

Examining the Interaction: Justice Sensitivity and Romantic Relationship Conflict Dynamics

Ravinder Kumar and Rameshbabu Tamarana

Central University of Karnataka

Vishal Sharma

Jagannath University, Bahadurgarh

The current study is designed to understand the association between sensitivity towards justice and conflicts among romantic partners. Justice sensitivity refers to an individual's acute perception of fairness and justice in interpersonal interactions. The data was collected from 310 romantic partners using purposive sampling. Participants were assessed through the Justice sensitivity short scale and romantic partner conflict scale (RPCS). Responses were analysed through Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses. The results suggest that the victim's sensitivity is positively related to interactional reactivity and dominance, suggesting that if any relationship tends to heighten victim sensitivity, it proportionately heightens the conflicts among the partners. These people become volatile and try to dominate arguments. Beneficiary sensitivity, on the other hand, showed significant positive relationships with avoidance, interactional reactivity, dominance and submission. These results suggest that people's guilt of benefits gained from injustices may also lead to snares of interpersonal conflicts. On the other hand, perpetrator sensitivity was reported to have a weak correlation with interactional reactivity and dominances but with a strong positive relationship to separation, indicating forces to avoid situations of being perceived as injustice. Observer sensitivity was tested and has to have little/weak effects or significant relationships with Partner conflicts and vice versa, except that in the romantic conflicts continuum, these are inbuilt within the perpetual disagreements in any romantic relationship. The results advocate, however, for a more measured understanding of the justice sensitivity construct in intimate relationships and caveats around communication strategies to manage relational tensions.

Keywords: Justice Sensitivity, romantic conflicts, victim sensitivity

Love is a powerful feeling of tenderness and affection for another person. Mutual attraction is the first step, and with time, it can develop into unconditional feelings. Passionate love, or complete engrossment between two people, is the foundation of romantic love (Berscheid & Waldster, 1978). When the idea of "you and me" gives way to the idea of "us," romantic love improves one's quality of life (Aron et al., 1995). Because it satisfies the basic needs of security, emotional support, and sexual gratification, a strong bond is maintained. When someone

is loved, their partner's company and concern for their well-being can influence their emotions, thoughts, and verbal expression (Ammazzalorso, 2001). (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Additionally, partners enjoy each other's company and are perceptive of how each other responds to them.

Moreover, higher commitment levels in love relationships reduce the tendency of attraction toward others (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Maner et al., 2009); thus, romantic love keeps the partners together and reduces

their desire to explore other romantic mates. Strong bonds in love relationships enhance subjective happiness (Diener & Seligman, 2002), which is crucially essential for mental health (Gove et al., 1983). The dynamics within these relationships can be rewarding and challenging, with conflict being an inevitable aspect that often arises.

Conflict in romantic relationships is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by numerous psychological, emotional, and interpersonal factors. Conflicts are distressing between couples and contribute to divorce (Gottman, 1999; Gottman & Levenson, 2022). Whisman et al. (2008) found that one-third of romantic relationships are in distressed relationships. According to various studies, the main topics leading to relationship conflicts are children, finance, power dynamics, sex, and loyalty (Betcher & Macauley, 1990). In terms of the most common area of disagreement, time was found to be the primary issue (CMF, 2000).

Additionally, communication and habits were frequently cited as the major contributing factors to conflicts in relationships (Papp, 2018); meanwhile, younger couples promptly highlighted the issue related to emotional closeness (Rauer et al., 2019). In recent years, justice sensitivity has emerged as a significant area of focus in romantic partner conflicts. Schmitt et al. (2003) proposed that justice sensitivity refers to an individual's acute perception of fairness and justice in interpersonal interactions. It encompasses an individual's capacity to evaluate the disturbance of resources, rewards, and punishments within a relationship context. In romantic relationships, individuals' levels of justice sensitivity influence their ability to navigate conflicts that maintain relationship harmony and satisfaction, as researchers highlighted that using smartphones is also a responsible factor for relationship dissatisfaction (Halpern & Katz, 2017; Roberts & David, 2016). The

perception of injustice as a receiver and or a doer is also associated with significant changes in interpersonal relations (Mohiyeddini & Schmitt, 1997; Schmitt & Mohiyeddini, 1996). Conversely, respect and fairness in the relationship reduce distress and improve overall well-being (Elovainio et al., 2003; Greenberg, 2004; Tepper, 2001).

