

**The Effect of Cynicism on Dating Anxiety and The Moderating Role of Relationship
Status**

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Abstract

Previous research shows there are several factors that cause dating anxiety. One of these factors is the type of interactions with a partner. A missing piece in the literature is how cynicism could potentially affect dating anxiety. We expect cynics to be more prone to dating anxiety because they tend to have negative beliefs about the world and have more negative interactions which can make it difficult for them to form and maintain relationships and might make them more prone to experiencing dating anxiety. Additionally, within this research the moderating effect of relationship status was studied. Since former research showed that relationships and interactions with romantic partners can influence dating anxiety. The hypotheses were examined in a sample of 170 participants through a survey. Cynicism was assessed with the Cynical Distrust Scale, Dating Anxiety with the Dating Anxiety in Adolescents Scale (DAS-A). A simple regression analysis showed that participants scoring higher on the cynicism scale also scored higher on the dating anxiety scale, supporting the first hypothesis. From this finding and previous research, it can be concluded that cynics are more likely to have dating anxiety. Previous research showed conflicting results of the role of relationships in influencing dating anxiety. This study attempted to get a better understanding of the role of relationships as a buffer between cynicism and dating anxiety, by testing the potential moderating role of relationship status. A multiple regression analysis with PROCESS found that cynicism's impact on dating anxiety was constant, regardless of relationship status.

The Effect of Cynicism on Dating Anxiety and The Moderating Role of Relationship Status

Most people hope and search for the experience of falling, and staying, in love. This is reflected in the multitude of dating apps and dating programs available to us today. In dating apps such as Tinder, Bumble and Happn, one can potentially find someone for everyone, and you are in control of who you decide to match with. In the Netherlands, about 1 in 3 singles uses dating apps and 14% of relationships are born from an online match (NOS, 2018). The Dutch television programs, 'First Dates' and 'Lang Leve De Liefde' are of high popularity too, as here, people trust that others will find the perfect match for them. Participants are people looking for love and not hard to come by, for several years the program has been broadcast five days a week with several dates per episode. In the end love is not something you can easily find on a dating app or a reality TV program. For most people finding love means actively dating and when it comes to actively dating and relationships, there are many factors that can determine success or failure. One of those factors could be dating anxiety.

Dating anxiety

Dating anxiety has been defined by Hope and Heimberg (1990) as the distress brought on by interactions with possible partners before a committed relationship develops. Individuals with dating anxiety have more dating problems, and previous research has found that dating problems may be a precursor to adult social phobia which leads to the failure to establish relationships as an adult (Bruch et al., 1989). This is a known risk factor in developing other psychological disorders (Collins, 2003; Hansen et al., 1992). Dow et al. (1985) showed that (dating) anxiety is associated with depression, low levels of self-esteem and loneliness. Furthermore, Chorney and Morris (2008) demonstrated another consequence of dating anxiety, namely that it creates less healthy relationships.

By getting a better understanding of what factors influence dating anxiety, practitioners would be able to help individuals with a high level of dating anxiety be more efficient in their dating lives and prevent the consequences of dating anxiety that were mentioned above, such as depression and loneliness. In addition, a better understanding of the origins of dating anxiety could help promote healthier relationships.

The definition of dating anxiety as given by Hope and Heimberg (1990) states that anxiety is mainly brought on by interactions with a possible partner. This statement has been supported by La Greca and Race Mackey (2010). In their studies on the role of friends and romantic partners in the development of dating anxiety, they found that negative interactions with a partner uniquely contribute to the development of dating anxiety. This phenomenon was also seen in a study of Chorney and Morris (2008), who found that having a negative interaction, such as sexual dysfunction during intercourse with a (potential) romantic partner can cause the development of dating anxiety. Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al. (2020) state that any interaction with a potential partner where one is evaluated could lead to dating anxiety. However, not all the research demonstrated that a (potential) partner increases anxiety.

Glickman and La Greca (2004) stated that people who are not dating show more dating anxiety. These findings are further supported by previous findings of Davila et al. (2004), who conversely found that both being in a relationship and dating have a positive impact on one's mental state and can thus decrease anxiety.

