Gender, Family Structure and Siblings Effects on a Person's Emotional Reliance and their Assertion of Autonomy

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ABSTRACT

This study researches the idea effects of a person's gender, family type and number of siblings on their dependency. 391 students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln completed a set of surveys that include the emotional reliance and assertion of autonomy sub scales of the interpersonal dependency inventory (IDI). A significant interaction was found between gender, family type and the number of siblings for a person's emotional reliance, but not their assertion of autonomy. As previous research showed, there was also a main effect of gender for both emotional reliance and autonomy.

Introduction

It is important to study the relationship between gender, family structure and number of siblings because it allows people to better understand how family structure may effect a person's relationship dependency. This study measures relationship dependency with the two subscales of the interpersonal dependency inventory: emotional reliance and the assertion of autonomy.

Previous research has explored the differing levels of emotional reliance for different type of relationships, like best friend, mother, roommate, etc. They found that with the combination of these types of relationships women reported higher emotional reliance than men (Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005). Turner &Turner also found that women typically have higher levels of emotional reliance than men (1999).

There have been several studies researching the closeness of siblings, or the quality of a siblings' relationship with emotional reliance. For example, it has been found that sibling relationship warmth was associated with emotional understanding and self-disclosure (Howe, Aquan-Assee, Bukowski, Lehoux, & Rinaldi, 2001). However, there has been little to no research regarding the the relationship between the number of siblings and their effect on emotional reliance.

Research has shown that overall young men have higher levels of the assertion of autonomy then women (Van Gundy, 2002). Another study researches the idea of family types related to how likely a parent will allow a child to assert their autonomy. They found that in mother-only homes, the parent was more likely than two-parent homes to allow the youth to make his or her own decisions. (Dornbusch, Carlsmith, Bushwall,, Ritter, Liederman, Hastorf, & Gross, 1985). This study primarily compares the differences between mother-only households and two biological parent households. It would be interesting to see how a variety of non-traditional family structures, like single parent but also foster and step parents relate to an

individuals' assertion of autonomy.

Overall, these studies examine different family structures, siblings and gender individually, but it would be interesting to see how they combine to interact in relation to measures of dependency. It is hypothesized that there will be a successively significant increase in emotional reliance with an increasing number of siblings for both traditional (two parent) and non-traditional households (single parent, foster, and step combined) but this effect will be larger for women than for men. It's also hypothesized that the opposite is true for the assertion of autonomy: there will be successively decreasing assertion of autonomy scores with an increasing number of siblings for both traditional and non-traditional families but this effect will be larger for men. It's also hypothesized that emotional reliance scores will be larger for those raised in a traditional family than those raised in a non-traditional household, with the effect being larger for women. The opposite will be true for assertion of autonomy, those raised in non-traditional households will have higher assertion of autonomy scores with the effect being larger for men than women. This study will build on the understanding of each family structure, number of siblings, and gender, and how they interact with each other in relation to a person's dependency.

Method

Participants

Participants include university undergraduate students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in addition to friends and associates of students enrolled in an introductory stats course. Each student in the class completed a survey and then collected more surveys from other students in classes, dormitories, Greek housing, apartments, etc. There were a total of 391 surveys collected with a ratio of 43.5% males to 56.5% females with an average age of 20.939 (Std.=2.0979) with a range of 17-35. Ethnicity includes 91.6% European-Americans, 14% Asian-Americans, 9% Hispanic-Americans, 6% African-Americans, 2% Native-American, and 1% other.

Materials

Each participant completed a self-report questionnaire in a natural setting. The questionnaire included demographic questions, such as age, gender, race, etc., and a set of surveys. Several surveys were collected but this analysis uses the Interpersonal Dependency Inventory (IDI) which measures thoughts, behaviors and feelings about the need for close relationships. Subscales of the IDI used in this analysis are the Emotional Reliance scale where higher scores mean more reliance, and the Assertion of Autonomy scale where higher scores mean higher autonomy.

Procedure

Investigators each completed one survey, then sought out other undergraduate students (regardless of age) to complete an additional 5 surveys per researcher. Surveys were then organized, scored, and entered into large databases of data from multiple sections. Then I formulated hypotheses and completed the appropriate analyses.

