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Chapter

The Role of Personality Traits and Values in Perceived Friendship Quality: The Dyadic Approach

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Abstract

This study using dyadic approach, focused on the impact of personality traits and basic human values on the synchrony and the average level of perceived friendship quality between dyads. We used the Friendship Quality Questionnaire to measure the perceived friendship quality levels of the involved parties, the 50-item IPIP version of Big Five Questionnaire to quantify the individual personality traits and a Short Swartz Values Survey to characterize different basic human values. Two aggregated measures were defined based on the score of friendship quality of each party of the friends. The level of friendship quality was defined as the sum of perceived quality of two persons involved in the friendship. The synchrony of friendship quality was defined by subtracting the perceived quality of one party from the other in the friendship. The level and the synchrony of each personality traits and each basic human value between dyads were quantified in a similar way. Several linear regressions were conducted in a two-step process to examine the correlation between personality traits and friendship quality and the correlation between basic values and friendship quality both at the dimension of general levels and synchrony. The results showed a significant positive effect of agreeableness on the level of friendship quality and a significant positive effect of agreeableness on the synchrony of friendship quality. Our findings highlight the association between personality and the perceived quality in dyadic relationships.

Keywords: big-five personality trait, basic human values, friendship quality, interpersonal relationship, synchrony

1. Introduction

Among all important interpersonal relationships in human social interaction, friendship is a predominant one as it stands for self-trust, reliability, and consolation, yet not as exclusive and singular as romantic relationships. However, not all friendships are deep and stable, and building high-quality friendship is desirable for many ones to enhance their psychological health and maintain efficient social communication.

The quality of friendship has drawn much attention in the past, and the possible predictors for friendship quality have been tested in a wide range. This study aimed to further resolve this issue by employing a novel dyadic approach, focusing on two

predictors that are both inborn features of individuals, that is, the personality traits and the basic human values.

Personality traits are the descriptions of people in terms of relatively stable patterns of behavior, thoughts, and emotions [1]. There are various taxonomies or models of personality traits, ranging from MBTI, Big-five model, 9-factor model to several others. Among these the most widely accepted model and researched one is the Five-Factor Model of Personality Traits [2, 3], also called the Big-Five Model. Personality has long been considered a crucial element in predicting various behavioral outcomes. Those varying in personality traits defined with such model demonstrated differential ability to respond to social cues and react in various interpersonal relationships. For interpersonal relationship in particular, personality traits are associated with the quality of relationships with peers, families, and romantic others [4].

Basic human values are generally described as rather stable broad life goals that are important to people in their lives and guide how they perceive things, make judgment, and behave [5, 6]. Basic human values is suggested to have a strong influence on interpersonal relationships, as the synchrony between pairs in the relationship and the strength of a value that a person holds for their life affects the quality of communications, the degree of trust, the synchrony of lifestyle, and the difference in mutual devotion.

Previous studies have already revealed some connections between personality traits, personal values, and friendship quality. Of the five dimensions of personality traits, scores of both extraversion and agreeableness have proven to have positive correlations with the peer acceptance and the number of friends [7]. In that study, the friendship statuses were confirmed by sociometric nomination techniques rather than rating scale measures, so the friendship score in the study only showed how popular a participant was, but the specific quality of each of the friendship he or she was in remained unknown.

Prosocial tendencies, indexed by agreeableness, were proved to be positively related to perceived friendship quality [8]. Children with high agreeableness tended to give more emotional support or instrumental aid to their friends, which resulted in higher friendship quality. This finding may as well be applicable to adults, and this would be examined in this study.

Moreover, there were sufficient proofs of the positive impact of high conscientiousness on friendship quality [9–12]. The high score of conscientious was associated with less conflicts [11, 12] and better peer-acceptance in interpersonal relationship building [9, 10]. A conscientious individual was expected to be a more responsible friend and more trustworthy and have better self-control, and their conflicts with their friends were more likely to be avoided which thus prevented their damage to general friendship quality.