In the research of Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al. (2020) it was found that basic appraisals of the world (i. e., how you view the world), is a factor that is important in explaining social anxiety in dating situations. Specifically, they find that a more negative worldview impacts anxiety.

Another possible predictor of dating anxiety that has not been explored yet is individual variation in expectations of other people, such as being cynical. One thing cynic individuals are known for is their rather negative outlook on the world (Stavrova et al., 2020).

Dating anxiety and Cynicism

Cynicism is defined by Stavrova et al. (2020) as the propensity to assume that others lack moral and act treacherously in order to further their own interests. Other researchers define cynicism as the tendency to distrust people, be suspicious of their motives and view them as selfish (Li et al., 2010). Cynical people tend to be less collaborative and non-compromising in conflicts, both of which usually require a certain amount of trust in another individual (Bond et al., 2004). The behavior of cynics is affected by their beliefs about the world and because of that they attract more negative situations, thereby making their beliefs about the world and the perceived intentions of other individuals even worse; Stavrova et al. 2020 defined this as a vicious cycle. This is consistent with prior research that showed that people tend to act on what they know and believe about the world around them (Bond et al., 2004). Their negative beliefs about the world around them and their tendency to have negative interactions with people might also negatively impact the dating life of cynics. Since they are already more likely to have negative interactions with people in general, it is likely that this also happens during interactions with a (potential) romantic partner. Therefore, cynics might generally suffer more from dating anxiety than non-cynics. The notion that negative interactions with (potential) romantic partners can lead to dating anxiety has been further discussed in the section above (Chorney & Morris, 2008; La Greca & Race Mackey, 2010; Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al., 2020).

Previous research on the influence of certain personality traits on the development of (dating) anxiety has neglected the effect of cynicism. Thus, this research will try to fill this gap within the literature.

A personality trait that has been the subject of research on the predictors of anxiety is Machiavellianism. Machiavellianism is characterized by cynicism, manipulation, and a willingness to exploit others. Pilkington and Richardson (1988) conducted a study that showed that having a Machiavellian worldview can be a predictor of developing anxiety that is related to dating. People with a Machiavellian worldview view having close relationships with people to be particularly risky (Ináncsi et al., 2018), and risky situations often trigger feelings of anxiety. The same might be true for cynical individuals.

Furthermore, the mistrust commonly displayed by individuals with high levels of cynical hostility can result in increased loneliness, stress, and anxiety in social interactions (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2008). The research of Segel-Karpas and Ermer (2020) revealed that being in a marriage can moderate the effects of cynical hostility on loneliness. In the current research the effect of cynicism on anxiety is investigated. Given the information above, being in a relationship or dating a potential partner might moderate the relationship between cynicism and dating anxiety.

The Role of Relationship Status

While it has been discussed that cynics in general might be more prone to having or developing dating anxiety, this might not be the same for all cynics depending on various influencing factors. In the previous section it became clear that having a partner might moderate the effect between cynicism and dating anxiety. Based on the article by Segel-Karpas and Ermer (2020), one would expect that for cynics, dating or being in a relationship might increase dating anxiety. However, previous studies and research have conflicting results regarding the direction of this effect.

It is well known that a social support network can reduce anxiety in individuals and is an important component in many parts of our lives. Social support can function as a buffer for stress and thus anxiety (Fusilier et al., 1987). Beehr and McGrath's (1992) research provides

further insights into the relationship between social support, stress, and anxiety. They concluded that social support has a moderating effect on stress and anxiety. Meaning that individuals who have a good support system, whether it be through family, friends, or a romantic partner, experience less stress and anxiety in their lives. Thus, having a relationship or dating might decrease one's (dating) anxiety. This is inconsistent with the research of Lefcourt et al. (1984) that states that the effect of social support is different depending on someone's personal proclivities and the setting they receive the social support in (Lefcourt et al., 1984). Since cynical individuals have more negative proclivities and more negative interactions, one would expect having the social support of a relationship or potential romantic partner does not affect the cynical individual and thus not decrease their anxiety.

