



Let's get Personal: The Relationship between Rejection Sensitivity, True Self, and Self-Disclosure in Online Environments

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Introduction

- Online dating has become increasingly popular in the last 20 years.
- Prior research suggests that rejection sensitive individuals may be more likely to engage in online dating (Blackhart et al., 2014).
- Rejection sensitive individuals may find it easier to express their true selves in online environments (Hance et al., 2017) as disclosing aspects of the true selves may be easier during online interactions than during in-person interactions due to decreased social pressures (McKenna et al., 2002).
- The current study sought to replicate past findings as well as to explore the role self-disclosure may play in these relationships. We specifically investigated the role of self-disclosure in use of and communication through online dating sites/apps.



Method

- 561 participants recruited through Sona:
 - $M_{age} = 20.61$, $SD = 4.98$, range = 18-55.
 - 417 female, 139 male, 3 transgender, 2 gender variant/non conforming.
 - 493 heterosexual, 21 gay/lesbian, 41 bisexual or pansexual, 6 other.
 - 84.5% White/Caucasian.
- Completed the 9-item Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (Downey & Feldman, 1996), the Real Me Scale (McKenna et al., 2002), the Self-Disclosure Scale (Wheless & Grotz, 1976), and the Online Dating Inventory (Blackhart et al., 2014).
- For those who had engaged in online dating, self-disclosure in online dating profiles ($n = 194$) and in communication with others through online dating sites ($n = 172$) was assessed.

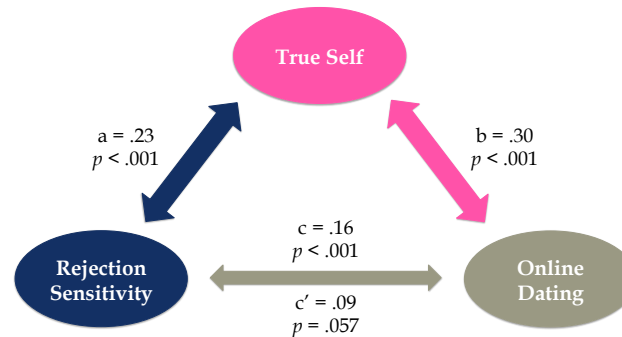
Results

- Consistent with prior research, rejection sensitivity was positively related to true self and rejection sensitivity and true self were positively correlated with online dating site use.
- Inconsistent with prior research, however, a multiple regression analysis showed that only true self ($b = .22$, $t = 5.27$, $p < .001$), and not rejection sensitivity ($b = .08$, $t = 1.90$, $p = .057$), predicted online dating site/app use.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Rejection Sensitivity	-				
2. True Self	.27**	-			
3. Online Dating Site Use	.14*	.25**	-		
4. Self-Disclosure in Profile	-.02	.23*	.26**	-	
5. Self-Disclosure in Comm.	.10	.24*	.40**	.39**	-
Mean	10.09	5.68	4.24	15.76	15.40
SD	4.40	3.75	5.03	7.58	5.74

* $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$

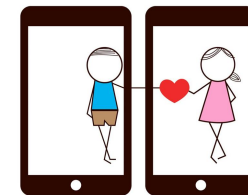
- A mediation analysis was conducted to assess whether true self mediated the relationship between rejection sensitivity and online dating site use using the Preacher and Hayes (2008) bootstrapping method with 5000 bootstrap resamples. Consistent with prior research, there was an indirect relationship between rejection sensitivity and online dating use through true self, 95% CI = .04, .11.



- We also examined the roles that rejection sensitivity and true self played in self-disclosure through online dating for those who engaged in online dating.
- Although rejection sensitivity was not related to self-disclosure in online dating profiles or when communicating with others through online dating sites, true self was positively related to both.
- In addition, a multiple regression analysis showed that only true self significantly predicted self-disclosure in online dating profiles ($b = .25$, $t = 3.45$, $p = .001$) and when communicating with others through online dating sites ($b = .23$, $t = 2.59$, $p = .004$).

Conclusions

- The current results show that rejection sensitive individuals feel they are better able to express their true selves through online communication.
- This suggests that rejection sensitive individuals may be more likely to engage in online dating because it may facilitate representation of their true selves.
- Results also suggest that a desire to share one's true self may facilitate self-disclosure in online communication through online dating sites and apps, which may be helpful in developing relationships with others through online mediums.
- Online dating may therefore present a viable option for rejection sensitive individuals to form romantic relationships as online dating may facilitate representation of the true self.
- Future research should examine whether engagement in online dating facilitates development of romantic relationships for individuals high in rejection sensitivity.
- Limitations include that data were cross sectional and self-report and that the sample is rather homogenous (i.e., overrepresentation of white, college-age heterosexual females).



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