

Self-disclosure and Intimate Relationship Satisfaction: The Mediation Role of Perceived Partner Responsiveness

Wang Meiyang^{1,a,*}

¹Guangdong Songshan Ploytechnic, Shaoguan, Guangdong, China

^a1045893871@qq.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract: This study explored the impact of self-disclosure among college students' couples on their satisfaction with intimate relationships, as well as the mediating role of perceived partner responsiveness and the moderating role of interpersonal trust. A survey was conducted on 905 college students from four universities in Guangdong and Jiangxi provinces, using the Self-disclosure Scale, Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale, Interpersonal Trust Scale, and Intimate Relationship Satisfaction Scale. The research results indicate that Self-disclosure was positively correlated with perceived partner responsiveness, interpersonal trust, and intimate relationship satisfaction (r values were 0.47, 0.18, and 0.32, respectively, with p values < 0.001); Perceived partner responsiveness is positively correlated with interpersonal trust and intimate relationship satisfaction (r values are 0.34 and 0.51, respectively, with P values < 0.001); There is a positive correlation between interpersonal trust and satisfaction with intimate relationships (r value of 0.34, p values < 0.001); The mediation effect analysis shows that self-disclosure significantly positively predicts intimate relationship satisfaction, and perceived partner responsiveness plays a partial mediating role in it. Interpersonal trust moderates the relationship between perceived partner responsiveness and intimate relationship satisfaction. Compared to college student couples with low interpersonal trust, perceived partner responsiveness has a greater positive predictive effect on intimate relationship satisfaction among college student couples with high interpersonal trust. Self-disclosure among college student couples predicts intimate relationship satisfaction through perceived partner responsiveness, and interpersonal trust moderates the latter half of the pathway.

Keywords: Self-disclosure; Perceived partner responsiveness; Interpersonal trust; Intimate relationship satisfaction

1. Introduction

Intimate relationship satisfaction refers to an individual's perceived fulfillment within romantic partnerships^[1], serving as a key indicator of relationship quality. Healthy intimate relationships significantly enhance subjective well-being^[2], whereas dysfunctional relationships may adversely affect physical and mental health, potentially leading to anxiety, depressive symptoms, and even suicidal ideation^[3]. As emerging adults transitioning to maturity, college students are at a crucial developmental stage for acquiring relationship competencies. The establishment of mature relational skills during this period—such as active listening, empathic understanding, and responsive partner care—has been shown to predict higher levels of relationship satisfaction^[4]. Notably, the relationship satisfaction observed in collegiate not only reflects current partnership quality but also serves as a predictor for future marital adjustment and family intimacy. These findings underscore the theoretical and practical significance of investigating the underlying mechanisms and key determinants of intimate relationship satisfaction among college populations.

Self-disclosure serves as a pivotal factor in establishing and maintaining intimate relationships^[5]. Defined as the voluntary process through which individuals reveal personal thoughts and share emotional experiences during interpersonal interactions^[6], self-disclosure aligns with Social Penetration Theory^[7], which posits that both breadth and depth of disclosure progressively intensify as relationships develop. The extent of self-disclosure demonstrates positive correlations with relational outcomes, including interpersonal attraction^[8], intimacy, and satisfaction in close relationships^[9]. Empirical evidence indicates a reciprocal relationship between disclosure and affection: individuals exhibit stronger preferences for those who engage in substantial self-disclosure, while simultaneously

demonstrating increased disclosure toward people they favor^[8], establishing self-disclosure as a prerequisite for fostering intimacy. Experimental findings reveal that self-disclosure between opposite-sex college students in unfamiliar environments enhances implicit intimacy levels, subsequently generating more positive interactions^[10]. Furthermore, empirical studies have demonstrated significant positive associations between partners' self-disclosure and relational quality^[11]. Building upon this theoretical foundation, we propose H1: Self-disclosure among college student couples significantly and positively predicts intimate relationship satisfaction.