The effect of Neuroticism/Emotional Stability was controversial. One study indicated that those of high neuroticism could enhance the irritation of two friends in the interaction between them, causing the frequency of conflict to rise [11]. On the contrary, another study showed inconsistent results. In this study, higher score in the neuroticism actually predicted a higher friendship score [13]. Whether neuroticism was positively or negatively associated with friendship quality therefore remained uncertain, despite an expected association between these factors.

There was no enough evidence that openness could be associated with friendship quality. However, the positive effect of openness on friendship could be hypothesized for this study on college students because openness was related to the tendency of being constructive and being more open to confronting the conflicts between friends instead

of neglecting or avoiding them [11, 14]. The former tendency was assumed more meaningful for friendship building between two both of whom were in high education.

It was also argued that the similarity of personality traits between friends had positive effects on building a reciprocal friendship. One study examined the effects of the degree of similarity in personality on friendships and found the personality traits between two persons in friend pairs were significantly more similar than random pairs [15]. Given that the personality traits were not specified in that study, it is intriguing whether a certain aspect in one's personality could possibly predict the friendship quality. A more recent study also showed similar results that personality similarity was positively correlated with group success, even after controlling for individual's own personality [16], demonstrating the crucial role of personality similarity in the interaction among group members.

Specifically, one study indicated the exceptional role of the similarity of Extraversion in dyadic interaction as matching levels of Extraversion led to higher periocular muscle activity which represented positive valence emotional expressions [17]. Two extraverted people tend to have a more relaxed interacting pattern and can be expected to build reciprocal interpersonal relationship including friendship.

The basic human values' effects on friendship were not such a hot topic, still there was previous experience. One study showed that friendship dyads shared more values than non-friendship dyads [18]. This study used a dyadic approach, but the finding was based on the observation of a simple study design and the conclusion demanded effortful interpretation. Nevertheless, it can be inferred that friends with similar values were more likely to have the similar patterns of friendship-related behaviors and thus forming a more reciprocal and equal relationship. In this study a linear regression model was made and the regression coefficients would be obtained for a more precise prediction.

The effects of basic human values on friendship quality have scarcely been tapped, but some suggested association can be found from the definition of the two dimensions of basic human values, Conservation vs. Openness to Change and Self-transcendence vs. Self-Enhancement. Schwartz (2006) explained the emphasis of two ends of both dimensions of the basic human value [19]. Openness to Change emphasized independent action, thought and feeling, and readiness for new experiences, whereas Conservation emphasized self-restriction, order, and resistance to change. It could be assumed that a higher score of Openness to Change in a friendship pair would lead to swift adaptations to the change of friendship background, and a greater chance of making various shared memories, whereas a higher score of Conservation would lead to more rigid and fragile friendship and potentially decrease friendship quality. Self-enhancement emphasized pursuit of interests, whereas Self-transcendence emphasized concern for the welfare and interests of others. It could be assumed that a higher score of Self-enhancement in a friendship pair would lead to a selfish pattern of treating friends and thus damage the general quality of the friendship, whereas a higher score of Self-transcendence would lead to a more selfless and caring friendship.

1.1 Hypotheses

To achieve a systematic understanding of the connection of different dimensions in the personality traits and the perceived friendship quality and of basic human values and the perceived friendship quality, a dyadic approach was applied, in which all the above variables were measured on both parties in the friendship. Both the synchrony and the averaged level of friendship quality were quantified based on

measurements on each individual in the dyads and were modeled. The personality traits and the basic human values served as independent predictors and entered in the model in a two-step linear regression process. In the first step, univariate regressions between each of the independent variable and the dependent variable were built. In the second step, multivariate regression models were built between the effective independent variables (the ones proven significant in bivariate regression) and the dependent variable.

Some hypotheses can be made based on the findings of previous studies. The sum of the level of the perceived friendship quality between friends could be positively correlated with the summated score in Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability (Inverse of Neuroticism), Intellect/Imagination (Openness), and Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement, but could be negatively associated with the summated score in Conservation vs. Openness to Change. The synchrony between friends in the perceived friendship quality could be positively correlated with the synchrony in Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Intellect/Imagination (Openness), and Conservation vs. Openness to Change.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Eighty-two undergraduate students were recruited to participate in the study (among whom 35 were males and 47 were females). They altogether formed 51 pairs of friendship dyads (among all participants, some were used to form multiple dyads). All dyads were of the same sex, among whom 22 were male pairs and 29 were female pairs. All dyads reported to be good friends and knowing each other for at least 3 years as verification for their interpersonal relationship before entering for the study.

