant contact with their relatives. Friendships formed by them are more traditional, with high levels of stability and geographical proximity between the partners.

Openness to Experience

In spite of the fact that openness has not been identified as a substantial predictor of relationship initiation in existing literature, there are some contexts that appear to facilitate the emergence of such an association. In particular, higher openness is associated with higher interpersonal attraction at zero acquaintance in new environments (such as among incoming freshmen in the first semester at the university) or in social media (Cemalcilar et al. 2018). In the latter context cues related to openness may be more discernable than in face-to-face interactions, as potential friends can have access to more self-expressive statements in zero-acquaintance situations (Back et al. 2011; Cemalcilar et al. 2018).

Constant contact is not necessary to maintain friendships of individuals open to experience, and even short periods of time are sufficient to build a relationship. This is why their friendships are described as less typical and more varying than usual, as they are eager to become friends with people who live far away or are known to them

only via Internet. This is likely due to frequent migrations of highly open individuals. Openness may be associated with more liberal attitudes and lead to higher diversity among people chosen to be one's friends (e.g., from different ethnicities). Homophily in terms of gender or cultural background is not vital in their relationships, only similarity of age may play a role here (Laakasuo et al. 2017). Openness is associated with having a larger network of friends, but not with one's level of closeness with network members. Also, high openness to experience is unrelated to friendship satisfaction (Wilson et al. 2015) and may lead to low stability of relationships (Selfhout et al. 2010).

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is one of the traits exerting small but positive impact on friendship formation and satisfaction (e.g., Selfhout et al. 2010). It might be more important for romantic relationship satisfaction than for friendships, as the processes (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) that lead to satisfying friendships are likely overlapping but distinct from the processes that result in romantic relationship satisfaction (Wilson et al. 2015). Conscientiousness can, however, influence maintenance of a relationship (Selfhout et al. 2010), as the emotional support and productive conflict management techniques, characteristic of highly conscientious individuals, have a positive impact on continuation of a relation. Their high self-control results in appropriate social behaviors, which lead to better relationships. Similarly, honesty, social responsibility, and rule orientation, associated with high conscientiousness, may positively influence the number of a person's friends, as well as quality and stability of their relationships (Jensen-Campbell and Malcolm 2007). High conscientiousness is related to less insecurity, higher social competence, and more positive social behaviors (Jensen-Campbell et al. 2007). Perceived similarity at higher (but not lower) levels of conscientiousness is conducive to interpersonal attraction (Cemalcilar et al. 2018). Moreover, high conscientiousness is associated with willingness to spend time with relatives, who may be chosen for close friends (Asendorpf and Wilpers 1998).

Neuroticism

Neurotic people do not initiate a lot of interactions, which might be due to their belief that they are not liked by others (Back et al. 2011). They struggle both with starting and maintaining relationships, because of their low self-esteem and negative affect. Possibly due to their high self-absorption and apparently low communion, neurotic people are perceived as less likeable (Wortman and Wood 2011). Even in the context of social media, higher neuroticism translates into lower interpersonal attraction among profile viewers (Cemalcilar et al. 2018). Neurotic individuals are also likely to engage in unstable and unsatisfying relationships. This effect might be exacerbated by the fact that in face-to-face interactions, highly neurotic individuals are attracted to each other (Cemalcilar et al. 2018). Highly neurotic persons experience less emotional closeness and higher insecurity, as well as excessive reassurance-seeking than emotionally stable people, which may lead to lower relationship quality and friendship satisfaction, as well as a higher number of conflicts (e.g., Wagner et al. 2014; Wilson et al. 2015). Neurotic people are impulsive, get upset easily, have poor conflict management skills, hold grudges, and often fail to provide their friends with sufficient emotional support (Mund et al. 2018). These features may easily lead to friendship dissolution, as low investment in a relationship is connected with its low quality. As a result, high neuroticism is associated with having a smaller friendship network (Harris and Vazire 2016).

Dark Triad

The "Dark Triad," i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, also shows links with friendship formation and maintenance (e.g., Jonason and Schmitt 2012). Relatively little research has been done in this area, and the literature on this topic is far from exhausting.