Perceived partner responsiveness refers to the degree to which individuals perceive their partners' attentiveness and responsive engagement during shared communication^[12]. According to the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy^[13], when partners demonstrate understanding, validation, and care through substantive responses to disclosed content, and such responses are accurately perceived by the discloser, this reciprocal process elicits enhanced experiences of mutual self-disclosure and intimate interactions^[14]. Empirical studies have established that self-disclosure positively predicts perceived partner responsiveness, with increased disclosure corresponding to heightened responsiveness perceptions^[15]. As a positive affective-cognitive construct, perceived partner responsiveness constitutes a crucial determinant of intimate relationship satisfaction among college students. Research indicates significant positive associations between perceived partner responsiveness and relationship satisfaction, demonstrating that elevated responsiveness levels predict greater satisfaction in collegiate romantic relationships^[16]. Consequently, we propose H2: Perceived partner responsiveness partially mediates the relationship between self-disclosure and intimate relationship satisfaction among college student couples.

Building upon the Interpersonal Process Model, this study systematically examines the mediating role of perceived partner responsiveness in linking self-disclosure to relationship satisfaction within collegiate romantic dyads.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The study recruited undergraduate students currently involved in romantic relationships from four universities in Guangdong and Jiangxi provinces. A total of 950 questionnaires were distributed, with 905 valid responses retained after excluding 45 invalid cases containing careless responses or missing data (95.2% valid return rate). The final sample comprised 373 males (41.2%) and 532 females (58.8%), with a mean age of 20.22 years ($SD = 1.83$).

2.2 Materials

2.2.1. Self-Disclosure Scale

The Self-Disclosure Scale developed by Miller^[17] was employed to assess self-disclosure levels between college student couples. This 10-item instrument (e.g., "My personal habits") utilizes a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Never disclose") to 5 ("Disclose in great detail"), with higher scores indicating greater self-disclosure toward one's partner. In the current study, the scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$).

2.2.2. Intimate Relationship Satisfaction Scale

The Intimate Relationship Satisfaction Scale adapted by Patrick and Knee^[18] was administered to measure relational satisfaction among college student couples. This 7-item instrument (e.g., "Our relationship is going well") employs a 7-point Likert scale anchored from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 7 ("Strongly agree"), where higher composite scores reflect greater relationship satisfaction. The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency in this study (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$).

2.2.3. Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale

The Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale adapted by Li Songyan^[19] was utilized to assess responsiveness perceptions among college student couples. This 12-item instrument (e.g., "In my relationship, my partner understands me well") employs a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Completely disagree") to 7 ("Completely agree"), with higher total scores indicating greater perceived responsiveness within the relationship. The scale exhibited excellent reliability in the current study (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$).

3. Result

3.1 Common method deviation test

Harman's single-factor test was conducted to examine potential common method bias. The exploratory factor analysis extracted 14 factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1.00, where the first factor accounted for 20.65% of the total variance—below the critical threshold of 40%. These results indicate no substantial common method bias in the current dataset.

3.2 Descriptive statistic and correlation analysis

As presented in Table 1, the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix illustrate the relationships among self-disclosure, intimate relationship satisfaction, perceived partner responsiveness, and interpersonal trust in college student couples. The results revealed significant positive pairwise correlations between self-disclosure and all other variables: intimate relationship satisfaction ($r=0.32$, $p<0.001$), perceived partner responsiveness ($r=0.47$, $p<0.001$), and interpersonal trust ($r=0.18$, $p<0.001$).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis results

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	IRS	PPR	Self-disclosure
IRS	5.44	0.92	1.00		
PPR	5.06	0.84	0.51***	1.00	
Self-disclosure	3.37	0.58	0.32***	0.47***	1.00

Note. IRS: Intimate relationship satisfaction; PPR: Perceived partner responsiveness; *** $p<0.001$.

3.3 The mediate role of Perceived partner responsiveness

Mediation analysis was conducted using Model 4 from Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS. As shown in Table 2, Self-disclosure significantly predicted intimate relationship satisfaction ($\beta=0.32$, $p<0.001$). Self-disclosure exerted a strong positive effect on perceived partner responsiveness ($\beta=0.48$, $p<0.001$). Perceived partner responsiveness significantly mediated the association, demonstrating a robust predictive effect on relationship satisfaction ($\beta=0.35$, $p<0.001$).

