Relationship Science Online

Factors Related to the Manifest of Communication / Conflict Patterns

What Factors Influence Conflict Patterns?

Cognitions – negative attitudes, attributions, beliefs

- **Cognitions and communication are intricately connected** (Manusov & Harvey, 2001)
- **For example, if a partner is perceive is encompassing negative traits, then destructive communication patterns ensue, because of one's appraisal of partner negativity**
- **Even if the partner behaves in positive ways, people's negative cognitions colour their perceptions of this behaviour, and either do not recognise it, or if they do, it is dismissed as an anomaly**
- **Negative attitudes about a partner are central to the use of negative reciprocity**
- **Further, it appears that individual differences shape our cognitions, and in turn, our perceptions and communicative responses towards partners**

What Factors Influence Conflict Patterns?

Individual differences

- **Evidence has been found for a variety of individual differences**
- **Importantly, it appears that individual differences shape our cognitions, and in turn, our perceptions and communicative responses towards partners**
- **What are these individual differences** (e.g., Eldridge & Baucom, 2012; Feeney et al., 1994; Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002)
  - Attachment style (attachment anxiety and avoidance)
    - *Anxiety +vely → demand and hostility; avoidance +vely → withdrawal*
  - Neuroticism +vely → demand-withdrawal
  - Agreeableness –vely → demand-withdrawal
  - Locus of control (depends on if internal or external)
  - Competence, empathy, relational vulnerability (difficult to let go of hurtful events) → relationship satisfaction 5 years later

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What Factors Influence Conflict Patterns?

Topic of the conflict

- **Who raises the topic generally engages in more demanding or active communication patterns**
- **While seriousness of topic doesn't seem to influence patterns as much, degree of pervious discussion influences use of demand-withdrawal** (Eldridge et al., 2007; McGinn et al., 2009)

Stress/distress/dissatisfaction

- **Research suggests, that stressful events and dissatisfaction make it harder for people to negotiate conflict in a more constructive way because their capacities are already taxed** (Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Neff & Karney, 2008)
  - Relationship issues are perceived as more serious (or that there is more of them)
  - Partners are more likely to be blamed for issues
  - People are less able to regulate their stress and emotions
  - Spillover into negative partner interactions
    - *This is especially the case if the person has greater vulnerabilities*

Factors are Interconnected

- **A simple example of individual differences and cognitions…**
  - Attachment and attribution a case in point

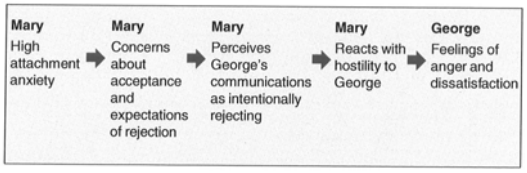


Figure 9.2 Mary, George, and attachment anxiety