Rationale of the Study

The present research focuses on justice sensitivity and romantic partner conflicts. Researchers have highlighted that when two people are in a relationship, they share the highs and lows of life. This sharing can strengthen their bond but also reveal vulnerabilities that may weaken it. Evidence shows that shared emotions and reaction towards their partner influence their bond, and people act accordingly. The present research delves into the multifaceted interplay between conflict in romantic partner relationships and justice. This research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by examining how justice insensitivity, encompassing hyper-sensitivity, interacts with conflicts in romantic relationships. By identifying potential patterns and associations, this study enhances our understanding of the intricate mechanisms underlying conflict within romantic partnerships. It offers valuable insights for interventions and strategies to promote healthier and more harmonious relationships.

Objectives

1. To explore the association between justice sensitivity and Romantic partner conflicts.
2. To find out whether justice sensitivity predict romantic partner conflicts.

Hypotheses

1. There is a significant relationship between dimensions of justice

- sensitivity and romantic partner conflicts.
2. Justice sensitivity is a significant contributor to romantic partners conflicts.

Method

Participants

A total of 310 respondents had showed the interest in the study after explaining the objectives. The participants were selected through purposive sampling method.

Inclusion Criteria

- a) Participants having age between 20 and 30 years.
- b) Only participants who have been in a romantic relationship for more than two years were included.
- c) Participants must be able to read and understand the English language.

Measures

The justice sensitivity short-scale Schmitt et al. (2010) developed was used for the present research. Using ten five-point Likert scale items, the test measures the four dimensions of justice sensitivity: victim, observer, beneficiary, and perpetrator sensitivity. The test ensured perfect internal consistency with a coefficient alpha of .87.

The Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS), introduced by Tammy L. Zacchilli, is intended to determine the kind and degree of conflicts within romantic relationships. The scale consists of 39 items that are further grouped into six subscales: Compromise, Avoidance, Interactional Reactivity, Separation, Domination and Submission. Specific dimensions of conflict are addressed within each of the subscales. The higher the scores, the greater the extent of conflicts in the romantic relationship, while the opposite is true for the lower scores. The scale has shown strong psychometric properties with

test retest reliability scores for sub-scale Compromise (.82), Avoidance (.70), Interactional reactivity (.85), Separation (.76), Domination (.85), and Submission (.72). These findings highlighted the reliability and consistency of the scale.

Procedure

The participants were briefed about the research, and the questionnaire and consent form were circulated through Google Forms. The participants were only eligible to be given the responses after the agreement on the consent form. The data was stored in a Google Excel sheet along with the participants' demographic details. To meet the objectives of the research, the data obtained was analysed using the Pearson product-moment correlation and linear regression. The findings are presented in the next section.

Results

The correlation results reveal intricate relationships between the dimensions of justice sensitivity and romantic partner conflict scale. Notably, Victim Sensitivity demonstrates significant positive associations with Interactional Reactivity ($r = .159 > .05$), and Dominance ($r = .195 > .05$), while exhibiting a significant negative correlation with Compromise ($r = -.112 > .05$). Beneficiary Sensitivity exhibits significant positive correlations with Avoidance ($r = .125 > .05$), Interactional Reactivity ($r = .145 > .05$), Dominance ($r = .206 > .01$), and Submission ($r = .135 > .05$), alongside a non-significant negative correlation with Compromise. Perpetrator Sensitivity, in contrast, displays negative associations with Interactional Reactivity ($r = -.143 > .05$) and Dominance ($r = -.113 > .05$), while significant positively correlating with Separation ($r = .138 > .05$). Observer Sensitivity, on the other hand, shows a negligible and non-significant correlation with the dimensions of romantic partner conflict scale.