Machiavellianism

Those with high levels of Machiavellianism attach little value to establishing close, intimate

friendships (Lyons and Aitken 2010), and their superficial friend selection criteria reflect this low importance: Machiavellians (especially Machiavellian women) seek physically attractive friends (Jonason and Schmitt 2012). Such friends might be used instrumentally to increase their chances of meeting attractive men through “advertisement” afforded by their physical attractiveness. Machiavellians also seek out friends among kind persons, likely because they are easy to manipulate and exploit. Machiavellianism has high negative impact on relationships, as it involves marked tendencies to distrust and manipulate others, and may lead to exploitation of another person for one’s selfish goals. It is related to low empathy, cynicism, and self-serving social motivations (e.g., financial success) which increase competitiveness, as well as decrease cooperativeness and reciprocity, tendencies that are undesirable among friends (Abell et al. 2016). The actions of Machiavellians are rarely connected to sincere interest in the other person, their self-disclosures are less honest and accurate, and, thus, their friendships suffer from low affective quality (Brewer et al. 2014). Machiavellian women rarely show emotional support to their friends; frequently report their friendships to be lower in companionship, help, intimacy, and emotional security; and often employ subtle manipulative tactics, such as making them feel shame or guilt. However, since Machiavellianism is associated with hostile views, but not hostile actions, they try to conform to friendship norms and avoid detection of distrust and manipulations from same-sex friends, so as to ensure their support. They may, through strategically seeking closeness in others coupled with a lack of overt hostile behavior, find acceptance among their peers. Ironically, they believe that it is actually their friends who are manipulating them, which further lowers trust and intimacy in their relationships. Machiavellians are unwilling to commit emotionally to other people, which prevents formation of strong bonds with them.

Narcissism

Highly narcissistic individuals make good first impressions (Back et al. 2011). Those people are

charming, have fashionable appearances, display confident behaviors, and have many stories to tell. Their dominant-expressive behaviors, social boldness, and being perceived as assertive help them make friends easily (Leckelt et al. 2015); however over time narcissists become less popular or are even actively disliked in their social circles (Czarna et al. 2014; Czarna et al. 2016). Even though they might use strategies to keep a friendship going, provide some support to their friends, spend time with them in exciting ways, and even self-disclose (to self-promote), their antagonistic behaviors are likely to lead the friendship to end. Bragging, arrogance and aggression, lack of empathy, hostility, blaming others for one’s own failures, and perceived untrustworthiness are difficult to accept by friends (possibly unless one is narcissistic themselves, Hart and Adams 2014; Maaß et al. 2016). These characteristics have an increasingly negative effect on narcissists’ popularity over time, leading to friends’ disappointment and relationship dissolution (Czarna et al. 2016; Leckelt et al. 2015). Nonetheless, narcissists are equally likely to leave their friends – as they often report experiencing negative interactions, perceive more transgressions, and tend to distance themselves from friends who outperform them (Nicholls and Stukas 2011). They are likely to quickly enter new short-lasting friendships. Thus, narcissism is linked to short-term relations and difficulties in prolonging friendships.

Psychopathy

Little research has been devoted to friendships of psychopathic individuals. Common sense would suggest that individuals who are manipulative, dishonest, and callously insensitive to others would not be perceived as high-quality friends. Highly psychopathic persons tend to see themselves as faultless. They perceive any problems in their relationship as the responsibility of their partner, which may lead to the perception of poor relationship quality. Indeed, high impulsivity, lack of remorse for their misdeeds, and low empathy towards other people produce complications in relationships they form. Adult psychopaths view relationships as unimportant and have mostly

short-lived relationships in which they essentially use people for their own purposes. There is some evidence supporting homophily in friendships among psychopathic individuals: they tend to choose “volatile others,” that is, people who are similarly unkind or untrustworthy and those with similar values, presumably so that they can serve as “wingmen,” making the negative consequences of their fast life strategies less problematic (Jonason and Schmitt 2012; Muñoz et al. 2008). The priority in commencing such friendships appears to be facilitation of their lifestyles and excitement they find in the company of less agreeable people. Research shows that among young people, peers selected youths who were high on psychopathic traits to be their friends nearly as often as youths who were low on these traits, albeit this occurred mostly for boys. Psychopathic girls were less popular among peers and experienced less reciprocation in their choices (Muñoz et al. 2008). However, the moderate popularity of psychopaths among those low on psychopathy might be true exclusively among teenagers, because adolescence is a developmental stage at which experimentation with antisociality and delinquent acts is more normative than at other stages, and thus highly psychopathic peers can fit in their social environment more easily (Muñoz et al. 2008).