Table 2 Mediating effect test of perceived partner response

Independent variable	Dependent variable	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Self-disclosure	IRS	0.32	0.11	105.76	0.32	10.28***
	PPR	0.48	0.23	256.50	0.48	16.29***
PPR	IRS	0.56	0.31	102.37	0.35	11.69***

Note. IRS: Intimate relationship satisfaction; PPR: Perceived partner responsiveness; *** $p<0.001$.

4. Discussion

4.1 The relationship between self-disclosure and with intimate relationship satisfaction

The current study investigated the association between self-disclosure and intimate relationship satisfaction among college student couples. Results revealed a significant positive correlation between these variables, aligning with prior empirical findings^[20] and validating the Social Penetration Theory. Existing literature has consistently posited that self-disclosure plays a pivotal role in relationship development^[21]. This dual mechanism operates through two pathways: First, as partners progressively deepen the breadth and depth of mutual disclosure, they cultivate enhanced mutual understanding and emotional support responsiveness. This reciprocal process facilitates dyadic adjustment that elevates relationship satisfaction. Second, individuals with heightened self-disclosure tendencies demonstrate proactive communication patterns in addressing relational conflicts. Rather than avoiding discord, they strategically reframe conflicts as opportunities for relational growth through constructive dialogue.

Furthermore, the stress-buffering effects of self-disclosure are well-documented. Empirical evidence suggests that habitual disclosure reduces emotional hypervigilance toward life stressors, thereby decreasing anxiety levels and improving overall life satisfaction^[22]. These benefits may

indirectly reinforce relational well-being by optimizing individuals' emotional regulation capacities within partnerships.

4.2 The mediating role of perceived partner responsiveness

The results demonstrate that perceived partner responsiveness partially mediates the positive association between self-disclosure and intimate relationship satisfaction among college couples. Specifically, self-disclosure exerts both direct effects on satisfaction ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$) and indirect effects via enhanced responsiveness perceptions ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$). This pattern aligns with the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy^[23], which postulates that reciprocal responsiveness—perceiving partners' understanding, validation, and care during disclosure—activates a self-reinforcing cycle of mutual engagement. Individuals who perceive higher responsiveness tend to reciprocate with deeper disclosure, thereby strengthening emotional bonds. These findings are consistent with prior research on dyadic reciprocity in relational dynamics^[24-25]. From an interactional reciprocity perspective, intimacy development constitutes a bidirectional communication process. When disclosers perceive their partners' empathic responsiveness (e.g., acceptance and concern), such positive feedback loops motivate further disclosure initiation. Concurrently, partners reciprocate by matching disclosure depth through parallel self-revelations. Over time, this iterative reciprocity pattern enhances relational cohesion. The cumulative effects of these processes significantly predict longitudinal improvements in relationship satisfaction, particularly when dyads maintain high interpersonal trust to buffer against disclosure-related risks.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between self-disclosure, intimate relationships, and perceived partner responsiveness among college students. The research results found that self-disclosure significantly positively predicts intimate relationships, and perceived partner responsiveness plays a mediating role between self-disclosure and intimate relationships. The results validated the mediating pathway of self-disclosure affecting intimate relationships through perceived partner responsiveness, revealing that relationship building is not a one-way self exposure, but a dynamic process that requires interactive response. This study focuses on college students, a critical group for the formation of intimate relationships, and reveals their special path of emotional development, providing empirical evidence for the social development of young people.

Acknowledgement

This study was sponsored by the 2022 project "Group Psychological Counseling for College Students' New Learning Adaptability" (2022SKYB17).