Results

Analysis of variance was conducted to determine the relationship of gender, number of siblings and family type as they relate to the emotional reliance and assertion of autonomy measures of dependency. See table 1 for emotional reliance descriptive statistics, and table 2 for assertion of autonomy descriptive statistics.

There is no significant three-way interaction between gender, family type and number of siblings as related to assertion of autonomy. ($F(2,376) = 0.104$ $MSe = 36.658$ $p > 0.05$). All three two way interactions are also not significant, descriptive of the three way. The main effects of family type and number of siblings are not significant, but the main effect of gender is significant as it relates to assertion of autonomy ($F(1,376) = 14.836$ $MSe = 36.658$ $p > .05$).

There is a significant three-way interaction between gender, family type and number of

siblings as they relate to emotional reliance ($F(2,376)=3.813$ $MSe=70.396$ $p<.05$). The two-way interaction between gender and family type is not significant ($F(1,376)=0.035$ $MSe=70.396$ $p>.05$). This pattern is potentially misleading in that females have significantly higher emotional reliance scores than males in traditional families, the rest of the pattern is descriptive of the three-way.

The two-way interaction between gender and number of siblings is also not significant ($F(2,376)=1.078$ $MSe=70.396$ $p>.05$). This pattern is potentially misleading in that females have significantly higher emotional reliance scores than males with two siblings, and there is no significant interaction between males and females with 0-1 sibling, the rest of the pattern is descriptive of the three-way.

The two-way interaction between family type and number of siblings is also not significant ($F(2,376)=1.878$ $MSe=70.396$ $p>.05$). This pattern is descriptive for males, but potentially misleading for females.

The main effect of gender is significant as it relates to emotional reliance ($F(1,376)=4.566$, $MSe=70.396$ $p<.05$) which is potentially misleading for males. The main effect of family type is not significant ($F(1,376)=.793$, $MSe=70.396$ $p>.05$) which is potentially misleading for females. The main effect of number of siblings is also not significant ($F(3,376)=1.183$ $MSe=70.396$ $p>.05$) which is potentially misleading for females.

Discussion

Overall, there was no significant three-way interaction between gender, family type and number of siblings as they relate to the assertion of autonomy. The lower order of interactions reflected this non-significance except the main effect of gender was significant.

Also, there was a significant three-way interaction between these variables as they relate to the emotional reliance scale. All three two-way interactions were not significant but they were

also all potentially misleading for females. The only significant main effect was gender.

Both the main effects of gender are significant, replicating the previous research that females typically have higher emotional reliance, and males typically have higher assertion of autonomy. However, contrary to previous research this study showed no significant relationship between family structure and autonomy. Perhaps this is because the previous research compared single mothers, to two biological parents, or perhaps the previous study was done with youth, while this study was with college-age students.

This study demonstrated that the combination of gender, family type and the number of siblings have an impact on a person's emotional reliance, but not necessarily their autonomy. In the future it would be interesting to research the effects of gender, family type, and number of siblings on a person's dependency as a whole. This study used two of the interpersonal dependency inventory subscales, perhaps future research can use all subscales, or even compare different measures of dependency. It would also be interesting to see how this changes before and after a person moves out of their parent's house.

Table 1
Gender, Family Type and Number of Siblings as related to Emotional Reliance

		Number of Siblings		
Male	Family Type	0-1	2	3+
	Traditional	42.740(n=50)	43.00(n=47)	41.171(n=41)
	Non-Traditional	41.417(n=12)	38.667(n= 9)	44.222(n=9
Female				
	Traditional	46.463(n=67)	43.50(n=78	45.548(n=42)
	Non-Traditional	38.6(n=5)	48.2(n=10)	44.722(n=18)

Table 2
Gender, Family Type and Number of Siblings as related to Assertion of Autonomy

		Number of Siblings		
Male	Family Type	0-1	2	3+
	Traditional	32.780(n=50)	31.021 (n=47)	31.756 (n=41)
	Non-Traditional	29.417 (n=12)	31.444 (n=9)	32.333 (n=9)
Female				
	Traditional	27.179(n=67)	27.654(n=78)	29.0(n=43)
	Non-Traditional	29.6(n=5)	28.8(n=10)	25.944(n=18)

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