

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SHYNESS AND SELF-ESTEEM WITH LONELINESS IN SOCIAL MEDIA BASED ROLEPLAYER

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the relationship between shyness and self-esteem with loneliness among social media-based roleplayers. Roleplay communities on social media provide a space for individuals to create and perform alternative identities, often allowing interaction without disclosing their real selves. This unique environment may influence how individuals experience social connection, particularly for those who struggle with social discomfort or self-evaluation in real-life interactions. Therefore, this population is relevant for understanding how psychological factors relate to perceived loneliness in digitally mediated contexts. This study employed a quantitative correlational design involving 110 participants aged 15–24 years who were actively engaged in roleplaying activities. Data were collected using psychological scales measuring shyness, self-esteem, and loneliness and were analyzed using correlation and multiple regression analysis. The results showed that shyness and self-esteem simultaneously had a significant relationship with loneliness ($R = 0.766$, $R^2 = 0.587$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a combined contribution of 58.7%. Furthermore, shyness was positively correlated with loneliness ($r = 0.721$, $p < 0.01$), while self-esteem was negatively correlated with loneliness ($r = -0.669$, $p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that individuals with higher social discomfort and lower self-evaluation are more vulnerable to loneliness, indicating that virtual interaction alone may not fully address underlying psychological needs.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social connection has remained a fundamental human need, as individuals inherently seek meaningful relationships (Suseno, 2013). When this need is not adequately fulfilled, individuals may experience loneliness, a distressing psychological state associated with various negative outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation (Hanam, 2020; Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018).

Alongside the rapid development of information and communication technologies, patterns of social interaction have increasingly shifted to online environments (Nasrullah, 2015). Social media platforms have become central spaces for building relationships, including in Indonesia, where their use continues to grow (We Are Social, 2022). One emerging phenomenon within this digital context is roleplay, in which individuals adopt alternative identities and engage in virtual interactions (Achsa, 2015; Ramadhanti, 2021).

The roleplay environment allows individuals to regulate self-presentation and interact without revealing their real identities, which may enhance psychological comfort, especially for those who experience difficulties in face-to-face communication (Deters & Mehl, 2013). However, reliance on virtual interaction does not necessarily address underlying psychological conditions and may contribute to persistent feelings of loneliness (Susanti, 2024).

Previous studies have identified several individual factors associated with loneliness, particularly shyness and self-esteem (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). Shyness, characterized by discomfort and inhibition in social situations (Zimbardo, 1977), has been consistently linked to higher levels of loneliness (Baş, 2010; Pratiwi & Asih, 2019). In contrast, self-esteem, defined as an individual's evaluation of self-worth (Coopersmith, 1967), is negatively associated with loneliness, as lower self-esteem may hinder the formation of meaningful relationships (Casipo & Casipo, 2018; Isaac et al., 2017).

The relationship between these variables can be understood through Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1986), which explains how individuals interpret social experiences in ways that may reinforce withdrawal and increase loneliness (Findlay & Coplan, 2008). Within the context of roleplay, virtual interactions may function both as a coping mechanism and as a factor that maintains these psychological tendencies.

Despite the growing prevalence of roleplay in social media, research examining the relationship between shyness, self-esteem, and loneliness among roleplayers remains limited, particularly in the Indonesian context. Most existing studies focus on general populations, leaving a gap in understanding how these variables interact within virtual identity-based interactions.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between shyness, self-esteem, and loneliness among social media-based roleplayers. Shyness and self-esteem were treated as independent variables, while loneliness served as the dependent variable. The main study involved 110 roleplayers aged 15–24 years, selected using purposive sampling based on their active involvement in social media-based roleplay activities. Operationally, purposive sampling was conducted by selecting participants who met specific criteria, including being within the age range, actively engaging in roleplay interactions on social media, and having experience in maintaining roleplay-based relationships.

The research instruments consisted of three psychological scales measuring shyness, self-esteem, and loneliness, developed based on established theoretical frameworks. The shyness scale was based on Zimbardo (1977), the self-esteem scale on Coopersmith (1967), and the loneliness scale on Rubinstein, Shaver, and Peplau (1979). Initially, each scale consisted of 40 items. All instruments were structured using a Likert scale format with multiple response options reflecting levels of agreement.

Prior to the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted involving 67 participants to test the validity and reliability of the instruments. Item validity was assessed using item-total correlation. Based on the results, several items that did not meet the validity criteria were removed. The final instruments consisted of 36 items for shyness, 31 items for self-esteem, and 28 items for loneliness, all of which met the acceptable validity threshold.

Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha indicated that the instruments had satisfactory internal consistency, with coefficients of $\alpha = 0.919$ (shyness), $\alpha = 0.900$ (self-esteem), and $\alpha = 0.882$ (loneliness), indicating high reliability.

The final version of the instruments was then distributed to 110 participants through an online questionnaire via social media platforms. Responses were measured using a Likert scale format.

