Literature Review and Hypotheses

Conflicts are both commonplace and unavoidable in romantic relationships. Key to how conflict influences a relationship is how it is approached (Cramer, 2000). That is, couples who better manage conflict in their relationships report more relationship satisfaction and intimacy, whereas poor conflict resolution strategies are linked to a number of negative relationship outcomes and a higher frequency of relationship conflict (Bradbury, Regge, & Lawrence, 2001; Cramer, 1998).

Given the relation between unresolved conflict, conflict frequency, and intimate partner violence (IPV; Jewkes, 2002), it is important to understand the factors that may help couples successfully avoid, or in situations when it does arise, resolve conflict in their relationships.

Personal Intelligence (PI) involves our ability to reason about our own personality and the personality of others (Mayer, 2009).

Research demonstrates that individuals use personal intelligence to facilitate their interactions with others. Specifically, individuals who are high in PI report less severe interpersonal conflict in their relationships (Bryan; 2018; Mayer, Lortie, Pantel, & Caruso, 2018). When conflict does arise, individuals high in personal intelligence are more likely to employ positive conflict resolution strategies to address the conflict, while individuals low in personal intelligence are more likely to engage in or withdraw from conflict (Bryan, 2018).

Such findings suggest that individuals who are high (vs. low) in PI are better able to understand others (Mayer et al., 2017), and therefore are better able to assess their needs and the needs of their partner during times of conflict (Bryan, 2018). As a result, they may be better able to communicate with their partner in a way that is constructive for conflict resolution. This in turn may lead to a decrease in the frequency of conflict and help prevent conflicts from escalating to levels that may be reflective of IPV.

Aim

The aim of the present research was to explore the relation between personal intelligence and communication patterns in romantic relationships. Our broader goal was to explore the relation between PI and communication and how couples navigate conflict in their relationships.

Hypotheses

Participants high in personal intelligence will employ more positive and constructive communication and conflict resolution strategies compared to participants who are low in personal intelligence.

Participants low in personal intelligence will employ more negative communication patterns in response to conflict in their relationships.

Personal intelligence will be negatively related to risk factors predicting IPV, including conflict frequency and the use of psychological and verbal manipulation tactics in communication with their partner.

Method

Participants

Participants included 192 UHMan students (age M = 19.33 years, SD = 2.89; 163 females) who completed an online survey for partial course credit. The average current relationship length was 23.60 months (SD = 28.49); previous relationship length, M = 14.38 months (SD = 10.94), and friendship length, M = 48.98 months (SD = 65.73).

Participants were part of a larger study exploring the relation between personal intelligence and general interpersonal communication.

In the present research, participants were asked to answer questions pertaining to their interactions and communications with close others (i.e. current romantic partners, previous romantic partners or best friends).

Measures

Test of Personal Intelligence (TOP); Mayer, Pantel, & Caruso, 2018: a 12 item scale assessing individual’s ability to reason about personality.

Relationship Conflict Resolution Narrative: Two essay prompts asking participants to describe their most recent conflict with a partner or friend and how they resolved that conflict.

Self-Defensive Perspective Taking Scale (Leong, 1990): a 13 item scale assessing an individual’s ability to put themselves in someone else’s “shoes”.

Gender Role Belief Scale (Ferris & Holden, 1996): a 20 item measure assessing the extent to which someone conforms to traditional gender norms.

Positive and Negative Relationship Life Space Items: an 89 item measure asking participants to report on their optimistic behavior and communications patterns in relationships. Items were factor analyzed to create two measures:

Psychological Manipulation: Eight items assessing the extent to which someone undermines or belittles their romantic partners or friends.

Coercion: Seven items assessing the use of coercion in one’s interactions with romantic partners or friends.

Overview of Statistical Procedures

Before beginning our analyses, we screened the data for signs of extreme inattention. We removed one participant from our analyses due to long-string responding (i.e. excessive repetition of the same number or response throughout the survey). A further 12 participants were removed for completing the survey in under 10 minutes. Our final sample consisted of 180 participants who were asked to respond about their interactions with a current romantic partner, previous romantic partner, or best friend.

An OLS regression was ran exploring the relation between personal intelligence and conflict frequency (i.e. how often participants reported arguing about the conflict written about in the survey). Personal intelligence was a negative, non-significant predictor of conflict frequency, b = -.03, S.E. = .03, [t(177) = -1.87, p = .06, 95% CI [.06, .08], suggesting that people who are high in personal intelligence are better able to understand others (Mayer et al., 2017).

Results

We also aimed to replicate and extend previous work exploring the role of personal intelligence and interpersonal communication patterns. That is, if people low in personal intelligence struggle to understand others, they may turn to more negative communication patterns during times of stress or stressful interpersonal interactions.

An OLS multiple regression was conducted to predict psychological manipulation from personal intelligence. The overall regression was significant, F(1, 178) = 4.25, p < .04, Adj R² = .02, suggesting personal intelligence accounted for a small portion of the variance in psychological manipulation. Personal intelligence, b = .26, S.E. = .34, [β = .45, 95% CI [.02, .07]] was a significant positive predictor of psychological manipulation; (see Figure 1). Such findings support previous research suggesting that individuals high in personal intelligence are better able to understand others (Mayer et al., 2017).

A systematic review of studies exploring risk factors of interpersonal violence demonstrates that recurring conflict is a significant risk factor of intimate partner violence (IPV; Capaldi, Knoll, Shorrit, & Kim, 2012; Jewkes, 2002). Although the specific analysis here was not significant, there was a negative relationship between personal intelligence and conflict frequency and conflict intensity. Further research is needed to explore the link between conflict frequency and personal intelligence and whether people in relationships who experience less IPV may be characterized by at least one partner who is high in personal intelligence.

Discussion

The results of our study replicate previous research suggesting that individuals who are high (vs. low) in personal intelligence are better able to understand others (Mayer et al., 2017). Specifically, our findings demonstrate that individuals who are high in personal intelligence tend to take the perspective of other individuals and they tend to employ more positive communication patterns in response to conflict in their relationships (Bryan, 2018).

In contrast, individuals low in personal intelligence reported using more psychological and verbal manipulation tactics in their communications with others. Moreover, individuals low in personal intelligence reported being less skilled at taking the perspective of others. Such findings suggest that individuals low in personal intelligence may struggle to understand others (Mayer et al., 2017). People with low personal intelligence may not recognize their misjudgments of others and become confused and frustrated due to this disconnect (Mayer et al., 2017). Collectively, the results of the current study indicate that individuals low in personal intelligence may lash out or attempt to control others in response, as supported by our findings which show they report a higher use of manipulation tactics when they are trying to do something.

References