2.2 Measures

The perceived friendship quality was measured by the 25-item version of the revised self-reporting Friendship Quality Questionnaire, [20–22]. The 25 items contained questions concerning companion, conflict solving, information sharing, suggestion giving and receiving, emotional distance, and satisfaction about the relationship. These dimensions ensured the measure to target each individual's evaluation about the reciprocal relationship between them in the dyad. Each item was rated on a five-point scale, with 0 meaning the lowest score (not at all true) and 4 meaning the highest score (really true), except for the 3 inversed item. All participants completed the evaluation on their own without confirming with their counterpart.

The personality traits were measured by the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP), which was one of the latest developed inventories inspired by the Five Factor Model of Personality Traits. The Five Factor Model, also called the Big Five, was the most widely accepted and researched taxonomy of personality traits [2, 3]. The model divided the personality trait into five factors. In the IPIP version, the five factors were named Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Intellect/Imagination. The questionnaire included 50 items, with 10 items per factor. Each item was rated on a five-point scale, with 1 for very inaccurate and 5 for very accurate.

The basic human values were measured by the Short Schwarz Values Survey (SSVS) [19], which was based on Schwartz Values Theory and has been translated into 47 languages [23]. The SSVS was an adapted version of the Schwartz Values Survey (SVS) invented for more convenient usage. The SSVS was proved to show comparable constructs with the SVS on the two value dimensions of Self-Transcendence versus Self-Enhancement and Conservation versus Openness to Change, and was well applicable across studies [19]. The SSVS contained 10 items, with each item judged on a nine-point scale.

2.3 Procedure

Questionnaires were delivered to the participants in written forms, with each form representing each questionnaire: the Revised Friendship Quality Survey, the International Personality Item Pool, and the Short Schwarz Values Survey. Each participant filled in questionnaires independently, and each counterpart within a dyad was naïve to each other's response. One participant can be paired with several others to form pairs under the condition that the two persons within the pair considered each other as good friends. For those who had been paired into more than one dyad, he or she needed to fill out the Friendship Quality Survey for various times depending on their relationship with a specific counterpart, but only needed to fill in the IPIP and SSVS only once.

2.4 Data analysis

The questionnaire results were preprocessed with excel formula and then thrown to the SPSS 24 for the statistical analysis.

The friendship quality scores for person 1 and person 2 in a dyad were added together, and the summated value was used to represent the general level of friendship quality in this dyad. The general levels of the five personality factors and two personality dimensions were each processed in the similar way, by adding together the scores of the two friends in a dyad.

The friendship quality score for person 1 minus that for person 2 was used to represent the synchrony of friendship quality in the dyad. The synchrony of the five personality factors and two personality dimensions were each processed in the similar way, by the subtraction of the scores of two friends in a dyad.

3. Results

First, the results of all the questionnaires were collected and put into a reliability test, and the descriptive statistics are shown in **Table 1**.

3.1 Univariate analysis

In the univariate analysis, linear regression models were built on the general level of friendship quality in the dyads and on the synchrony between counterparts in the dyads, each only including one measure as an independent factor (**Table 2**).

The models on the summated score of friendship quality between dyads revealed that among all personality traits, only Agreeableness ($\alpha = 0.001$, $\beta = 1.545$) had a significant positive correlation with the general level of friendship quality. For basic human values, both Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement ($\alpha = 0.017$, $\beta = 7.300$)

Measures	M	SD	Range	Alphas*
Friendship quality	71.92	14.86	28–100	0.92
Personality traits				
Extraversion	23.49	7.84	7–39	0.87
Agreeableness	33.54	5.16	23–43	0.77
Conscientiousness	28.67	6.53	12–43	0.80
Emotional stability	21.01	8.46	3–39	0.89
Intellect/imagination	33.51	5.78	20–46	0.78
Basic human values				
Conservation vs. Openness to Change	0.31	1.02	–2.03-3.20	/**
Self-Transcendence vs. Self-Enhancement	–0.71	0.76	–2.66-0.89	/**

*Cronbach-Alpha.