Some research suggests that aggressiveness and rule breaking observed among young people with disruptive behavior disorders do not exert negative influence on quality of friendship. Thus, those youths are still capable of building and maintaining intimate relationships. Their friendships are fairly stable and perceived as particularly conflicted only by the psychopathic individuals and not by their friends. The latter seem to be willing to endure a higher level of conflict than others would before reporting it as problematic (Muñoz et al. 2008). Youths who show high levels of instrumental aggression form friendships that they report as being satisfactory, at least in the early stages of its formation (Poulin and Boivin 2000). In contrast, those who show a more reactive type of aggression, which involves impulsive responses to perceived provocations or threats, report low satisfaction and more conflict in their

friendships than instrumentally aggressive youths (Poulin and Boivin 2000). The detrimental influence that high levels of psychopathy have on friendships seems to result from lack of empathy, rather than potentially dangerous behaviors. Individuals with psychopathic traits, lacking in empathy, are likely to fail to consider the wishes of others in their actions. They may believe that friends are there only to please them and may perceive others as being unsupportive when they do not submit to their wishes.

Conclusion

Personality is an important factor that has an impact on building friendships and is related to differences in friendship characteristics (Laakasuo et al. 2017). Even though it presumably explains only a relatively small fraction of the total variance in liking ratings and has a modest predictive power when it comes to friendship formation and maintenance, this impact is nontrivial (Wortman and Wood 2011). The importance of friends’ personalities might in fact seem obvious to most people. However, not all personality traits have a substantial influence on the nature of those relationships, and a given feature may have different impact on separate parts of friendships’ dynamic. Extraversion or agreeableness, as opposed to, e.g., conscientiousness, emerges as more vital in friendship formation. Emotional stability may be seen as an important factor helpful to maintain a relationship. While the Big Five traits’ relationship to this particular social bond is relatively well researched, more study appears to be required in regard to the Dark Triad traits.

Are There General Rules to the Selection of Friends?

Research consistently finds that similarity in personality is a strong predictor of friendship formation (Selfhout et al. 2010). Since personalities have an impact on people’s everyday decisions, the more similar two people are, the higher the chance that they choose similar leisure activities or work tasks. Actual location, work, or type of education influence who people are likely to meet

and with whom they can commence a friendship. Similar day schedule and choice of leisure and work activities lead to opportunities for meeting people who are similar in some ways. Moreover, perceived similarity of personalities seems to be at least equally (if not more) important for interpersonal attraction as actual similarity (Cemalcilar et al. 2018). Though similarities in more fine-grained and specific dimensions, such as attitudes, preferences, economic statuses, and political orientation, seem to play an even more proximate role in determining whether initial liking transforms into enduring friendship or not, it can be argued that many of those specific dimensions are manifestations of one's personality (Mund et al. 2018). Interestingly, similarity in the levels of personality traits seems to play a more important role in interpersonal attraction in face-to-face and other interactions where reciprocity (of communication and exchange) is expected (Cemalcilar et al. 2018). It is not nearly as important in computer-mediated communications, including social media and networks (such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram), where users are more in control of whether or not to further their interaction or continue being an observer only.

While similarity remains one of the most common principles of friend selection, it does not by any means explain all variance in this domain, and there is certainly more complexity to how we choose friends. Recently, a new exciting line of research, one requiring refined study designs and advanced statistical tools, started to examine how certain combinations of personality traits of each member of a dyad are important and how they interactively contribute to person perception and interpersonal attraction (Cemalcilar et al. 2018).

Are Friends' Personalities Related to the Functions of Friendship?

