

Implicit Relationship Beliefs and Conflict Resolution Styles as Predictors of Marital Satisfaction

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The purpose of this study was to explore how implicit relationship beliefs and conflict resolution styles influence marital satisfaction. The sample comprised of 65 couples i.e. 130 individuals (husbands = 65, wives = 65). Correlational analysis was carried out to find a relationship amongst the study variables; Path analysis was performed through AMOS to validate the mediating relationship of conflict resolution style and implicit beliefs in predicting marital satisfaction. Results showed that among five conflict resolution styles only accommodating and competing style was significantly correlated with marital satisfaction. The AMOS showed a partially mediating path between implicit beliefs (destiny), competing conflict resolution style and marital satisfaction. This approves the presence of mediating relationship between implicit beliefs and conflict styles in predicting marital satisfaction.

Keywords: Implicit Relationship Beliefs, Conflict Resolution Styles, Marital Satisfaction.

Marital problems and separation rate has risen in Pakistan in recent decades. In Lahore city, more than 100 separations get enrolled in family courts in a day. The separation rate is on the rise in the privileged society as well as in the lower and working classes. From February 2005 to January 2008, roughly 75,000 separation cases were enlisted. From February 2008 to May 2011, about 1,24,141 separation cases were reported. Around 2,59,064 divorces have occurred in the last decade. In 2010, reportedly 40,410 divorce cases were filed in the city's family courts and 13,500 separations have been documented so far in 2011 (Pakistan Today, November 2013). In relation to the above context, the purpose of this study was to make an exhaustive model including implicit relationship beliefs, conflict resolution styles and marital satisfaction.

Given the severity of the marital problem, many professionals have tried to identify predictors and preventers of marital dissolution. Gottman (1994a, 1994b, 1998) contended that the social style matters a lot while taking care of clash, which could be a solid determinant of the length of marriage in addition to their emotional satisfaction in that marriage. Relationship fulfillment was found to be connected with

conflict resolution styles (Gottman, 1994a, 1994b).

Marital conflicts are defined by Bradbury, Rogge & Lawrence (2001) as 'social interactions in which spouses hold incompatible goals' (p.59). Bradbury et al. further explained that in their perspective, these goals do not have to be evident; that conflict happens when one mate seeks an objective, or imposes this objective on the partner, and this effort blocks the objectives of other accomplice.

In psychology, conflict resolution is the methodology of lessening enmity among people, gatherings, associations or political groups (Walker, 1991). The process by which one attempts to reduce or eliminate conflict is known as conflict resolution (Rahim, 1986). Conflict Resolution is the process by which two parties reconcile their objectives of staying together. The conflict is resolved when the two parties are eager to accept a specific position as the norm, either because the expenses of instigating further clash would exceed the profits of any enhanced settlement, which may come about or because they are willing to accept the settlement as fair (Nicholson, 1975). One of the important goals in behavioral marital therapy is to help couples address deficiencies in their conflict resolution skills.

Albert Ellis (1962) stated that emotional distress is based on the acceptance of core irrational beliefs that depart from reality based and logical assumptions, and that lead to self-defeating behavior. The cognition of individuals about their relationships influences how satisfied or distressed they are in the relationship and how they correspond with their partners (Fincham, Harold & Gano-Phillips, 2000).

According to Gauhar and Amjad (1998) every person handles conflict differently. Each of us has access to several conflict management styles. One may settle on any method for evading war of words, while another will decide to meet fights head-on.

The dimensional models of conflict introduced by Blake and Mouton (1964) remain the basis for much of the research today on interpersonal conflict styles. The introduced dimensions are:

- a) Assertiveness: Concern for self-interest
- b) Co-operativeness: Concern for the other party or the relationship

These two dimensions are interpreted in terms of five models of styles:

- i) Collaborating - high assertiveness, high cooperativeness
- ii) Competing - high assertiveness, low cooperativeness
- iii) Accommodating - low assertiveness, high cooperativeness
- iv) Avoiding - low assertiveness, low cooperativeness
- v) Compromising - medium assertiveness, medium cooperativeness

According to Gauhar and Amjad (1998) none of these styles is right or wrong. Each one could be proper and best, contingent upon the circumstances, issues to be resolved and individual preferences.

