Introduction

The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) emphasizes the interaction between intra- and interpersonal variables in determining relationship outcomes:

- Enduring vulnerabilities
- Stressful events
- Adaptive processes

Objective: To determine whether communication patterns mediate the association between externalizing traits and relationship satisfaction in intimate partners.

Methods

Participants
- 100 newlywed couples ages 19-52 ($M=27.33$; $SD=6.09$) recruited from the community

Measures

Externalizing Spectrum:
- Antisocial PD/Conduct Disorder - SNAP-2 (Clark et al. 2009)
- Externalizing Personality – ESI (Krueger et al. 2007)
- Substance Use – ESI (Krueger et al. 2007)

Communication Patterns Questionnaire (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984)
- Coercion (Noller & White, 1990)
- Mutuality (Noller & White, 1990)
- Post-Conflict Distress (Noller & White, 1990)
- Destructive Process (Noller & White, 1990)
- Constructive Communication (Heavey et al. 1996)

Marital Satisfaction – DAS (Spanier, 1976)

Analyses

- Latent variable path modeling in Mplus (Muthen & Muthen)
- Overall model fit evaluated with:
  - Chi-square & change in chi-square, CFI/TLI = .90-.95, RMSEA = ≤.06
- Models tested: 1) Actor effects (own predictors on own satisfaction); 2) Partner effects (own predictors on partner satisfaction)

Path Model

Objective: To determine whether communication patterns mediate the association between externalizing traits and relationship satisfaction in intimate partners.

Model Fit

Parameter Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$X^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>RMSEA [90% CI]</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>72.72</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.02 (0.00, 0.10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner 68.21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.03 (0.00, 0.10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutuality 68.36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.03 (0.00, 0.10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post-Conflict Distress 68.45</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.03 (0.00, 0.10)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Actor-Partner Path Model: Standardized Estimates for Externalizing Traits, Post-Conflict Distress, and Relationship Satisfaction

Results

- Husbands’ and wives’ levels of externalizing traits significantly covaried in all models.
- Husbands’ and wives’ levels of relationship satisfaction significantly covaried in all models except Post-Conflict Distress.
- Externalizing traits and relationship satisfaction were significantly negatively associated for husbands, but not for wives.
- Total evidence from all fit indices indicated that the partner models did not have significantly better or worse fit than models with actor effects only.

Conclusions

- Externalizing traits affect husbands’ own self-reported communication patterns, but not wives’; one’s own externalizing traits do not affect one’s partner’s self-reported communication patterns.

- An individual’s communication patterns are associated with his/her own relationship satisfaction; however, with one exception (husband’s post-conflict distress and wife’s satisfaction), one’s own communication patterns are not related to one’s partner’s relationship satisfaction.

- Most aspects of communication, as measured by the CPQ, partially mediated the association between externalizing traits and relationship satisfaction for husbands but not for wives.

- Externalizing traits may be manifested differently in men versus women, explaining why husbands’ externalizing was associated with his communication patterns and relationship satisfaction, but wives’ was not.

- The level of externalizing traits characteristic of the current sample (particularly wives) may not be high enough for there to be significant negative repercussions on one’s partner’s communication and relationship satisfaction.

Husbands’ and wives’ levels of externalizing traits significantly covaried in all models.