

Conflict Strategies, Spiritual Meaning, and Spiritual Disclosure Across Various Relationships

Elissa O'Dell, Dr. Laird Edman
Psychology Department, Northwestern College

Introduction

Many research studies have focused on marital success, but few researchers have attempted to compare communication styles across various types of relationships, including marriages, dating and engaged relationships, and friendships. Previous research suggests married couples are more likely to utilize constructive problem-solving strategies than friends (Dincyurek et al., 2013) but research is limited in comparing all three types of relationships. Other researchers have focused on the impact of spiritual disclosure or intimacy within a relationship and conflict (Mahoney et al., 2020), suggesting that higher levels of spiritual disclosure are related to better conflict strategies and less frequent conflicts. Lastly, previous research also points to the possibility of a relationship between spiritual meaning and spiritual disclosure in a relationship (Holland et al., 2016). The previous research, as well as the lack of previous research on this topic, prompted the proposal of three hypotheses.

Hypotheses

1. Different types of relationships will utilize different types of conflict resolution strategies.
2. The level of spiritual disclosure in a relationship between partners will be correlated with constructive conflict resolution strategies and with frequency of conflicts.
3. The level of spiritual meaning that each partner has will be correlated with the amount of spiritual disclosure between partners.

Method

Participants:

- 67 total: 43.3% men and 56.7% women
- Ages 18-24
- 28.4% Friends, 44.8% Dating/Engaged, 26.9% Married

Materials:

- Demographics
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Type of Relationship
 - Length of Relationship
- Spiritual Meaning Scale (SMS) (Mascaro et al., 2004)
- Spiritual Intimacy Scale (Mahoney et al., 2020)
- Frequency subscale - Conflicts and Problem-Solving Scales (Kerig, 1996)
- Conflict Strategies subscale - Conflicts and Problem-Solving Scales (Kerig, 1996)

Results

Hypothesis 1:

- The results of a one-way ANOVA for collaboration strategies failed to attain significance, $F(2, 63) = .954, MSE = 33.128, p = .391$.
- A one-way ANOVA for verbal aggression strategies failed to attain significance, $F(2, 63) = 1.048, MSE = 38.527, p = .357$.
- A one-way ANOVA for stonewalling strategies failed to attain significance, $F(2, 64) = 1.0800, MSE = 21.858, p = .346$.

Hypothesis 2:

- A Pearson product-moment correlation between spiritual disclosure and collaborative conflict strategies was significant, $r(63) = .49, p < .001$.
- A Pearson product-moment correlation between spiritual disclosure and major conflicts failed to attain significance, $r(64) = -.19, p = .128$.
- A Pearson product-moment correlation between spiritual disclosure and minor conflicts failed to attain significance, $r(64) = -.04, p = .762$.

Hypothesis 3:

- A Pearson product-moment correlation between spiritual disclosure and spiritual meaning failed to attain significance, $r(63) = .05, p = .690$.

Exploratory Tests:

- Type of relationship and discrepancies in partner scores
 - A one-way ANOVA reached significance, $F(2, 25) = 4.454, MSE = 103.488, p = .002$,
- Married couples:
 - The results of a Pearson product-moment correlation for spiritual disclosure and verbal aggression was significant, $r(14) = -.53, p = .036$.
- Dating/Engaged couples:
 - The results of a Pearson product-moment correlation for spiritual disclosure and collaborative scores was significant, $r(28) = .45, p = .012$.
- Friends:
 - The results of a Pearson product-moment correlation for spiritual disclosure and collaborative scores was significant, $r(18) = -.59, p = .009$.
 - The results of a Pearson product-moment correlation for stonewalling and verbal aggression was significant, $r(16) = -.66, p = .003$.

Conclusion

None of the hypotheses proposed for this study were fully supported. My data did suggest that there is a relationship between spiritual disclosure and collaborative conflict strategies, expanding the previous research on married couples (Mahoney et al., 2020) to dating, engaged, and friend relationships. Another implication is that no relationship inherently suggests a certain type of conflict resolution strategy; all relationships have the potential for positive strategies or for negative strategies.. Continued research may help partners better understand how their interactions with each other impact other areas of their relationship.

The exploratory analyses suggest that there may be relationships among some of the variables in specific types of relationships. Conclusions cannot yet be made about these exploratory analyses.

Future Directions

In the future, it may be interesting to further explore the discrepancy scores in each type of relationship in order to help couples discern how to interact in their relationships and how compatible they may be.

The exploratory analyses of these data also suggested that spiritual disclosure may be related to different variable depending on the relationship. Further research may be helpful in understanding these differences and better assisting couples in the type of relationship they are in.

Limitations

- Small sample size
- Convenient sample
- A majority Christian sample
- Ceiling effects on spiritual disclosure and spiritual meaning scales

References

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