

Gender, Age, and Romantic Relationship Status Differences in Embarrassment and Self-Attitudes of College Students

Lauren A. McDermott
Ginny M. Naples
Terry F. Pettijohn II
Mercyhurst College

Terry F. Pettijohn
The Ohio State University-Marion

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E-mail: terrypet@usa.com

Introduction

- College is a time of great change and exploration in a young adult's life. Consequently, knowledge of differences in social/emotional states and self-attitudes in college students are important areas to investigate. Previous research has established gender differences in embarrassability (Miller, 1996), interaction anxiousness (Miller, 1995), and self- and body esteem (Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999). We were interested in replicating these differences in a sample of college students, as well as considering how respondent age and romantic relationship status may alter these differences.

Predictions

- Consistent with previous studies, we predicted females, compared to males, would report greater embarrassability, blushing propensity, interaction anxiousness, and lesser self- and body esteem. These predictions are consistent with previous research findings that women have greater social sensitivities and are more affected by social situations than men (Miller, 1995).
- We also predicted freshmen would report greater embarrassability, blushing propensity, interaction anxiousness, and lesser self- and body esteem compared to upperclassmen. Freshmen are entering a new social environment and may feel less certain about their social roles and more anxious about interpersonal interactions, which may lead to more negative evaluations and uncertainty of the self.
- Those involved in romantic relationships were predicted to report greater self- and body esteem compared to those not in romantic relationships. Being emotionally involved in a close relationship may buffer an individual from threats regarding self- and body esteem, and being involved in romantic relationships may increase personal acceptance and enhance self beliefs.

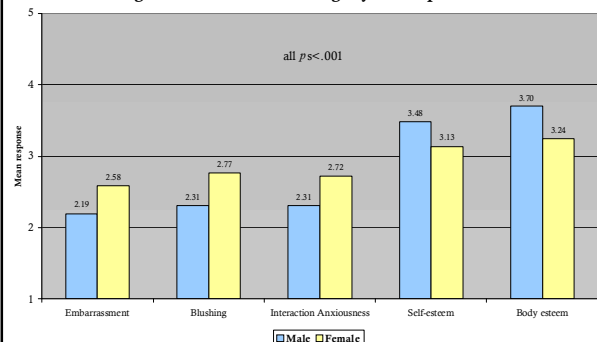
Method

- Participants**
 - 234 college students
 - 71.8% female, average age=19.3 years
 - 97% heterosexual, 55.1% dating
 - 69.7% freshmen, 91.9% Caucasian
- Materials & Procedure**
 - Participants completed a randomly ordered packet of questionnaires containing one general embarrassment questionnaire (Modigliani, 1966, 1968), one general blushing questionnaire (Leary & Meadows, 1991), one interaction anxiousness questionnaire (Leary, 1983), one questionnaire on self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), one questionnaire on body esteem, and demographic questions relating to age, ethnicity, class rank, romantic relationship status, and sexual orientation.

Results

- For each dependent variable, we conducted a 2 (participant gender: male or female) x 2 (relationship status: in a relationship or not in a relationship) x 2 (class rank: freshmen or upperclassmen) ANOVA.
 - Compared to males, females reported significantly higher general embarrassment scores, greater blushing propensity, greater interaction anxiousness, lower self-esteem, and lower body-esteem scores. See Figure 1.
 - Those in relationships reported greater self-esteem and greater body-esteem than those not in relationships. See Figure 2.
 - Freshman reported higher embarrassability and blushing propensity than upperclassmen. See Figure 3.
 - All other main effects and interaction effects were not significant.
- Correlations between variables were also calculated. See correlation matrix for results.

Figure 1. Mean Scale Ratings by Participant Sex



Note: General Embarrassment, Blushing, Interaction Anxiousness, and Body esteem were rated on a 5-point Likert scale and Self-esteem was rated on a 4-point Likert scale. Larger values indicate greater amounts of the variable being measured. All participant sex differences were significant, $p < .001$.

Figure 2. Mean Scale Ratings by Class Rank

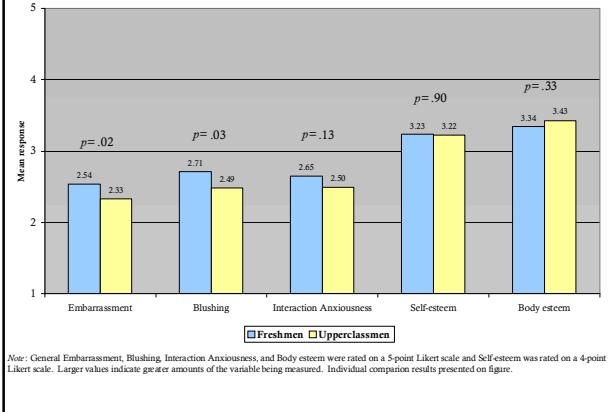
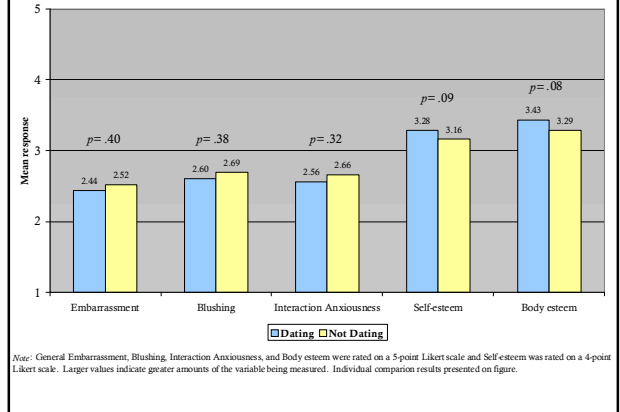


Figure 3. Mean Scale Ratings by Dating Relationship



Correlations

		Age	Body esteem	General Embar.	Self-esteem	Blushing	Interaction Anxious.
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.144*	-.100	.073	-.077	-.104
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.029	.129	.268	.246	.115
	N	230	230	230	229	230	229
Body esteem	Pearson Correlation	.144*	1	-.348**	.503**	-.320**	-.307**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.029		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	230	234	234	233	234	233
General Embar.	Pearson Correlation	-.100	-.348**	1	-.372**	.676**	.570**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.129	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	230	234	234	233	234	233
Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation	.073	.503**	-.372**	1	-.344**	-.421**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.268	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	229	233	233	233	233	232
Blushing	Pearson Correlation	-.077	-.320**	.676**	-.344**	1	.695**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.246	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	230	234	234	233	234	233
Interaction Anxious.	Pearson Correlation	-.104	-.307**	.570**	-.421**	.695**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.115	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	229	233	233	232	233	233

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
 ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

- Our predictions were generally supported, although only marginal differences were found with respect to relationship status and year in college variables. Relationships may protect self-attitudes and future studies should investigate which aspects of relationships enhance and detract from self-views.
- Knowledge of these results may help college students prepare for the emotional adjustments college students experience on campus.
- Faculty and students should be sensitive to the relation between social interaction, embarrassability reactions, and self- and body esteem.

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