

Associations Between Perceived Physical Safety, Disengagement, and Trust in a Cohabiting Relationship



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To Be More Specific

Abstract

In the present study, we test whether people who perceive that their partner has endangered their physical safety are more disengaged (e.g., avoidant and withdrawn) during discussions with their partner and have lower trust levels regarding physical safety. Additionally, we will explore the concept of cognitive trickery/bias: how a person can perceive something about their lives that is in reality not true (e.g., “my partner is very supportive of me in my times of need” when in fact, their partner is not); these individuals might be less likely to behave or feel differently about their partner after experiences of physical violence, so we will examine whether individuals' relationship satisfaction moderates the influence of experiences of physical violence with the partner on their tendency to disengage and their trust in their partner and how it, along with understanding the epistemological limitations of testimony, can have an impact on psychological preconceptions regarding these variables.

Review of Constructs

Perceived Physical Safety: Whether or not an individual feels safe in their relationship and to what extent.

Disengagement: Being distant, avoidant, withdrawn, etc.

Trust/Closeness: How much an individual trusts/is close with their partner.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): “behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors.” (Ali 2016)

Cognitive Self-Deception: how a person can perceive something about their lives that is in reality not true (e.g., “my partner is very supportive of me in my times of need” when in fact, their partner is not.

Methods

Participants: There were 82 heterosexual couples and 4 homosexual couples that participated in this study, bringing us to a total of 172 individual participants. 82 of the participants were male whereas 90 of the participants were female. The only requirement for the study is that the couple is in fact cohabitating. This meaning that they live together.

Procedures: The sample for this study was recruited using an announcement that was sent to all faculty, staff, and students on the UMBC campus. Flyers for the study were also placed around the campus. The study took place in a lab on the UMBC campus and questionnaires were administered to participants. First, questionnaires like the CSI were given. These questionnaires have participants rate various questions on a scale from 1-5. These questions range from “In general, how satisfied are you in your relationship?” Next, a questionnaire regarding personal information such as education level, ethnicity, and annual income was administered.

Methods

Measures:

Perceived Physical Safety & Trust/Closeness. These constructs were measured using a novel measure (Khalifian & Barry).

-PPS: part (e): “threatening to physically hurt or hurting one’s partner.” 4-point scale

-T/C: a 7-point self-report scale that indicates how much a participant trust their partner not to commit any given transgression.

Disengagement. Disengagement was measured using the Relationship Scales Questionnaire. This measure looks at how participants generally feel about close relationships

Correlational Data

V1&V2 (Male)

		Physical Safety-P	Disengagement_in_Discussion
Physical Safety-P	Pearson Correlation	1	.231*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.040
Disengagement_in_Discussion	Pearson Correlation	.231*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.040	

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

b. Listwise N=80

Correlational Data

V1&V3 (Male)

		Physical Safety-P	RDI
Physical Safety-P	Pearson Correlation	1	-.339**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
RDI	Pearson Correlation	-.339**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

b. Listwise N=82

Correlational Data

V1&V2 (Female)

		Physical Safety-P	Disengagement_in_Discussion
Physical Safety-P	Pearson Correlation	1	.265*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.016
	N	86	83
Disengagement_in_Discussion	Pearson Correlation	.265*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	
	N	83	83

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlational Data

V1&V3 (Female)

		RDI	Physical Safety-P
RDI	Pearson Correlation	1	-.091
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.403
Physical Safety-P	Pearson Correlation	-.091	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.403	

a. Listwise N=86

Discussion

Results indicate that these associations are present and this leads me to believe that for the most part, a person's perception about their physical safety in their relationship is associated with how they feel about/interact with their partner. However, in one case there seemed to be no association between PPS and Trust/Closeness. This could very well mean that either the participants involved committed some sort of cognitive self-deception, or they lied on their report

Cognitive Trickery

“Self-deception involves emotional mechanisms provoking a preference for immediate reward despite possible long-term negative repercussions.” (Laura Federico 2016) In the sense of relationships, we could make the case that often times people in relationships deceive themselves unintentionally to avoid long-term negative emotions that concern their problems in favor for short-term positive emotions as a form of coping. This falls right in line with our notion of *cognitive trickery*. One complication of this idea is that it seems impossible for an individual to actually believe two contradicting things at the same time (e.g. I love watching television with my partner and I hate watching television with my partner).

Philosophically Relevant Notions

There are various philosophical typologies that play a part in this question, but in particular we need to look at what certainty and truth are.

The Veil of Perception: a philosophical notion that argues the point that we can never access epistemological certainty contained within another person's conscious, considering the only way we are able to gather information as humans is through our own senses.

Expressions of Truth: In model theory, there are definitions of truth that exist, but are dependent.

F = closed objects

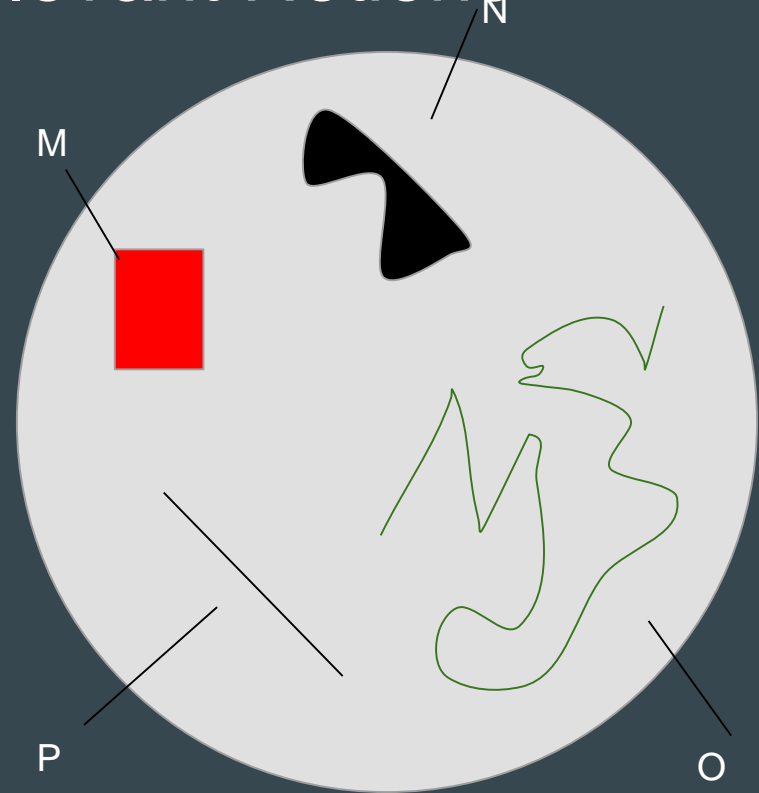
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F = open objects

@(Fm) = F

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Conclusion/Questions

Although it seems that people most likely display their perceptions about their relationships, the evidence that supports the rare case that conflicts that provides insight into interesting psychological and philosophical implications.

References:

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