References

- [1] Li Xue, Zheng Yong. *Is beauty good? The role of physical attractiveness in intimate relationships*. [J]. *Progress in Psychological Science*, 2019, 27(10):1743–1757.
- [2] Jin Xiaoyi, Liu Shiqi. *Who is happier? A Study on the Influence of Contemporary Youth's Marriage and Love Status on Subjective Well being: A Survey from Shaanxi Province* [J]. *Journal of Shandong Women's College*, 2025, (02): 44-58.
- [3] Li Rulin, Zhang Jinfu, Liang Xingang. *Theoretical factors influencing subjective well-being*. [J]. *Chinese Journal of Mental Health*, 2003, 17(11):783–785.
- [4] Wu Guobang. *The Influence of College Students' Belief in Intimate Relationships on Love Satisfaction* [D]. Jiangxi Normal university, 2018.
- [5] Willems YE, Finkenauer C, Kerkhof P. *The role of disclosure in relationships*. [J]. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 2020, 31:33–37.
- [6] Li Linying, Chen Huichang. *A survey and research on self-disclosure among college students*. [J]. *Psychological Development and Education*, 2004(03):64–69.
- [7] Altman I, Taylor DA. *Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships*. [M]. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973.
- [8] Sprecher S, Treger S, Wondra JD, et al. *Taking turns: Reciprocal self-disclosure promotes liking in initial interactions*. [J]. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 2013, 49(5):860–866.

- [9] Finkenauer C, Engels R, Branje S, et al. Disclosure and Relationship Satisfaction in Families. [J]. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2004, 66(1).
- [10] Qian Fei. A Study on the Influence of Self Disclosure on Intimacy among College Students. [D]. Shanghai Normal University, 2017.
- [11] Sprecher S, Hendrick SS. Self-Disclosure in Intimate Relationships: Associations with Individual and Relationship Characteristics over Time. [J]. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 2004, 23(6):857-877.
- [12] Reis HT, Clark MS, Holmes JG. Handbook of closeness and intimacy. [J]. Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004, 201–225.
- [13] Reis HT, Shaver P. Intimacy as an interpersonal process. [J]. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 1988, 33(4):367–389.
- [14] Coker B, McGill AL. Arousal increases self-disclosure. [J]. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 2020, 87:103928.
- [15] Kim K, Hyun MH. The Effects of Self-disclosure About Negative Emotion to Partner on Intimacy in the Dating Relationships of Early Adulthood: Focused on Perceived Partner Responsiveness. 2020.
- [16] Gable SL, Gonzaga GC, Strachman A. Will you be there for me when things go right? Supportive responses to positive event disclosures. [J]. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2006, 91(5): 904–917.
- [17] Miller LC, Berg JH, Archer RL. Openers: Individuals who elicit intimate self-disclosure. [J]. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1983, 44(6):1234–1244.
- [18] Patrick H, Knee CR, Canevello A, Lonsbary C. The role of need fulfillment in relationship functioning and well-being: a self-determination theory perspective.[J]. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2007, 92(3), 434–457.
- [19] Yang Shucheng, Wang Zixiang, Liu Zhenliang, Li Yansong. Reliability and validity testing of the Chinese version of the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale. [J]. *Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 2019, 27(05): 950–953.
- [20] Guo Aili A study on the relationship between adult attachment, self-disclosure, and intimate relationship satisfaction among college students.[D]. Changjiang University, 2016.
- [21] Tang N, Bensman L, Hatfield E. Culture and Sexual Self-Disclosure in Intimate Relationships. Interpersonal. [J]. *An International Journal on Personal Relationships*, 2013, 7(2):227–245.
- [22] R Zhang. The stress-buffering effect of self-disclosure on Facebook: An examination of stressful life events, social support, and mental health among college students. [J]. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2017.
- [23] Laurenceau, Jean-Philippe, Barrett, et al. Intimacy as an Interpersonal Process: The Importance of Self-Disclosure, Partner Disclosure, and Perceived Partner Responsiveness in Interpersonal Exchanges. [J]. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 1998.
- [24] Jia Yanru. Attachment anxiety, inability to tolerate uncertainty, perception of partner response and relationship conflict. [D]. Harbin Normal University, 2019.
- [25] Bar-Kalifa E, Hen-Weissberg A, Rafaeli E. Perceived Partner Responsiveness Mediates the Association between Social Anxiety and Relationship Satisfaction in Committed Couples. [J]. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 2015, 34(7):587–610.