

Relationship woes could have roots close to home, study says

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One of the biggest stumbling blocks to having successful relationships lies within.

That's the somewhat startling finding of a study conduct by UT graduate student Jerika Norona and Professor Deborah Welsh, both of the psychology department, which Welsh heads.

The research focused on undergraduate [college students](#), both because of the ready availability of subjects and because they are in a particularly formative time of their lives.

"College students are learning how to balance classes, relationships and work, and that places a lot of stress on them," said Norona. "They are developing into independent adulthood, and part of that is learning how to deal with both rejection and emotional growth."

The researchers found that students who entered into relationships with a pre-existing fear of rejection often had less [successful relationships](#) than their peers.

In other words, entering a relationship with fears that it might fail could doom that relationship before it even gets started.

The reason is two-fold: People with fear of rejection tend to be overly sensitive to any bump in the relationship, while also being more emotionally cut off as a means of buffering themselves against possible

disappointment.

While that might sound ominous, there is a silver lining, particularly for those who might be aware of their emotional state.

"The fact is, most people who are sensitive to [rejection](#) are the same people who most want the relationship to succeed," said Welsh, who heads the Development of Adolescents and Young Adults Lab. "It's unfortunate that their relationships are the ones most affected, but if they realize that they have these concerns then they can learn to address those vulnerabilities, grow from them, and have more successful relationships."

Norona said the next step in the study might be to help [students](#) address some of those issues and learn how to better adapt, react and maintain relationships.

Norona and Welsh said the findings don't apply only to romantic relationships. They could help improve friendships, organizations—really, any connection.

"The key is to just become more self-aware about what you bring to a relationship, what you want out of it and what you can do to make it stronger," said Norona. "Awareness is key."

Provided by University of Tennessee at Knoxville

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