Next, the sections above showed that the role of relationships and interactions with (potential) romantic partners can increase or decrease the amount of dating anxiety. Glickman and La Greca (2004) found that adolescents who weren't dating showed more dating anxiety whereas for example La Greca and Race Mackey (2010) reported that individuals in a romantic relationship were more likely to have dating anxiety.

These conflicting results will make it interesting to investigate how relationship status will moderate the effect of cynicism on dating anxiety. Furthermore, it may help clarify the current understanding of this topic in the literature.

The Current Research

The main question this research tries to answer in order to close the existing literature gap is the following: Are cynics more prone to dating anxiety? And is this effect moderated by relationship status?

As reviewed in the sections above, cynics have more negative interactions with the world and people around them. Previous research has shown that negative interactions, especially with (potential) romantic partners could lead to having more dating anxiety (.

Chorney & Morris, 2008; La Greca and Race Mackey, 2010) This leads to the first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: People who score high on the cynicism scale will also score high(er) on the dating anxiety scale.

The second hypothesis derives from the literature on marriage, social support and how interactions with (potential) romantic partners can affect dating anxiety. Previous findings in this area were conflicting regarding the direction of the effect of a relationship or dating partner on dating anxiety. While some research stated it could increase dating anxiety; others stated it would decrease dating anxiety (Chorney & Morris, 2008; Davila et al., 2004; La Greca and Race Mackey, 2010; Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al., 2020). Because of these contradictory findings we want to investigate the protentional moderating effect of relationship status on the relationship between cynicism and dating anxiety. Hence the second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: The effect of cynicism on dating anxiety will be moderated by relationship status. A specific direction of this effect is not predicted, due to the contradicting findings in the existing literature.

This research provides a better understanding of how cynicism can affect a person's (dating) life. This will fill a clear literature gap and might open a door towards a new direction of research on the interpersonal consequences of having a cynical worldview. Furthermore, since previous findings about the role of relationships in this context are conflicting, the current research would be of value and add to the literature by clarifying the effect of being in a relationship or actively dating on the relationship between cynicism and dating anxiety. Furthermore, we will get a better understanding of how relationships influence anxiety for cynics. In our research we will assess this by using relationship status as a moderator.

Method

Participants

An a priori power analysis was carried out using G power 3.1. Previous research showed that powering for detecting a small-to-medium effect size is appropriate in social science studies (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 2003). To detect a small to medium sized interaction effect $f = 0.07$ with 80% power and an alpha level of .05, in a regression analysis with 3 predictors, a minimum total sample size of 141 participants would be needed. To compensate for possible dropouts and exclusions, the aim was to recruit 168 participants. The final sample satisfied these requirements. Ultimately, 228 participants participated in this study. In total 58 participants were removed from the dataset because they did not complete the survey. This left us with 170 participants (95 Women, 73 Men, 1 Non-binary/Third gender, 1 Prefers not to say, $M_{age} = 29.1$, $SD = 13.4$). All participants were recruited through convenience sampling. The participants mainly consisted of friends, family members, fellow students and people that were recruited through social media platforms, such as Instagram. Participation was completely voluntary, and no compensation was given for participation. To know more about the background of participants, we inquired about age, gender, education background and English proficiency.

Measures

Participants completed an online survey in which their cynicism level, dating anxiety, and relationship status were assessed via a Qualtrics questionnaire.

Cynicism was assessed through the Cynical Distrust Scale by Cook and Medley (1954). This scale consists of 8 items that need to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'strongly disagree', 5 = 'strongly agree'). Example items of this scale are: 'No one cares much about what happens to you' and 'Most people inwardly dislike putting themselves out to help other people'. Scores can range from 1 to 5. A higher score on this scale indicates higher

levels of cynicism in the individual. The scale showed good reliability in the sample, with a Cronbach's alpha of .83.