Table 1. Associations between dimensions of justice sensitivity and Romantic partner conflict scale scores

	Mean	SD	VS	OS	BS	PS	CP	AD	IR	SP	DM	SB
Victim Sensitivity (VS)	5.70	2.18	1									
Observer Sensitivity (OS)	6.49	1.90	.477**	1								
Beneficiary sensitivity (BS)	5.27	1.75	.218**	.372**	1							
Perpetrator sensitivity (PS)	6.31	2.15	.148**	.378**	.413**	1						
Compromise (CP)	54.43	9.49	-.112*	-.007	-.095	.031	1					
Avoidance (AD)	9.59	3.33	.054	-.050	.125*	-.001	.226**	1				
Interactional reactivity (IR)	14.50	5.65	.159*	.021	.145*	-.143*	-.181**	.075	1			
Separation (SP)	17.01	5.69	.077	.093	.033	.138*	.174**	.106	.291**	1		
Dominance (DM)	14.87	6.38	.195**	.044	.206**	-.113*	-.128*	.159**	.605**	.157**	1	
Submission (SB)	15.18	5.09	.087	-.004	.135*	-.018	.045	.432**	.320**	.174**	.327**	1

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 2. Regression coefficients of Victim Sensitivity on compromise

Variables	Model 1		
	B	β	SE
Constant	57.20		1.491
Victim Sensitivity	-.486*	-.112*	.244
R ²	.012		

Note. *p < .05.

Table 2 presents the regression model on outcome variable compromise by the predictor variable Victim sensitivity. The Constant term is 57.20, representing the estimated value of the dependent variable when all independent variables are set to zero. The Results show a significant association between victim sensitivity and compromise. However, the results of multiple regression coefficients [B = -.486, SE = .244 p < .01] indicate that, on average, the dependent variable is expected to decrease by 0.486 units for a one-unit increase in Victim Sensitivity. The R-squared value explained by the model, is [0.012], indicating that the

model explains only a 1% percentage of the variability in the dependent variable

Table 3. Regression coefficients of Beneficiary Sensitivity on Avoidance

Variables	Model 1		
	B	β	SE
Constant	8.34**		.593
Beneficiary Sensitivity	.238*	.125*	.107
R ²	.016		

Note. *p < .05.

Table 3 reveals the contribution of the Predictor variable Beneficiary Sensitivity in the outcome variable while taking avoidance as an outcome variable. The Constant term is 8.34 statistical significance at the p < .01 level. This implies that, on average, when all independent variables are set to zero, the estimated value of the dependent variable is 8.34. The coefficient of the regression model [B = .238, SE = .107 p < .05] reveals that, on average, for a one-unit increase in Beneficiary Sensitivity, the dependent variable is expected to increase by 0.238

units significantly. The R-squared value [.016] suggests that the model explains only a small proportion (1.6%) of the variability in the dependent variable. These findings

suggest a statistically significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Table 4. Regression coefficients of Victim Sensitivity, Perpetrator sensitivity, and Beneficiary Sensitivity on Interactional Sensitivity

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	β	SE	B	β	SE	B	β	SE
Constant	12.15**		.882	14.61**		1.18	12.82**		1.26
Victim Sensitivity ^a	.412**	.159**	.144	.477**	.184**	.144	.387**	.149**	.144
Perpetrator sensitivity ^b				-.448**	-.170**	.146	-.670**	-.255**	.156
Beneficiary Sensitivity ^c							.703**	.194**	.218
R ²	.025			.054			.092		
Δ R ²				.028			.038		

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01.

