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Emotional Promiscuity Scale

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Research on promiscuity has focused on the sexual side with virtually no attention paid to the emotional side. I define emotional promiscuity as the tendency to develop romantic feelings quickly, often, and less discriminately. This tendency may be at least as important as sexual promiscuity with respect to the origins, development, and sustenance of relationships. Insofar as past behavior is predictive of future behavior in romantic relationships, emotional promiscuity in the past should influence current relationships in a variety of ways.

Researchers are beginning to confirm the longstanding notion that (at least some) people have little trouble disentangling sex and love (see Diamond, 2004). The same distinction applies to promiscuity. In one study, for example, Harms, Williams, and Paulhus (2001) found that those who are “love-prone” do not share the same individual difference correlates as those who are “lust-prone.” Moreover, those seeking a mate take into consideration the emotional promiscuity of potential partners. For example, women and long-term-oriented men are averse to dating emotionally promiscuous partners and quickly end relationships with them (Jones, 2009).

Emotional promiscuity research looms large in importance when one considers the potential health consequences. Researchers have indicated that those who report being in love feel less at risk for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs; Manuel, 2005) and are less likely to use condoms (Rosenthal, Gifford, & Moore, 1998). It follows that emotionally promiscuous individuals are at higher risk for STD infection.

In sum, there appear to be health as well as relationship consequences of emotional promiscuity. Further advancement of research on this variable requires a standard instrument. This report provides an overview of my development of a reliable and valid measure of emotional promiscuity.

Description

My literature search revealed several elements of emotional promiscuity (EP): the tendency to fall in love quickly, frequently, and indiscriminately. Also associated is an exaggerated fascination with the experience of falling in love. The construct of emotional promiscuity must be distinguished from sexual promiscuity, that is, indiscriminate sexual activity (e.g., Simpson & Gangestad, 1991). It must also be distinguished from romanticism, the tendency to endorse idealistic notions of love (e.g., Sprecher & Metts, 1989).

Accordingly, a useful measure of EP would be able to assess the construct independently of sexual promiscuity or romanticism. This is not to say that the measures of the three constructs cannot be correlated—just not inherently confounded. To this end, I developed and validated a reliable measure of individual differences in emotional promiscuity. To permit fair comparisons with the effects of sexual promiscuity, I used the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991) as a template. For robust coverage, the items span from behaviors to attitudes to identity. I used several questionnaire formats to cover both attitudes and reported behaviors.

The final set of 10 emotional promiscuity (EP) items were selected by refining a large wide-ranging item set. A series of factor analyses along with part-whole correlations were used to narrow the item set. The items were retained if they fell on the first unrotated factor in a total of four datasets.

Response Mode and Timing

The EP scale has been used successfully in paper-and-pencil as well as online survey formats. For best results, it should be administered privately and confidentially. It is appropriate for adults of any age and takes less than a minute to complete.

Scoring and Reliability

The items were evaluated separately for male and female participants in two types of samples: (a) a college student dataset (N = 142), and (b) two web-based surveys (N = 775).

College data. The data were from students attending a large northwestern university. Only individuals of European extraction were included. The item mean for males (2.99) was higher than the mean for females (2.81), marginally close to, but not reaching, statistical significance, t(141) = 1.88, p = .07. The alpha reliability was .69 for both male and female participants.

Web data. Two web-based surveys were aimed at a much broader community sample and included participants with a wide range of ages (16 to 71) and education. The item mean for males (3.45) was not significantly higher than the mean for females (3.36), t(695) = 1.38, p = .17. Alpha was .73 for male participants and .73 for female participants.

Convergent and Discriminant Validity

Correlations of EP with age were quite small—only .10 in the college sample and −.03 in the web sample. In short, individual differences in EP are evident across the adult life-span.

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Student sample. For males, the correlation of the EP with sexual promiscuity (SOI) was −.01, but for females the corresponding correlation was .27. For males, a correlation of EP with the Romantic Beliefs scale was .24. For females, the correlation was .34. This pattern indicates that EP is not inherently confounded with related measures but is correlated in some cases.

Correlations with the Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999) indicated a positive correlation with Openness to Experience (men only), which was the only significant correlation, \( r = .38, p < .01 \), two-tailed.

In Jones and Paulhus (2009), EP in women was positively and slightly associated with long-term mating orientation, but unrelated in men. EP was also positively correlated with anxious attachment style and negatively associated with avoidant attachment style. It was negatively related with IQ for both men and women.

Web sample. In the web sample, the correlation between EP and SOI was .09 for females and .13 for males. As in the student sample, the web sample revealed a moderate positive correlation with anxious attachment style and a small to moderate correlation with avoidant attachment style for both men and women. Infidelity data were available in the web sample, and EP was significantly correlated with general infidelity in men, and slightly correlated in women. Once again, EP was positively and slightly positively associated with long-term mating orientation for women, but was unrelated in men.

Criterion Validity

Of critical importance is the association that the EP scale has with relationship development, sustenance, and outcomes. In a behavioral study, Jones and Paulhus (2009) tracked participants longitudinally by coding their online logs of romantic interests and infidelities. Participants were asked to record the initials of the person they were involved with every week, along with the person or persons that they were most romantically and sexually attracted to that week.

Emotional infidelity was operationalized by the week-by-week discrepancies between the initials of participants’ declared partners and the initials of their romantic interests. EP scores significantly predicted total number of romantic interests and were the lone predictor of emotional infidelity. In sum, the EP scale appears to be a valid and distinct predictor of relationship-relevant outcomes.

References


Emotions


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<tr>
<th>Emotional Promiscuity Scale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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Rate your agreement using the above guidelines

1. I fall in love easily.
2. For me, romantic feelings take a long time to develop.
3. I feel romantic connections right away.
4. I love the feeling of falling in love.
5. I am not the type of person who falls in love.
6. I often feel romantic connections to more than one person at a time.
7. I have been in love with more than one person at the same time.
8. I fall in love frequently.
9. I tend to jump into relationships.
10. During your entire life, how many people have you fallen in love with?
    A = None  B = 1  C = 2  D = 3  E = 4 or More