Descriptive analysis was conducted by categorizing participants' scores into five levels (very high, high, moderate, low, and very low). This categorization was based on a mean and standard deviation approach to ensure

standardized interpretation of score distribution, where the score intervals were determined using the following criteria: very high ($X \geq M + 1.5SD$), high ($M + 0.5SD \leq X < M + 1.5SD$), moderate ($M - 0.5SD \leq X < M + 0.5SD$), low ($M - 1.5SD \leq X < M - 0.5SD$), and very low ($X < M - 1.5SD$).

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS version 25. Prior to hypothesis testing, tests of normality and linearity were conducted. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between each independent variable and loneliness, while multiple regression analysis was performed to determine the combined contribution of shyness and self-esteem to loneliness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participant Characteristics

Following a validity testing process, 110 participants were included in the final analysis. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method according to the following criteria:

Active users of social media (such as Telegram, WhatsApp, Instagram, Line, and Twitter/X).

Roleplayers on social media.

Experience difficulties or limitations in socializing in real life.

The majority of participants were female (95.45%), while only 4.55% were male. Participants ages ranged from 15 to 24 years, with the highest proportion being 17 years old (20.91%).

In terms of roleplaying platforms, most participants reported using Telegram (66.67%) as their primary platform, followed by WhatsApp (22.70%), Instagram (19.15%), Twitter/X (11.35%), and Line (4.26%). The total frequency exceeds 100% as participants were allowed to select more than one platform.

These findings suggest that Telegram is the most preferred platform for roleplaying activities, possibly due to its flexibility and anonymity features that support identity exploration in online interactions.

Descriptive Statistics

Tabel 1. Shyness Data Categorization

Categorization	Interval	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	$X \geq 117$	7	6,36%
High	$100 \leq X \leq 117$	29	26,36%
Moderate	$84 \leq X \leq 100$	36	32,73%
Low	$67 \leq X \leq 84$	35	31,82%
Very Low	$X \leq 67$	3	2,73%
Total		110	100%

Source: Based on the Calculation of Standard Deviation Categorization

Based on Table 1, the majority of participants were in the moderate category of shyness (32.73%). This indicates that most roleplayers experience a certain level of social discomfort, but are still able to engage in interaction. In the context of roleplay, this condition may reflect a tendency to participate in social interactions while maintaining emotional distance, as individuals can regulate their level of involvement through fictional identities. This pattern is consistent with the notion that shy individuals prefer controlled interaction settings to minimize the risk of negative evaluation (Zimbardo, 1977).

Tabel 2. Self-Esteem Data Categorization

Categorization	Interval	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	$X \geq 107$	10	9,09%
High	$94 \leq X \leq 107$	29	26,36%
Moderate	$81 \leq X \leq 94$	34	30,91%
Low	$69 \leq X \leq 81$	29	26,36%
Very Low	$X \leq 69$	8	7,27%
Total		110	100%

Source: Based on the Calculation of Standard Deviation Categorization

Based on Table 2, the majority of participants were in the moderate category of self-esteem (30.91%), followed by high (26.36%) and low (26.36%). This indicates that most roleplayers tend to have a relatively balanced level of self-evaluation, although their confidence may vary across situations. In the context of roleplay, this condition may reflect the ability of individuals to manage how they present themselves through alternative identities, allowing them to maintain a certain level of confidence during interaction. This pattern is consistent with the view that self-esteem is a dynamic evaluation influenced by social experiences (Rosenberg, 1965).

Tabel 3. Loneliness Data Categorization

Categorization	Interval	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	$X \geq 95$	13	11,82%
High	$82 \leq X \leq 95$	18	16,36%
Moderate	$69 \leq X \leq 82$	46	41,82%
Low	$55 \leq X \leq 69$	25	22,73%
Very Low	$X \leq 55$	8	7,27%
Total		110	100%

Source: Based on the Calculation of Standard Deviation Categorization

Based on Table 3, the majority of participants were in the moderate category of loneliness (41.82%), followed by low (22.73%) and high (16.36%). This indicates that most roleplayers experience a moderate level of loneliness, suggesting the presence of social interaction alongside unmet emotional needs. In the context of roleplay, this condition may reflect a situation where individuals are actively engaged in online interactions but still perceive a lack of deeper emotional connection. This pattern is consistent with the notion that loneliness arises from a discrepancy between desired and actual social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1981).

Assumption Test

The results of the normality test indicated that all variables were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). Additionally, the linearity test showed that the relationships between shyness and loneliness ($p = 0.114$) and between self-esteem and loneliness ($p = 0.206$) were linear.