The finding of Table 4 explains three models with outcome variable interactional reactivity with predictor variable Victim Sensitivity, Perpetrator sensitivity, and Beneficiary sensitivity. The Constant terms in all three models are statistically significant at the p < .01 level, with 12.15, 14.61, and 12.82 values, respectively. The coefficients of Victim Sensitivity are consistently positive and statistically significant across all three models, with values of [B1= 0.412, B2 = 0.477, & B3 = 0.387, SE = .144 p < .01] in Models 1, 2, and 3, respectively. This suggests that, on average, for a one-unit increase in Victim Sensitivity, the dependent variable is expected to increase by the respective coefficient values. In Model 2, the introduction of Perpetrator Sensitivity regression coefficients [B2 = -0.448, & B3 = -.0670, SE = .156 p < .01] reveals a negative and statistically significant relationship with the outcome variable. Finally, Model 3 introduces Beneficiary Sensitivity, demonstrating a positive and statistically significant relationship with the regression coefficient [B= 0.703, SE =0. 218 p < .01] on outcome variable.

The R-squared values increase from Model 1 (0.025) to Model 2 (0.054) and then to Model 3 (0.092), indicating that the additional variables contribute to explaining more of the variability in the dependent variable. The Δ R-squared values between consecutive models (0.028 from Model 1 to Model 2 and 0.038 from Model 2 to Model 3) signify the incremental contribution of each set of variables. Overall, the results suggest that Victim Sensitivity, Perpetrator Sensitivity, and Beneficiary Sensitivity play distinct roles in explaining variations in the outcome variable, with Model 3 providing the highest 9.3% explanatory power.

Table 5. Regression coefficients of perpetrator sensitivity on Separation.

Variables	Model 1		
	B	β	SE
Constant	14.71**		.593
Perpetrator sensitivity	.364**	.138*	.107
R ²		.019	

Note. *p < .05.

Results from Table 5 explain the significant contribution of Perpetrator Sensitivity on outcome variable separation. The regression models displayed statically significant constant with a value of 14.71 significant at the $p < .01$ level. The coefficient for Perpetrator Sensitivity [$B = 0.364$, $SE =$

0.148 $p < .01$] indicates a significant change for a one-unit increase in Perpetrator Sensitivity; the outcome variable is expected to increase by 0.364 units. The R squared value [.019] suggests that the model explains 1.9% of the variability in the outcome variable.

Table 6. Regression coefficients of Beneficiary Sensitivity, Perpetrator sensitivity, and Victim Sensitivity on Dominance

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	β	SE	B	β	SE	B	β	SE
Constant	10.91**		1.12	13.49**		1.26	11.45**		1.40
Beneficiary Sensitivity ^a	.752**	.206	.201	1.11**	.305**	.216	.993**	.272**	.216
Perpetrator sensitivity ^b				-.710**	-.239**	.176	-.745**	-.251**	.174
Victim Sensitivity ^c							.506**	.173**	.160
R ²		.042			.090			.118	
ΔR^2					.047			.028	

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Results from Table 6 investigate the relationships between the outcome variable dominance and the predictor variables, including Beneficiary Sensitivity, Perpetrator Sensitivity, and Victim Sensitivity. The Constant terms in all three models are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level, with 10.91, 13.49, and 11.45, respectively. Beneficiary Sensitivity, the coefficients consistently show positive and statistically significant relationships with the outcome variable across all three models. The coefficients are [$B_1 = 0.752$, $B_2 = 1.11$, & $B_3 = 0.993$, $SE = .216$ $p < .01$] in Models 1, 2, and 3, respectively. These values indicate that, on average, for a one-unit increase in Beneficiary Sensitivity, the outcome variable is expected to increase by the respective coefficient values.