Dating anxiety was assessed with the DAS-A, dating anxiety scale for Adolescents, developed by Glickman and La Greca (2004). This scale consists of 26 items, divided over three subscales and filler items. The items need to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'Not at all characteristic of me', 5 = 'Extremely characteristic of me'). The first subscale is 'Fear of Negative Evaluation', an example item is 'I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make while on a date'. The second subscale is 'Social Distress-Dating', an example item of this subscale is 'It is difficult for me to relax when I am with a member of the opposite sex who I do not know very well'. The third and last subscale is 'Social Distress-Group', an example item is 'I tend to be quieter than usual when I'm with a group of both males and females'. The items that remain are not a part of the subscales, but are filler items, which were included to provide a break from rating anxiety related items. The filler items are not used in scoring. A higher score on this scale indicates higher levels of dating anxiety in the individual. Scores can range from 1 to 5. The scale showed a good reliability in the sample with a Cronbach's alpha of .94. The subscales are used to compute the overall score. Beyond that, they are not used in further analysis therefore their reliability is not reported.

At last, the relationship status of the participants was assessed. There were two questions to determine whether a participant was in a relationship, single but dating, or single and not dating. The first question was: 'Are you currently in a relationship?'. The second question was: 'Are you actively dating at the moment?'. Participants could answer these questions with 'yes' or 'no'.

Procedure

To collect participants, an anonymous link was distributed among relatives, friends and through social media. Once participants clicked the link they were informed about the

nature of the study. All participants participated voluntarily and had to give informed consent before moving on in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of 13 scales in total, including scales that were used for different research projects. The order in which they appeared was randomized for each participant to prevent order effects. After the dating anxiety scale participants were presented with the question: 'Are you currently in a relationship?', when their answer was 'yes' they moved on to the next scale. In case their answer was 'no' they were presented a follow up question: 'Are you actively dating at the moment?'.

At the end of the questionnaire, demographics were collected. After this the participants were informed about the exact constructs we tried to measure and were thanked for their participation.

Analysis Plan

The statistical software used for the analyses was SPSS (version 28.0.2.0) and the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) (version 4.2). To test the first hypothesis, a higher score on cynicism predicts a higher score on the dating anxiety score, a simple regression was performed. In this regression dating anxiety was the dependent variable and cynicism the independent variable. To test the second hypothesis and thus the moderating effect of relationship status on this relationship, a moderation model was run using PROCESS. The moderator was the categorical variable 'relationship status' with the categories 'In a relationship', 'Single and Dating' and 'Single and Not Dating'. To have an indication whether it would be of interest to do exploratory analyses, overall correlations between all variables were examined.

Results

The means and standard deviations of the two continuous variables cynicism and dating anxiety can be found in table 1. This table also shows the correlations between these

variables and the demographic variables age and education. For the moderator, which is a categorical variable, frequencies can be found in table 2. In table 1, there is some initial support for the first hypothesis, since cynicism and dating anxiety are positively correlated ($r = .27, p > .010$). Apart from that there is a negative correlation between age and dating anxiety ($r = -.20, p > .010$), and a negative correlation between dating anxiety and education ($r = -.26, p > .010$).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of study variables

variable	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Cynicism	2.79	0.81				
2. Dating anxiety	2.50	0.80	.27**			
3. Age	29.09	13.44	-.06	-.20**		
4. Education	1.81	0.75	-.26**	-.24**	.23**	

Note: **. correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), n = 170

Table 2

Frequencies

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Cumulative Percentage</i>
In a relationship	82	48.2	48.2
Single and dating	20	11.8	60
Single and not dating	68	40.0	100
Total	170	100.0	

Hypothesis testing

Before performing the simple regression and moderation analyses in PROCESS the assumptions were tested. The assumptions for both tests are similar. For a simple regression, four assumptions are important. The first assumption is linearity, the relationship between cynicism (X) and dating anxiety (Y) is linear. The second assumption is independence of

measurements, the observations are independent of each other. The third assumption is homoscedasticity, the variance of residual is the same for any value of cynicism (X). The fourth and last assumption for a simple regression is (multivariate) normality, for any fixed value of cynicism (X), dating anxiety (Y) is normally distributed. For a multiple regression, an additional assumption that is important is that of no multicollinearity, this assumes that the residuals are normally distributed. None of the assumptions were violated so the analyses could proceed as planned.

