

This study examined newly developed narrative measures of young women's influence schemas in the context of conflict in their current romantic relationships. Forty-five women were interviewed about how well their partners met their needs and completed ratings of relationship functioning. Narrative indicators of Denigration and absence of Reflection were related to less relationship satisfaction and more verbal aggression.

PURPOSE

This study examined:

1. Characteristics of a newly developed narrative measures of young women's schemas for conflict in specific romantic relationships and;
2. How narrative-based measures of conflict were related to questionnaire indices of power, negative emotions and involvement in relationship aggression.

BACKGROUND

- The dominance-submission framework is not sufficient to understand young women's views of conflict and influence in their romantic relationships.

- Social exchange theory suggests understanding needs to consider shared influence in romantic relationships

- To measure influence in the context of relationship conflict, we developed an interview and a narrative coding system to index Denigration & Reflection.

- Denigration:** denigrating affect expressed to the partner during conflict is detrimental to romantic relationships.

- Denigration within the context of describing unmet needs suggest that a woman's sense of influence is compromised because unmet needs evoke frustration and/or hopelessness

- Reflection:** taking the perspective of the self and the partner into account when dealing with unmet needs.

- Mutuality between partners is related to the capacity to understand the needs of the self and the partner in order to negotiate potentially differing needs or priorities

Predictions

Denigration and Absence of Reflection in response to unmet needs would be related to:

Less Power, Less Relationship Satisfaction

More Negative Emotions, More Relationship Aggression.

METHODS

Participants:

- 45 heterosexual women 18 to 25 years of age ($M= 19$ $SD=.89$). Involved in a current relationship of at least 3 months or longer (ranged from 3 to 60 months $M = 19.71$, $SD = 14.0$).

- European-American (62%) Hispanic, (16%) African American (7%), and Asian (2%) and mixed (13%)

- Semi-structured Interview Questions:** How well the participant thought she and her partner met each other's needs; 2 specific examples of when her partner met her needs; How she felt and how her partner felt when the needs were met and whether there were any other reactions; 2 specific times when her needs were not met by her partner; How she felt and how her partner felt when her needs were not met, and whether there were any other reactions

Narrative Measures

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

- Narratives were coded independently by three different coders and discrepancies in coding were resolved through discussion

Self- Denigration Scale : Scores range from a low of 1 –at least one need not met is a threat to the relationship and there are several indicators of denigration in the narrative - to a high of 5 with no indicators of denigration present .

“I caught him smoking and it broke my heart. And I ended it with him and started dating someone else for two months and then I got back together with Partner and now it's almost a year again so um that made me really upset. Uh, lost of trust completely and it's still hard to rebuild that and trust again.”

- Self- Reflection Scale:** Introspective Reflection involved evidence that the speaker understood her partners point of view during a conflict ; Shared Reflection required evidence that both the speaker and her partner understood each others perspective and had discussed the problem .

- Negative Emotions in Response to Needs Not Met: Hard, Soft, Flat

- Couples Emotion Rating Form

- Other Power Measures:

- The Power Perceptions and Power Satisfaction

- The Romantic Relationship Power Inventory

- Relationship Aggression: Conflict in Relationships Questionnaire (CIRQ)

Table 1

Narrative Groups

Relationship Denigration	RD Threat	RD-No Threat	None
RD			
N	21	13	11
%	47	29	24
Reflection	Shared	Introspective	None
N	7	17	21
%	16	38	47

Table 2

Means for Relationship Power, Satisfaction & Aggression by Denigration and Reflection Groups

	Denigration (RD)				Reflection (REF)					
	RD-Threat		RD-No Threat		No REF		Some REF			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
RP Comply	3.69	.66	3.95	.51	4.11	.84	3.63 ^a	.69	4.10 ^b	.63
Satisf.	35.10 ^a	8.45	39.33 ^{ab}	5.14	42.38 ^b	3.43	35.14 ^a	8.37	41.13 ^b	4.30
Psych. Aggress	2.43 ^a	.88	1.99 ^{ab}	1.00	1.26 ^b	.90	2.14	1.10	1.82	.96

Note. RR= romantic relationship, RP= romantic partner. Cells not sharing the same superscript are significantly different at $p<.05$ or better

Acknowledgements: The undergraduate students in the Romantic Relationships Research Lab RRRLab– <http://www.tcnj.edu/~cyrd/research.htm>

RESULTS

Inter-rater Reliability of Relationship Denigration and Reflection :

Intraclass Correlations Denigration (.79) and Reflection (.77).

- Table 1 shows Denigration was common whereas Shared Reflection was infrequent in the Narratives about unmet needs.

The Relationship Between Denigration and Reflection and Questionnaire Measures of Power

(see Table 2) : Separate MANOVAs in which the Self- Denigration and Reflection Groups were the between subjects and the power measures were the dependent variables showed women whose schemas included Reflection had higher ratings of their own influence (partner likely to comply to a request).

Relations between Relationship Denigration and Reflection with Hard Emotion:

There were no significant findings for narrative measures and ratings of emotion. However hard emotions were negatively associated with satisfaction ($r= -.34$) and positively associated with verbal aggression ($r= .54$)

Relation between Relationship Denigration and Reflection and Relationship Aggression and Satisfaction

(see Table 2): MANOVAs showed women who used Reflection compared to those who did not were more satisfied with their relationships. Women in the denigration with threat group compared to those without denigration reported being involved in more psychological aggression and being less satisfied with their relationship .

CONCLUSIONS

- The narrative approach holds promise for understanding young women's conflict schemas from the perspective of shared influence.

- This study is among the first to demonstrate the importance of conflict schemas in regard to unmet needs for understanding individual differences in relationship functioning.

- There is utility in considering positive as well as negative aspects of conflict schemas in romantic relationships; this was highlighted by the results linking reflection with more positive relationship functioning.