Model 2 reveals a statistically negative relationship between Perpetrator Sensitivity and outcome variable dominance. The coefficients are [$B_2 = -0.710$ & $B_3 = -0.745$,

$p < .01$] in Models 2 and 3, respectively, indicating that, on average, a one-unit increase in Perpetrator Sensitivity is associated with decreased dominance. Model 3 introduces Victim Sensitivity and shows a significant positive relationship with dominance. The regression Coefficient [$B = 0.506$, $SE = .160$ $p < .01$] suggests that, on average, a one-unit increase in Victim Sensitivity is associated with an increase in dominance. The R- R-squared values show a continuous increase from Model 1 (0.042) to Model 2 (0.090) and then to Model 3 (0.118), indicating that the predictor Beneficiary Sensitivity, Perpetrator Sensitivity, Victim Sensitivity variable jointly contribute to outcome variable dominance. The ΔR -squared values between consecutive models (0.047 from Model 1 to Model 2 and 0.028 from Model 2 to Model 3) signify the additional contribution of each set of variables. Consequently, all three predictor variables jointly contribute (11.8%) to the outcome variable.

Table 7. Regression coefficients of Beneficiary Sensitivity on Submission

Variables	Model 1		
	B	β	SE
Constant	13.12**		.905
Beneficiary Sensitivity	.392*	.135*	.163
R ²		.018	

Note. *p < .05.

The findings of Table 7 examine the relationship between the outcome variable submission and the predictor variable Beneficiary Sensitivity. The Constant term of the model is statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level, with a value of 13.12. The coefficient for Beneficiary Sensitivity is [$B = 0.392$, $SE = 0.163$ $p < .05$], indicating that, on average, a one-unit increase in Beneficiary Sensitivity is associated with a 0.392-unit increase in the submission. The result shows 1.8% of the variability in the outcome variable.

Discussion

The study aimed to check the interrelation between justice sensitivity and conflicts between the romantic partners. Conflict is inevitable in everyone's life, and that is even more true for those who live together in dating, intimate, and marital relationships (Lulofs & Cahn, 2000). Conflict can be distressing for couples and a predictor of divorce (Gottman, 1999; Gottman & Levenson, 2022). Whisman et al. (2008) estimated that about one-third of romantic couples are in a distressed relationship. However, the conflicts in any relationship depend upon the justice shown by the partners for one another in the relationship. Justice is a fundamental human value (Montad, 2007) concerning interpersonal relationships and relations within and between social groups and societies. The present research focuses on the four

dimensions of justice sensitivity: victim, observer, beneficiary, and perpetrator.

Multiple linear regression and the Pearson correlation approach were used to analyse the current study's findings. The sub-dimension of justice sensitivity and romantic partner disputes have both significant positive and negative associations, according to the correlation data. The results indicated a favourable relationship between international reactivity and dominance and a higher degree of victim sensitivity. According to Mohiyeddini and Schmitt (1997) and Schmitt and Mohiyeddini (1996), higher victim sensitivity is characterised by the immediate awareness of unfair victimisation, recurrent thoughts and great anger after experiencing victimisation, and strong intents to protest and correct the injustice. In order to demonstrate dominance and interactional reactivity, people who see themselves as victims in a relationship want to exert control and feel the need to win conflicts. These individuals are typified by verbal violence, emotional instability, and problems with trust between partners. Victim sensitivity was linked to a reluctance to volunteer for the common good in a recent study using a Japanese sample. This association was mediated by an angry expectation of being the lone volunteer (Tham et al., 2019). Recent research by Baumert et al. (2020) revealed that victim sensitivity predicted decreased cooperation under danger of exploitation in samples from the Philippines, which is consistent with previous findings from Western samples (Gollwitzer & Rothmund, 2011; Maltese et al., 2016). Furthermore, it was discovered that in intimate relationships, victim-sensitive people tended to interpret their partners' attempts at reconciliation following conflict with suspicion, be reluctant to forgive, and harbour thoughts of legitimisation and retaliation (Gerlach et al., 2012).