The implicit theory approach has been previously utilized to comprehend motivation and conduct in areas including individual perception (Dweck, Hong, & Chiu, 1993). Additionally, other studies also signify that implicit theories predict relationship outcomes (Franiuk, Cohen, & Pomerantz, 2002; Knee, 1998; Knee, Patrick, & Lonsbary, 2003). Implicit

theories of relationship (ITRs) are derived from Dweck and Leggett's (1988) study and theories of personality. Individual's dissimilarity occurs to the degree of their beliefs; romantic connections are either meant to be or not meant to be (soul mate or destiny theory) and beliefs that relations profit from the effortful struggle of dealing with difficulties (work-it-out or growth theory). Knee (1998) defined romantic destiny as the belief that 'potential relationship partners are either implied for one another or not' (Knee, 1998, p.360). The romantic destiny perspective proposes that for every person there is only one compatible mate, and relationships that are initially poor, are doomed to fail. Belief in romantic growth, on the other hand, is a belief that "successful relationships are cultivated and developed" (Knee, 1998, p.360). Believers in romantic growth are likely to view a relationship as a process of resolving conflicts and challenges that require work and time.

Studies have additionally discovered that people with high growth beliefs are more determined to see clash as a chance to advancement of the relationship and understand more about their partner's personality. In contrast, people having low growth belief feel less dedicated to their partners after conflict experiences (Knee, Patrick, Viator, & Neighbors, 2004). Knee et al. (2004) found that while high growth beliefs served as a buffer during conflict in relationships, destiny beliefs also served as a defense in a different way.

Previous research has shown patterns of conflicts to be related with marital satisfaction (Baucom, Epstein, Sayers, & Sher, 1989; Crohan, 1988), and more specifically dysfunctional relationship beliefs have been shown to have a significant negative correlation with relationship satisfaction (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981; Metts & Cupach, 1990; Stackert & Bursik, 2003). Use of a destiny belief can be observed in people, who more frequently withdraw from the relationship in contrary occasions, while people who have a solid confidence in growth are more inclined to create and utilize upkeep methods trying to work through the adverse occasions.

Dalton (2003) studied a possible connection of romantic opinions and beliefs in regards to correspondence and clash determination. They measured the faiths in development and

sentimental fate using one questionnaire and beliefs concerning communication and conflict resolution with another. As expected, the participants with an elevated level of confidence in sentimental development in social occasion with a low level of certainty in destiny beliefs had the most raised index of clash determination convictions and vice versa.

Raymond (1998), through a longitudinal study of romantic beliefs, discovered that the relationship in the early years was stronger for people who believe in destiny. Additionally, belief in destiny was associated with initial closeness in a comparative way. Moreover, belief in destiny interacted with avoidance coping strategies in managing relationship stressors, and with possessiveness. Belief in growth independency holds that successful relationships are cultivated and developed. Predictions were supported.

Greef and Debruyne (2000), planned to investigate whether there is one conflict management style that corresponded more fundamentally with marital satisfaction than all others. Spousal happiness with how marital conflict is overseen was additionally analyzed, as were gender differences. Fifty-seven couples who had been married for 10 years participated in the study. Results uncovered that the spousal collaborative style has the greatest connection with fulfillment in marriage.

In the light of previous literature review, the objectives were (1) to conduct mediation analysis of conflict resolution styles, implicit beliefs and marital satisfaction and (2) to find out if marital satisfaction is predicted by any of the conflict resolution styles. The following hypotheses were framed:

- Conflict resolution styles are likely to mediate relationship between implicit beliefs and marital satisfaction.
- Implicit relationship beliefs are significant predictors of marital satisfaction.
- Conflict resolution styles are significant predictors of marital satisfaction

Method

Sample

The participants of the study consisted of 130 individuals (65 couples) who have been married

for ten to forty years. This sample was taken using a stratified random sampling technique with the inclusion criteria that couples being involved in the study are married for not less than ten years and living together ever since. By way of semi-structured interview, couples whose marriages were within a specified duration were approached at their houses.

Biographical data indicate that respondents were husbands and wives. Participants who had been married for a period between ten to twenty years constituted 65% of the sample, and those married for more than twenty years constituted 34% of the sample. Respondents came from different family systems, i.e. 64% belonged to joint families and 35% were from nuclear families. Further, the data revealed that 78% of the marriages were arranged and only 21% were by choices of participants.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted to fill in demographic forms including information about the duration, family system, and family income. Data was collected from four different areas of Lahore (Wapda town, DHA, Gulberg and Lahore Cant.). The questionnaires were administered on willing couples who were previously marked as fulfilling in the inclusion criteria. The participants were informed about the procedure and were assured about the anonymity and about the right to withdraw anytime they wish without any issues. All spouses were told to complete the questionnaire without collaborating with each other. They were directed to complete it in all respects under the presence of the researcher.

Measuring Instruments

Semi-Structured Interview. It was used to gather the basic demographic information. The consent forms were signed by the participants, and a rapport was established with them. Semi-structured interview helped to verify the information obtained through the bio data form.

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Knee, 1998; Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001). The TKI measures five "conflict resolution modes" or methods for managing conflicts: contending, teaming up, bargaining, maintaining a strategic distance from, and obliging. Scores are assembled in

three classes: high (scores that fit in the upper 25% of the conflict resolution modes), medium (scores that fit in the center half), and low (scores that fit in the bottom 25%). Internal reliabilities were found to be .80.