**All values were only each related to one question.

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics for all measures.

Friendship quality						
Measures	General level			Synchrony		
	β	constant	p	β	constant	p
Personality traits						
Extraversion	0.032	143.349	0.933	0.043	10.047	0.825
Agreeableness	1.545	40.204	0.001	0.693	6.488	0.031
Conscientiousness	0.403	120.724	0.306	0.120	9.612	0.630
Emotional stability	0.448	125.003	0.154	–0.007	10.540	0.972
Intellect/ imagination	0.740	94.276	0.077	–0.163	11.403	0.564
Basic human values						
Conservation vs. Openness to Change	–5.162	147.048	0.024	2.060	8.516	0.198
Self-Transcendence vs. Self-Enhancement	7.300	154.199	0.017	–0.994	11.213	0.675

Table 2.
The univariate linear regression data of all predictors for friendship quality.

and Conservation vs. Openness to Change ($\alpha = 0.024$, $\beta = -5.162$) significantly correlated with the general level of friendship quality in a positive way.

The models on the synchrony of friendship quality between dyads revealed that among all factors of personality traits, only Agreeableness ($\alpha = 0.031$, $\beta = 0.693$) positively correlated with the synchrony of friendship quality. Basic human values did not show statistically significant effects on the synchrony of friendship quality.

3.2 Multivariate analysis

In the multivariate analysis, linear regression models were built on the general level of friendship quality in the dyads and on the synchrony between counterparts in the dyads. All independent factors showing a significant contribution in univariate models entered the multivariate models simultaneously.

The model on the general level of friendship quality (**Table 3**) included three predictors, the summated scores of Agreeableness, Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement, and Conservation vs. Openness to Change. Only the general level of Agreeableness showed a significantly positive correlation with the general level of friendship quality.

The model on the synchrony of friendship quality (**Table 3**) included the general level of Agreeableness as the only predictor. Therefore, the multivariate analysis produced the same result as in the univariate result.

In sum, the general level of friendship quality in a dyad was positively correlated with only the general level of Agreeableness; the synchrony of friendship quality in a dyad was positively correlated with only the synchrony of Agreeableness.

4. Discussion

Our findings showed that the general level of Agreeableness, the general level of Conservation vs. Openness, and the general level of Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement contributed significantly to the general level of friendship quality in a dyadic relationship. The synchrony of Agreeableness contributed significantly to the synchrony of perceived friendship quality between those in a dyad.

These findings highlight the contribution of the general level of personality traits and basic human values to the general level of friendship quality. Regarding the effects of personality traits, the lack of contribution of the general level of Extraversion to the general level of friendship quality was unexpected, as the past study showed sufficient

General level of friendship quality		
	β	P
Personality traits		
Agreeableness	1.168	0.031
Basic human values		
Conservation vs. Openness to Change	-3.794	0.076
Self-Transcendence vs. Self-Enhancement	2.519	0.445
Constant	71.402	/
Synchrony of friendship quality		
	β	P
Personality traits		
Agreeableness	0.693	0.031
Constant	6.488	/

Table 3.
 The multivariate linear regression data of selected predictors for the general level and synchrony of friendship quality.

evidence for the existence of such effect [7]. However, the target population of the past was early adolescents, while the target of this study was college students. The strong positive impact of the general level of Agreeableness on the general level of friendship quality was consistent with the prediction. The ability to care for and empathize with others remained a crucial factor of building a high-quality friendship. It was surprising to find that the general level of conscientiousness did not contribute significantly to the general level of friendship quality, as there were sufficient proofs of such contribution given in the past studies [9–12]. Unlike those in the past studies, participants of this study were all born and raised up in the Chinese society. Individuals from the Chinese culture were typically prone to avoid confrontation [24]. Even those ones with low Conscientiousness were influenced by such cultural norms that they would not resort to conflicts as often as the same people from confrontational cultures, when they disagreed with their friends. The general level of Emotional Stability did not prove to contribute significantly to the general level of friendship quality in this study. This was not surprising as the past two studies concerning this topic came up with contradictory results [11, 13]. The general level of Openness did not have any significant association with the general level of friendship quality. Although individuals with higher level of Openness showed preference to confronting rather than neglecting conflicts when they arose [11, 14], the tendency of confronting conflicts may not help to improve the friendship quality.

