

# “I Just Don’t Get You”: How Low Personal Intelligence Interferes with Communication in



## Romantic Relationships

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### Literature Review and Hypotheses

#### Literature Review and Background

- Conflict is 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, Rogge, & 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, Panter, & 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 broad 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 patterns in response to conflict in their relationships.
- 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 included 192 UNH 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 23.26 months ( $SD = 28.49$ , previous relationship length,  $M = 14.38$  months ( $SD = 10.94$ ), and friendship length,  $M = 89.98$  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 (TOPI)** (Mayer, Panter, & 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-Dyadic Perspective Taking Scale** (Long, 1990): a 13 item scale assessing an individual's ability to put themselves in someone else's "shoes".
- Gender Role Belief Scale** (Kerr & 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 objective behaviors and communication 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.

### Results

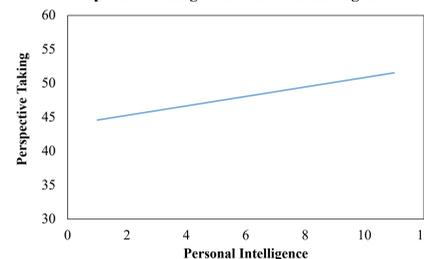
#### Overview of Statistical Procedures

- 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 report 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,  $b = -.01$ ,  $S.E. = .03$ ,  $\beta = -.01$ ,  $t(177) = -.17$ ,  $p = .86$ , 95% CI  $[-.08, .06]$ .

#### People High in Personal Intelligence are More Skilled Perspective Takers

- An OLS multiple regression was conducted to predict perspective taking from personal intelligence. The overall regression was significant,  $F(1, 178) = 4.25$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $Adj R^2 = .02$ , suggesting personal intelligence accounted for a small portion of the variance in perspective taking. Personal intelligence,  $b = .70$ ,  $S.E. = .34$ ,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $t(178) = 2.06$ ,  $p = .04$ , 95% CI  $[.03, .137]$ , was a significant positive predictor of perspective taking, suggesting that people who are higher in personal intelligence are more skilled perspective takers (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).

Figure 1. OLS Regression Predicting Perspective Taking from Personal Intelligence

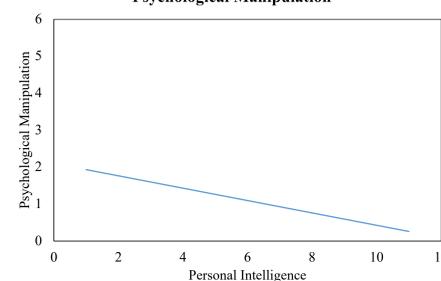


#### People Low in Personal Intelligence Employ More Negative Communication Patterns

We also aimed to replicate and extend previous work exploring the role of personal intelligence in 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 tense or stressful interpersonal interactions.

- An OLS multiple regression was conducted to predict psychological manipulation from personal intelligence. The overall regression was significant,  $F(1, 153) = 9.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $Adj R^2 = .05$ , suggesting personal intelligence accounted for a small portion of the variance in psychological manipulation. Personal intelligence,  $b = -.17$ ,  $S.E. = .06$ ,  $\beta = -.24$ ,  $t(153) = -3.03$ ,  $p < .01$ , 95% CI  $[-.28, -.06]$ , was a significant negative predictor of psychological manipulation (see Figure 2).
- An additional OLS regression predicted the use of coercion in interpersonal communication from personal intelligence. Consistent with the above findings, the overall regression was marginally significant ( $1, 114$ ) =  $3.97$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $Adj R^2 = .03$ , suggesting personal intelligence accounted for a small portion of the variance in the use of coercion. Personal intelligence,  $b = -.08$ ,  $S.E. = .04$ ,  $\beta = -.18$ ,  $t(114) = -1.99$ ,  $p = .05$ , 95% CI  $[-.16, -.00]$ , was a negative predictor of the use of coercion.
- Such findings replicate previous research suggesting that individuals low in personal intelligence employ more negative communication patterns in response to conflict in their relationships.

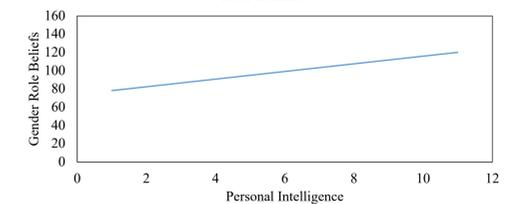
Figure 2. Personal Intelligence Predicts Psychological Manipulation



#### People High in Personal Intelligence Endorse More Equal Gender Role Beliefs

- Previous research suggests that the endorsement of more traditional gender roles and violation of traditional gender roles can be a source of conflict in romantic relationships (Jewkes, 2002; Baly, 2010). Moreover, adherence to more traditional gender role beliefs has been linked to IPV in some romantic relationships. As a result, we were interested in exploring whether personal intelligence may relate to certain beliefs about men and women's roles. An OLS multiple regression was conducted to predict gender role beliefs from personal intelligence. The overall regression was significant,  $F(1, 178) = 26.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $Adj R^2 = .13$ , suggesting personal intelligence accounted for a 13% of the variance in gender role beliefs. Personal intelligence,  $b = 4.19$ ,  $S.E. = .82$ ,  $\beta = .36$ ,  $t(178) = 5.14$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI  $[.26, 5.80]$ , was a significant positive predictor of gender role beliefs. Specifically, individuals who were higher in personal intelligence endorsed more equal gender roles (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Personal Intelligence Predicting Gender Role Beliefs



### Discussion

- The results of our study replicate previous research suggesting that individuals who are high (vs. low) in personal intelligence are better at understand others (Mayer et al., 2017). Specifically, our findings demonstrate that individuals who are high in personal intelligence are better able 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 close 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 want their partner or friends to do something.
- 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, Knoble, Shortt, & Kim, 2012; Jewkes, 2002). Although the specific analysis here was not significant, there was a negative relationship between personal intelligence and conflict frequency. 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.
- The results of the present study also extend our understanding of the role of personal intelligence in attitudes towards males and females gender roles. That is, we found that individuals high in personal intelligence tend to endorse more gender equality and feeling less threatened by behaviors that violate traditional gender role norms according to the positive relation between personal intelligence and the gender role beliefs scale.
- Previous research suggests adherence to traditional gender roles may increase some individual's tendency to accept blame, take responsibility for dealing with their partner's problems, and to deny and minimize any abuse or manipulation from their partner (Baly 2010; Boonzaier, 2008). Yet individuals who reject traditional gender roles may experience greater conflict in their relationships (Jewkes, 2002). Collectively with previous findings that individuals high in personal intelligence are better able to navigate conflict in their relationship (Bryan, 2018), the results of the present study suggest personal intelligence may be linked to less perpetration or victimization of IPV due to its relation to the endorsement of more equal gender roles.
- Future research should explore the role personal intelligence has in one's ability to use psychological manipulation in their interpersonal relationships. Moreover, it should also explore the how partner's varying levels of personal intelligence may interact to predict successful communication and conflict resolution in their relationships.

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