Marital Adjustment Test (Freeston & Plechaty, 1997 and Locke & Wallace, 1959). It is a 15-item scale that measures marital satisfaction. The 15 items are answered on a variety of response scales (Freeston, 1997; Locke, 1959). The estimated Cronbach alpha was very good with a correlation of .90. The instrument is internally consistent and discriminates reliably between distressed and non-distressed couples. Sample items: When disagreements arise, they usually result in: (a) Husband giving in (b) wife giving in (c) agreement by mutual give and take

Implicit Theories of Relationships Scale (Knee et al., 2003). Eleven items measure fate conviction and the other 11 measure development conviction. Reactions are marked on a 7-point Likert-sort scale ranging from 1 (unequivocally differ) to 7 (firmly concur). For e.g.: "Potential relationship partners are either compatible or they are not" (destiny) and "A successful relationship evolves through hard work and resolution of incompatibilities" (growth). The internal reliabilities were .82 and .73 for destiny and growth beliefs, respectively.

Data analysis consisted of two steps. Firstly, descriptive statistics was employed to describe the sample characteristics. The hierarchical regression analysis was used for gauging the

predictions of relationship between implicit relationship beliefs and conflict resolution styles. Finally, path analysis was done to significantly support mediating relationship of variables.

Results

The reliability analyses of questionnaires were determined before in depth analyses of data (Table 1).

The correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient for exploring the interrelationships between scores on marital satisfaction, implicit beliefs (Destiny Beliefs, Growth Beliefs) and all five conflict resolution styles (Competing, Compromising, Collaborating, Accommodating, Avoiding) (see Table 2).

The results in Table 2 indicated a negative correlation between marital satisfaction and destiny beliefs whereas a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and growth beliefs. This result supports the hypothesis that there is a relationship between marital satisfaction and implicit relationship belief. Secondly, there is a negative relationship between Competing styles and marital satisfaction and accommodating style has positive relationship with marital satisfaction.

Mediation Analysis

Another proposed dimension of analysis was to find out if our study variables have any mediating factor in predicting marital satisfaction. To perform this analysis AMOS (structural

Table 1. Psychometric Properties, Means, Standard Deviations and Maximum Scores of Study Variables

Questionnaire	k	A	M	SD	Max Score
Marital Satisfaction	15	.75	98.5	29.8	156
Conflict Resolution Styles					
Accommodating	12	.8	6	7.6	12
Avoiding	12	.8	4.9	9.2	12
Competing	12	.7	4.4	2.7	12
Compromising	12	.8	6.4	6.7	12
Collaborating	12	.9	6.9	6.4	12
Implicit Beliefs Growth	11	.8	61.8	4.0	11
Implicit Beliefs Destiny	11	.6	47.1	5.5	11

k=number of items, α = Cronbach alpha, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

Table 2. Pearson Product Movement Correlation Matrices for the Sample (N=130)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Marital Satisfaction	--	-.26**	.21*	-.28**	.016	-.021	.20*	.162
Destiny Beliefs			-.78*	.19*	-.036	-.126	.01	.001
Growth beliefs				-.20*	-.09	.16	.05	-.11
Competing					.01	.06	-.04	.07
Compromising						.16	.11	-.06
Collaborating							-.27*	-.21*
Accommodating								-.3**
Avoiding								----

Table 3. Fit Indices for Conflict Resolution Styles, Implicit Beliefs and Marital Satisfaction

Model	χ^2	p	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
1: Partial Mediation	18.71	.284	16	.985	.974	.036

Note: N=130, All change in chi square values are computed in relative model, Chi-square>.05 CFI= comparative fit index; RMSEA= root mean square error of approximation; TLI=Tucker-Lewis index.

equation model) was used to provide a thorough analysis (see Table 3).

In (Figure 1), the results indicated that implicit beliefs are partially mediated by conflict resolution styles. As shown in Table 3 in partial mediation model, the fit indices were considered to provide an indication of good fit of the data ($\chi^2 = 18.71, p = .284$).

the amount of unexplained variance. Thus, for each observed variable, $R = (1 - \text{error variance})$; MS=marital satisfaction.

It was hypothesized that destiny beliefs and growth beliefs are likely to predict marital satisfaction. As shown in Figure 1, direct path coefficients yielded significant prediction of marital satisfaction from destiny beliefs ($\beta = -.219, p = .004$) whereas growth belief was not a direct, significant predictor of marital satisfaction. Avoiding ($\beta = -.266, p = .007$), accommodating ($\beta = -.213, p = .004$) and competing ($\beta = -.235, p = .012$) styles significantly predicted marital satisfaction except collaborating i.e. ($\beta = -.142, p = .116$).