Regarding the effects of basic human values, the general level of Conservation vs. Openness was shown to contribute significantly and negatively to the general level of friendship quality. Open-minded individuals seemed to form better friendships as they treated friends with sincerity and tolerance. The general level of Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement also positively and significantly contributed to the friendship quality as expected. The selfless care for the friend and being selflessly cared by the friend can actually enhance the general level of friendship quality.

As the novel finding demonstrated in the novel dyadic approach in our study, the synchrony of Agreeableness was demonstrated to positively correlate with the synchrony of perceived friendship quality. The extent to which a friendship was emotionally reciprocal was the key factor of maintaining high-quality friendship. Surprisingly, the synchrony of Extraversion did not show a positive correlation with the synchrony of dyadic friendship quality. Previous study only shows that matching level of Extraversion leads to positive emotional expressions [17] and that may not be an essential factor of friendship building. Unlike the past study [16], the Synchrony of both Conservation vs. Openness to Change and Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement revealed positive relationship with the synchrony of the friendship quality. In these studies, the values were compared in friendship dyad vs. non-friendship dyad and the friendship quality was not directly tested. Thus, our findings provide a step further to show how the quality friendships can be measured in a more continuous way.

Furthermore, in multivariate models, only Agreeableness was found to have a significant association with friendship quality, outshining Conservation vs. Openness to Change and Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement that were both significant in univariate models. After controlling for the human basic values, for models on both general level and synchrony, Agreeableness remained the most crucial predictor for the high-quality friendship.

Finally, the study may suffer from some limitations. The first limitation was the demographic homogeneity of the participants, given that all were East-Asians and were college students. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings based on these subjects may be limited and could benefit from replication studies. Secondly, it is possible that friends engaged in the study may not be that close friends. Although

all participants were all confirmed by the data collectors to be good-friend pairs and knowing each other for at least 3 years, additional measures could be applied in future studies to validate the authenticity of the friendship and to ensure the strength of good friendships. Finally, the Big Five theory may not account for all the valuable aspects of human personality traits, and other taxonomies can help to fill the gap. In the future studies, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) [25] can be used to offer a rather clinical assessment of personality traits, and the Enneagram Personality [26] can be introduced as a taxonomy that categorizes humans possessing particular type of personality instead of dimensions of personality traits of a particular person. What's more, the traditional western-based personality models may not be perfectly suitable to measure the participants in China. With the cultural adaptation considered, the Seven-factor Chinese Personality scale [27] and Junzi Personality [28] referencing to Confucius ideas can also be introduced as further research materials.

Despite these limitations, this study was well-rounded and informational, providing valuable contributions to the research on the effects of both personality traits and basic human values on friendship qualities. Using a novel dyadic approach, this issue can be addressed in a deeper way from the perspective of both the general level of both friends and the synchrony between friends, by aggregating the data collected from each friend counterpart. In addition, this study filled in the gap of related researches in a Chinese context, supplementing a cross-cultural understanding of the effects of personality traits and basic human values on friendship quality.

5. Conclusion

This study was designed to examine the correlation between personality traits and friendship quality and the correlation between personality traits and friendship quality, by testing both the general level of these measures and the synchrony between friends in a Chinese university context.

The initial univariate analyses found that the general level of agreeableness (one of the personality traits) had positive association with the general level of friendship quality, and the general level of Conservation vs. Openness to Change and Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement (two of basic human values) had positive associations with and general level of friendship quality. Moreover, the synchrony of Agreeableness was the only independent variable positively associated with the synchrony of friendship quality. In the subsequent multivariate analyses, the general level of Agreeableness was the only independent variable that remained significantly correlated. Finally, both the general level of Agreeableness and the synchrony of Agreeableness between friends showed significant correlations.

This study showed the importance of Agreeableness in building high-quality friendship in a high-context culture, highlighting Agreeableness as a reliable predictor in one's personality for promoting the friendship quality in the practice of healthy social interaction.

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