Tabel 4. Normality Test Results

No.	Variables	K-SZ	P (0.05)	Indicated
1.	Shyness	0.064	0.200	Normally Distributed
2.	Self-esteem	0.065	0.200	Normally Distributed
3.	Loneliness	0.080	0.079	Normally Distributed

Source: IBM SPSS version 25

Tabel 5. Results of Linearity Test

Variables	F	Sig (p)	Indicated
Shyness and Loneliness	1.391	0.114	Linear
Self-Esteem and Loneliness	1.249	0.206	Linear

Source: IBM SPSS version 25

These results confirm that the data met the assumptions required for further parametric analysis.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Tabel 6. Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Variables	R	R Square	Sig (p)
Shyness & Self Esteem → Loneliness	0.766	0.587	0.000

Source: IBM SPSS version 25

The regression analysis revealed a significant relationship between shyness and self-esteem with loneliness ($R = 0.766$, $R^2 = 0.587$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that shyness and self-esteem together contribute 58.7% to loneliness. This finding suggests that both variables play a substantial role in predicting loneliness among social media roleplayers. Individuals with higher levels of shyness and lower self-esteem are more likely to experience loneliness.

According to Crozier (2010), shyness is associated with social discomfort and increased sensitivity to rejection, which may lead to loneliness. Zimbardo (1977) also explained that shy individuals tend to withdraw from social interactions, limiting their access to emotional support. This finding is consistent with Tian et al. (2021), who found that shyness and loneliness are positively correlated over time. These results highlight that personality factors significantly influence loneliness, particularly in online social environments.

Correlation Analysis

Tabel 7. Correlation Analysis Results between Shyness and Loneliness

Variables	R	R Square	Sig (p)
Shyness - Loneliness	0.721	0.519	0.000

Source: IBM SPSS version 25

The correlation analysis showed a significant positive relationship between shyness and loneliness ($r = 0.721$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher levels of shyness are associated with higher levels of loneliness. This suggests that individuals who experience greater social discomfort tend to have more difficulty forming meaningful social connections, which increases their likelihood of feeling lonely.

This finding is in line with Zimbardo (1977), who stated that shy individuals are more likely to avoid social interactions. It also supports previous studies, such as Putri (2024), which found a significant relationship between shyness and loneliness, and Pratiwi and Asih (2019), who reported that shy individuals tend to experience difficulties in social adaptation, leading to increased loneliness.

Tabel 8. Correlation Analysis Results Self-Esteem and Loneliness

Variables	R	R Square	Sig (p)
Self Esteem - Loneliness	-0.669	0.448	0.000

Source: IBM SPSS version 25

The results showed a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and loneliness ($r = -0.669$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher self-esteem is associated with lower levels of loneliness. This finding suggests that individuals with positive self-evaluations are more confident in building social relationships, which reduces their likelihood of experiencing loneliness.

According to Mruk (2013), individuals with low self-esteem tend to have negative self-perceptions and doubt their ability to form healthy relationships. This finding is consistent with studies by Razak and Halima (2025) and Lindah et al. (2024), which showed that individuals with higher self-esteem are better able to adapt socially and are less likely to experience loneliness.

The findings indicate that shyness is positively associated with loneliness among roleplayers, suggesting that virtual interaction does not fully eliminate the interpersonal barriers experienced by shy individuals. Although roleplay allows individuals to interact through alternative identities, those with higher levels of shyness may still avoid deeper engagement due to fear of negative evaluation. As a result, their interactions tend to remain superficial, which limits the development of meaningful emotional connections and contributes to persistent loneliness (Zimbardo, 1977; Crozier, 2010; Pratiwi & Asih, 2019).

In contrast, self-esteem is negatively associated with loneliness, indicating its role as a protective factor in online interaction. Individuals with higher self-esteem are more likely to engage confidently and form more meaningful relationships, while those with lower self-esteem may participate in roleplay as a form of avoidance rather than genuine connection. This may reduce their sense of belonging despite active social interaction (Mruk, 2013; Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018; Ishaq et al., 2017).

Together, these findings suggest that the effectiveness of roleplay as a medium for social connection is influenced by individual psychological characteristics. While roleplay provides opportunities for interaction, it does not necessarily ensure the fulfillment of emotional needs, particularly for individuals with high shyness and low self-esteem. Similar patterns have been observed in online interaction contexts, where the quantity of interaction does not always reflect the quality of social relationships (Caplan, 2007; Yao & Zhong, 2014)

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the data were collected using a self-report method, which may be subject to social desirability bias, as participants might respond in ways that are considered socially acceptable rather than reflecting their actual psychological condition.

Second, the data collection was conducted online through Google Forms, limiting the researcher's ability to control the response process. This may have led to variations in participants' understanding of the questionnaire items, as well as the possibility of inattentive or rushed responses.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between shyness and self-esteem with loneliness among social media-based roleplayers. The findings showed that shyness is positively associated with loneliness, while self-esteem is negatively associated with loneliness, with both variables contributing significantly of loneliness.

These findings imply that roleplay communities can serve as an alternative space for social interaction, particularly for individuals who experience difficulties in face-to-face communication. However, the results also indicate that participation in roleplay does not automatically reduce loneliness, as underlying psychological factors such as shyness and low self-esteem continue to influence the quality of social interactions.

This study is limited by the use of self-report measures and online data collection, which may affect the accuracy of responses. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore additional variables and use more controlled methods to better understand psychological experiences within roleplay environments.

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