For indirect effects, the path coefficients from growth belief to collaborating was $\beta = .184, p = .029$ and from collaborating to marital satisfaction was $\beta = -.142, p = .111$. Mediation was seen on path coefficient from destiny to competing ($\beta = .192, p = .033$) and from competing to marital satisfaction ($\beta = -.235, p = .002$).

The following conclusions were drawn from Figure 1. The model indicated partial mediation with path between competing, destiny and marital satisfaction reflecting that high scores on destiny beliefs have high scores on competing style, which ultimately predicts marital satisfaction. Direct links between variables

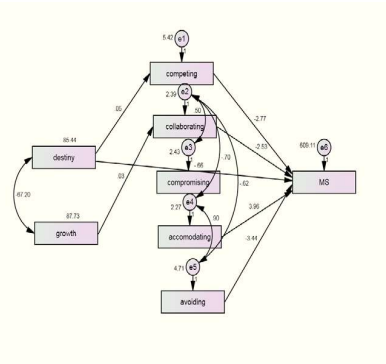


Figure 1: Multivariate model for mediation analysis.

Note: A complex multivariate model of six exogenous variables and two endogenous variables. Completely standardized, maximum likelihood parameter estimates. The residual variances components (error variances) indicate

were also found to be significant. Avoiding, accommodating and competing styles were found to be significant predictors of marital satisfaction and collaborating style was directly predicting growth beliefs. Hence, the hypothesis regarding presence of mediating relationship was approved between competing, destiny and marital satisfaction and a direct relationship was observed between avoiding, accommodating and competing styles.

Discussion

This research began with the assumption that individuals possess implicit theories about destiny and growth in marital relationships. The present exploration surveyed destiny and growth beliefs and exhibited their effects on marital satisfaction in the light of distressing circumstances like conflicts. Analysts have forwarded forcing arguments that implicit theories of relationships, especially destiny beliefs, operate through conflict styles of one's partner (e.g. Franuik et al., 2002, 2004; Knee & Canevello, 2006). In this present research, we have extended the line of research to understand marital satisfaction determined by implicit beliefs and mediating conflict resolution styles. Predictions were supported and the results revealed that implicit relationship beliefs are mediated by conflict resolution styles in determining marital satisfaction. However, the relevant importance of these evaluations can be influenced by individual differences in conflict resolution styles, specifically, competing and accommodating styles.

The current findings may relate to past research regarding the implicit theories of relations – longevity association. Soul mate theorists, who believe their partner is not ideal, report less satisfying relationships and report more quickly about terminating relationship than soul mate theorists who believe they are with the right person (Franiuk et al., 2002; Knee, 1998). Our findings suggested that destiny belief is highly correlated with marital satisfaction but, in a negative way, which means if the belief in destiny is high, the satisfaction a person experiences in the marital relationship will be lower.

Most importantly, marital satisfaction was more strongly related with conflict styles, which supports the various research done by Gottman

(1994a, 1994b, 1998), who contended that the resolution style that a couple utilizes, particularly, while taking care of conflicts, might be a solid pointer of the length of their marriage and their sentiments of fulfillment in that marriage.

We hypothesized that competing style will be positively correlated with destiny belief and negatively with marital satisfaction, which was successfully proved. According to this, we can propose that individuals' who tend to use a competitive style, take a firm stand, comprehend what they need and typically work from a position of force drawn from things like position and rank, which seem to have a positive relationship with destiny belief. The entire scenario leads to an understanding that if a person has high destiny belief the chances are high for him to have a competitive conflict resolution style and a low level of marital satisfaction. In our daily life we can suggest from this finding that if a person's marital satisfaction needs to be increased than he or she has to stop competing with his/her partner in conflicting situations and change his/her belief about his/her partner that they are either meant to be or not.

For instance, research on implicit beliefs in different spheres has additionally demonstrated that implicit theories can impact attributions, feelings, and conduct at both trait and state levels (Dweck, Chiu, Hong, 1995).

These discoveries likewise may have suggestions for readiness to look for help when confronted with relationship challenges. Looking for help may appear to be especially valuable when growth beliefs are higher as one accepts that relationship difficulties might be handled successfully. Therefore, relationship counseling, whether through expert administrations or loved ones, may appear to be conceivably productive when working in terms of specific beliefs. In this way, looking for help for a dying relationship may not generally yield better results; however in any case, one may be more inclined to welcome aid when individuals practice to belief in growth of a relationship.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, we can conclude that a person's belief about relationship is highly concerned with his marital satisfaction. We can propose that people can combat with their marital discords

in a better way if they understand involvement of their belief system to establish a healthy marital relationship. Moreover, the rate at which divorces is being reported nowadays can also be decreased if we work on the belief system a partner has and teach him or her appropriate conflict resolution styles to deal with conflicts in a successful manner and live a satisfactory marital life.

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