To test the first hypothesis, that cynical individuals experience more dating anxiety, the dependent variable dating anxiety was regressed on the independent variable cynicism. Cynicism significantly predicted dating anxiety ($b = .703, p < .001$)($F(1, 169) = 13.203, p < .001$), meaning the more cynical a participant was, the more likely they were to experience dating anxiety. This seems to support the first hypothesis. Moreover, the R^2 was .073 which implies that the model explains 7,3% of the variance in dating anxiety.

The second hypothesis proposed a moderating effect of relationship status on the relationship between cynicism and dating anxiety. Hypothesis two was tested by using PROCESS model 1. Relationship status is a categorical variable and was coded into dummy variables by PROCESS. The overall model was significant $F(5, 164) = 4.52, p < .001, R^2 = .121$. Cynicism and dating status explained 12,1% of the variance in dating anxiety. This means the main effect of cynicism, which was significant, can be interpreted ($t = 2.00, p = .047$), again providing support for the first hypothesis, that cynical individuals experience more dating anxiety. The interaction effects between cynicism and the two dummy variables were not significant, which suggests that there is no overall moderating effect of relationship status, and the second hypothesis is not supported. Despite the overall moderation not being significant, we will nevertheless take a closer look at the simple slopes data. This is done because the effect of one of the dummy's had a significant result ($b_{w2} = .376, p = .003$). This

indicates that there might be a significant effect in the simple slopes, conclusions cannot be drawn because the interactions were not significant, but it might still give some insight. The data shows that when in a relationship, cynicism predicts a significant increase in dating anxiety ($b = .259, p = .013$). The data of the simple slopes for dating and not dating were not significant ($b_{\text{dating}} = .293, p = .198$; $b_{\text{not-dating}} = .202, p = .086$). Indicating that when you are in a relationship, cynicism is a predictor of dating anxiety but when you are dating or not-dating, cynicism does not predict dating anxiety.

Exploratory analysis

For the exploratory analysis the same model was used as for hypothesis 2. However, this time we controlled for age and education level because the correlations showed that age and education had a significant negative effect on dating anxiety. Starting with age, the model showed that age had a negative, small, and non-significant effect $t(162) = -1.38, p = .169$. The second covariate that was added, education was not significant either, $t(162) = -1.38, p = .066$. This suggests that neither age nor education are alternative explanations for the different levels of dating anxiety in more vs. less cynical participants.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate whether cynics are more prone to having or developing dating anxiety, and whether this effect might be moderated by relationship status. This research has both theoretical and practical value. By exploring the effect of cynicism on dating anxiety the understanding of the influence of a cynical worldview on attitudes towards intimate interpersonal processes, such as dating became more complete. This influence of cynicism was not studied before and therefore fills a gap in the literature. In doing so insight into how negative attitudes and beliefs towards relationships can affect one's mental health and well-being in the dating context was provided. Furthermore, it helps understand the mechanism through which cynicism may contribute to dating anxiety, which can lead to the

development of interventions for individuals that struggle with dating anxiety. In addition, it is of practical value to know how cynicism influences dating anxiety because it allows practitioners to address one of the potential underlying causes of dating anxiety. Furthermore, it offers a greater understanding of the consequences of a cynical worldview.

For the first hypothesis it was expected being a more cynical individual would predict having more dating anxiety. The results showed that participants with higher scores on cynicism also scored higher on dating anxiety, supporting our first hypothesis. This is supporting evidence for the research by Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al. (2020), who investigated predictors for anxiety in dating individuals. The notion that cynics are more prone to (dating) anxiety is negative news for cynics. Anxiety has been proven to have a negative effect on one's (mental) health (Dow et al., 1985). Thus, cynics may be more likely to suffer from health problems. An effect that was already outlined by Stavrova and Ehlebracht (2019). These results demonstrated that individuals with a cynical worldview were found to be at a higher risk of developing health problems. Additionally, the study suggested that poor health over time may contribute to the development of a cynical outlook.

