Relationship Science Online

Demand-Withdrawal

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- **Demand-withdrawal: critical and demanding behaviour by a partner is met with defensive withdrawal by the other partner**
  - Ranks among the most destructive and least effective interaction patterns in couples' problem-solving communication repertoires (Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993)
    - *Rarely results in the resolution of relationship issues (Eldridge & Baucom, 2012)*
    - *Demand-withdrawal is particularly associated with poorer conflict resolution and reduced satisfaction over time (Christensen & Heavey, 1990)*
  - One of the most common couple interactions seen in couples seeking therapy (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994; Shoham & Rohrbaugh, 2002)
    - *It appears that some extent this conflict pattern is gendered – women do more demanding and men do more withdrawing in heterosexual relationships*
    - *This genderised patterns seems to transcend cultures, similar patterns appear in Italy, Taiwan, Brazil, and the US (Christensen et al., 2006)*
    - *Interestingly, men who are more demanding of their wives results in wives experiencing increases in relationship satisfaction – appears man is committed to relationship (Heavey et al., 1993, 1995)*

Demand-Withdrawal

- **Demand-withdrawal has a number of verbal and non-verbal indicators**

VERBAL BEHAVIOUR – Demand

1. **Blame. Blames, accuses, or criticises partner**
   - Uses critical sarcasm, character assassinations such as "you're a real ass", "all you do is eat", "why are you such a jerk about it?"
   - Explicit blaming statements (e.g., "you made me do it" or "you prevent me from doing it"), in which the partner is the casual agent for the problem.
2. **Pressure for Change. Requests, demands, nags, manipulates, seduces, or otherwise pressures for change in the partner.**
   - This pressure can be either positive or negative (critical or complimenting and supportive).
   - This pressure can be implicit as well as explicit. In other words, it need not be as explicit as "I want you to play with our son." It must however, carry in it an implicit should statement, which clearly indicates what the partner "should" be doing. Examples of this include "you never play with our son," and "If you spent more time at home, our child would probably not act out as much as school." These statements both carry implicit "shoulds" that the parent should carry out his/her parenting duties and spend more time with the child.

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VERBAL BEHAVIOUR – Withdraw

1. **Withdrawal. Becomes silent, refuses to discuss a particular topic, refuses to argue or fight about the issue, does not actively defend self, does not offer solutions or assists in the discussion**

2. **Avoidance. Actively avoids discussing the problem**
   - Hesitates, shifting focus or changes topics, diverts attention, or delays discussion
   - Minimises the importance of the problem being discussed, deny the existence of the problem
   - Purposefully being vague or making ambiguous comments about the problem to obscure the discussion or confuse the partner
   - More active than withdrawal

NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOUR

1. **Withdrawal. Looks away, pulls back, retreats, does not follow or pays attention to what the partner says. More passive than Avoidance.**
2. **Avoidance. Turns body away, physically steps away, crossing of hands back and forth (as if to stop the conversation), putting up one's hands up (again as a "stop" gesture), folding one's arms, leaving the room.**