Additionally, there is a non-significant correlation between romantic partner

disputes and observer sensitivity. Individual disparities in the ability to recognise injustice that impacts others and the intensity of one's motivational, emotional, and cognitive reactions to such injustice are known as observed sensitivity. In this case, the dispute is more fundamental to the relationship between the two parties. According to numerous research, observer sensitivity is linked to facing norm violations by others and indirectly encourages taking action against them in spite of the risks to oneself (Niesta Kayser et al., 2010; Sasse et al., 2020). Regardless of the degree of guilt that participants felt, Rothschild and Keefer (2018) demonstrated that observer sensitivity had a lasting impact on moral outrage over a company's treatment of its employees and calls for retribution. These effects were most noticeable after participants had confirmed their moral identity.

A significant positive correlation of beneficiary sensitivity is observed with submission, interpersonal reactivity, and dominance. It is a tendency to feel guilty by taking passive benefits. Weiss et al. (1999) highlighted that people high on beneficiary sensitivity tend to show a more affective reaction to guilt, supported by the finding of (Gollwitzer et al., 2005; & Schmitt et al., 2010). Furthermore, beneficiary and preparatory sensitivity show an inverse association with moral disengagement (Maltese & Baumert, 2019). Findings showed high interpersonal conflict among the beneficiary-sensitive individuals. These individuals exhibit moral behaviour even in situations that encourage self-serving actions. For instance, those with a high (compared to low) beneficiary inclination were more likely to distribute resources equally in dictator game scenarios (Lotz et al., 2013), demonstrate trust in trust game setups (Baumert et al., 2020), and contribute more generously to public goods (Schlösser et al., 2018).

Perpetrator sensitivity is the propensity to see one's behaviour as constituting injustice towards others and feel shame and guilt. Individuals with high perpetrator sensitivity actively try to avoid wrongdoing, which can affect their relationships by making them more cautious and less dominant (Baumert et al., 2021). Like beneficiary sensitivity, it also correlates with lower tendencies to justify unethical behaviour. Bondu et al. (2016) found a negative correlation between perpetrator sensitivity and bullying behaviour among young adults.

Future directions

The study only focused on the association and contribution of justice sensitivity in romantic partner conflicts. In future research, additional variables such as personality, attachment style, and communication should be added to check for a more comprehensive understanding of the conflicts among romantic partners. Further research can also explore the mediation and moderation effects of other important variables. The cultural context can be studied to understand the partners' conflict dynamics. Qualitative data can also be included to provide a deeper understanding.

Conclusion

The study delved into the intricate relationship between justice sensitivity and conflicts among romantic partners, shedding light on various dimensions of this dynamic. It revealed a significant positive correlation between victim sensitivity and conflict within romantic relationships, suggesting that individuals who perceive themselves as unjustly victimized may exhibit behaviours aimed at asserting dominance and control during disagreements. This tendency can exacerbate trust issues, emotional volatility, and verbal aggression between partners. Surprisingly, observer sensitivity did not show a significant relationship with conflict dynamics, implying that while individuals may

readily recognize injustice affecting others, this sensitivity may not directly impact conflicts within their relationships. Conversely, beneficiary sensitivity exhibited a significant positive correlation with conflict, indicating that individuals who feel guilty about benefiting from injustice may experience conflict characterized by avoidance, interpersonal reactivity, dominance, and submission. On the other hand, perpetrator sensitivity showed a nuanced relationship, negatively contributing to interpersonal reactivity and dominance while positively correlating with separation. This suggests that individuals high in perpetrator sensitivity may struggle with feelings of guilt and shame during conflicts, potentially leading to relationship dissolution. Overall, the findings underscore the complex interplay between different dimensions of justice sensitivity and conflict dynamics within romantic relationships, providing valuable insights for interventions to promote healthier conflict resolution strategies and enhance relationship satisfaction among couples.

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Ravinder Kumar, PhD., Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Central University of Karnataka, Kalaburagi. Email: ravi.kuk1995@gmail.com

Rameshbabu Tamarana, PhD., Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Central University of Karnataka, Kalaburagi. Email: rmhbabu@gmail.com

Vishal Sharma, PhD., Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Jagannath University, Bahadurgarh. Email: sharmavishal748@gmail.com