As per the second hypothesis, that looked at the moderating effect of relationship status on the effect of cynicism on dating anxiety. The direction that this effect would take was left open because previous research found evidence for both directions. For example, the study of Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al. (2020) showed a negative effect of relationships on anxiety whilst the research of Davila et al. (2004) showed a positive effect. The multiple regression analysis with PROCESS showed there is no significant moderating effect of relationship status.. Therefore, the findings are not able to provide any hard conclusions and more clarification on the effect of relationship status (and the possible social support that comes with it) on dating anxiety. In the data of the simple slopes, there is a significant result for being in a relationship which might provide a direction for new research.

Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions

The present study had some limitations we would like to acknowledge. Firstly, the measurement used to assess dating anxiety might not be optimal for the participants that joined the study. Dating anxiety is a real issue for many adults, and when researching online, one will come across various articles that attempted to measure dating anxiety. However, the current measurement instrument used for dating anxiety is not appropriate for adults because it was originally intended for adolescents. As such, the results of this instrument may be inaccurate when applied to adults. However, since the mean age of participants in the study was relatively young, it may still be considered a valid option for this particular population. Nonetheless, to create a more reliable measurement of dating anxiety in an adult population, future research should use a measurement instrument designed for adults. In the current research it was decided to use the DAS-A because it is a more popular scale to measure dating anxiety that has been validated on many occasions.

Additionally, this study sought to assess relationship status and its moderating effect as accurately as possible. However, the methodology used may not capture the full scope of effects that a relationship or dating can have on a person. The current study only measures an individual's relationship status. This does not immediately show its effect. A person may have a much more positive view of relationships and thus have less dating anxiety when he or she is happily dating than someone who is in an unpleasant relationship and vice versa. This could be both the reason for our lack of a significant moderation result, as well as an indication that there is no effect which would explain the conflicting results in the literature. To gain more insight on this matter, future research ought to be concerned with more accurately measuring the effect of being in a relationship, dating or being single instead of solely looking at relationship status. This could be achieved by also interviewing the participants and thereby getting a better idea of the context of their relationship status.

Furthermore, this study was limited as it was conducted solely through a survey, relied on self-reported data and is correlational, meaning we cannot make any causal claims with certainty, and we cannot be sure if cynicism causes dating anxiety or if dating anxiety causes individuals to be more cynical. As a result, there is still much to be learned about the impact of cynicism on dating anxiety and further research is needed to expand the understanding of this connection. This can be done by conducting experimental studies that can establish causality, this way causal claims can be made. Another option would be to conduct longitudinal studies, through this the effect of cynicism on dating anxiety can be observed over time.

Now that we have discussed some limitations of this research we will move on to a strength. An important strength is the addition of a unique perspective to the literature. Whereas previous research on dating anxiety has focused on the role of Machiavellianism, this study seeks to explore the effects of cynicism on dating anxiety. Notably, this is a fresh contribution to the field that has not been explored in previous research. Moreover, the results of this study give us further insight into the effects of cynicism in the context of relationships and dating. In terms of practical contribution, the findings have some implications for how to provide more targeted help to people by better understanding the cause of the anxiety they experience. For example, practitioners in the field can try to help people reduce their cynical worldview and through that reduce their anxiety. Addressing the cause will always have a better and more lasting effect than addressing the consequence.

Conclusion

While former research has demonstrated the consequences of having anxiety, such as being more prone to depression, loneliness and other psychological disorders, the current research tried to get a better understanding of the causes for dating anxiety. This study investigated one possible cause in particular: cynicism. This research confirmed cynicism can

have a negative impact on one's life and it is advisable to avoid having a cynical attitude. This research showed that individuals who possess a cynical outlook on the world also have a more negative outlook on the dating world and find themselves suffering more from dating anxiety. A cynic always expects the worst and generalizes this across all aspects of their life which causes them to have more negative interactions which worsen their negative outlook on the world. Therefore, they also expect the worst from dating, through this they are bound to have more negative dating experiences, confirming their image about dating and possibly increasing their dating anxiety. More research is required to explore the effect of being in a relationship and the possible social support this gives an individual, which might decrease (dating) anxiety and help break this pattern.

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