Dissimilarity, when modest, does not necessitate dislike. In the realm of interpersonal attraction, it has been found that perceivers seek those who are slightly but "not too much better versions" of themselves (Cemalcilar et al. 2018). Affiliating with such individuals who complement themselves but not threaten their self-evaluation provides a good balance in their strivings towards two

potentially conflicting goals (i.e., self-affirmation and self-enhancement). While individuals generally seek to enhance their self-esteem by engaging in upward comparison with people who are similar to themselves, there is a comfort zone for associating with people who we perceive as better than ourselves: perceiving others as being too superior may be ego-deflating.

Finding a nonthreatening but advantageous object of social comparison might be an important but not the only or main objective of initiating friendships. Having friends provides a multitude of benefits, mostly via prolonged social acceptance, as well as emotional and physical support. In fact, the quality of social relationships has been found to have a tremendous impact on mental and physical health and mortality (Wortman and Wood 2011). Those multiple benefits of having friends point to the functional or adaptive explanations of the origins of interpersonal liking (Wojciszke et al. 2009). Research findings linking personality traits with liking and other aspects of friendships are consistent with these explanations: personality traits that are more likely to aid or facilitate the interests of others are more strongly associated with being liked by others and perceived as attractive to potential friends. The relationships between traits and liking can therefore be largely explained by communion (Wortman and Wood 2011). How much a trait is liked by others could consistently be explained by how other-oriented that trait item is, as suggested by Wojciszke et al. (2009).

Do Personalities of Our Friends Influence Our Personalities?

Friendships can naturally have both positive and negative consequences, and those frequently stem from the personalities of people with whom one interacts often and closely. As mentioned in the introduction, personality traits continue to change in the adulthood, and those changes may have important influence on health and mortality. Experiences gained in relationships and social roles can have an enduring impact on trait development. Personalities of our friends influence our own personalities and behaviors. Depending on how similar our personalities are to those of our

friends, our traits can be reinforced or their expression suppressed (Nelson et al. 2011). Such influence can be particularly alarming in case of friendships between individuals with less desirable traits, such as psychopaths. Preliminary evidence suggests that, indeed, young people with psychopathic traits might engage in antisocial acts together, reinforcing their delinquency. On the positive side, the same can be true to more socially valuable traits, such as agreeableness.

How Do Personalities Influence Friendships?

Simply documenting that links exist between personality traits and experience of friendship does not clarify the mechanisms through which personality exerts its effects. More research is needed to uncover processes through which personality traits shape relationships with friends. The way in which personality influences friendship formation, maintenance, and satisfaction is likely mostly indirect (or synergistic) – via perceptions that drive motivations, social actions, behaviors and choices, the way people treat others, and through activities which give them opportunities to meet individuals interested in similar things. More research is required to clarify these mechanisms. For instance, quantity of time spent with friends and quality of friend interactions (depth of conversation, self-disclosure, and lack of emotion suppression), although associated with friendship satisfaction, failed to explain the associations between personality traits and friendship satisfaction (Wilson et al. 2015). Future research should examine other potential interpersonal processes that explain how personalities impact each stage and aspect of relationships with friends, including why some people are more satisfied with their friendships than others.

Can We Help People Form Better Friendships?

By studying the mechanisms and processes that account for individual differences in friendship, we can improve our ability to help people understand what may promote or impede the development of quality friendships (Wilson et al. 2015). As we gain better understanding of how personality exerts its effects on friendship formation, maintenance, and dissolution, we can achieve

new insights into the most relevant processes that need to be targeted in prevention of negative interpersonal phenomena and (therapeutic) intervention to change one's own maladaptive behaviors. Importantly, it may be possible to improve individuals' lives by targeting those processes without directly changing the personality traits driving those processes (Wilson et al. 2015).

Cross-References

- ▶ [Big Five Model](#)
- ▶ [Interpersonal Self](#)
- ▶ [Loneliness](#)
- ▶ [Manipulativeness](#)
- ▶ [Machiavellianism](#)
- ▶ [Narcissism](#)
- ▶ [Need to Belong](#)
- ▶ [Psychopathy](#)
- ▶ [Social Connection Seeking](#)
- ▶ [Shyness](#)
- ▶ [Social Interaction](#)

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