

Personality Characteristics, Self-esteem and Attachment Styles As Predictors for Demand/Withdraw Marital Communicational Cycle

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ABSTRACT

Demand/withdraw is a marital communicational pattern in which one spouse requests lovely behaviors, nags or complains while the other spouse avoids or withdraws. Given the fact that demand/withdraw has been repeatedly linked to marital discord, it is important to understand why couples engage in such a seemingly dissatisfying conflict pattern. The purpose of this research was to determine the predicting factors of demand/withdraw. The research method was regression and the variables were attachment styles, five factor personality characteristics and self-esteem. The group members consisted 175 couples (350 people). The results showed that among all variables, neuroticism, anxious attachment style and agreeableness were significant predictors for demand/withdraw pattern. It showed that the increasing in anxious attachment style and neuroticism, and decreasing in agreeableness can lead to increasing the probability of demand/withdraw occurrence.

KEYWORDS: Demand/withdraw, attachment styles, personality characteristics, self-esteem.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most prevalent marital communicational pattern is demand/withdraw. Demand/Withdrawal pattern is a type of argument in which one of the partners(demander) is nagging or criticizing the other partner. He or she pressures the other through emotional requests and complaints. In response to the nagging or criticism from the partner, the partner(withdrawer) usually withdraws from the conflict instead of offering a counter response and retreats through defensiveness and passive inaction. Most research on this topic has indicated that the demand in a marriage typically comes from the wife and that the husband is typically the one who withdraws from the conflict (Christensen & Heavey, 1993; Noller & Feeney, 1998; Caughlin & Vangelisti, 1999; Folger et al., 2001).

There are some perspectives about demand/withdraw pattern and the factors affect it. They point to some variables such as gender differences, attachment style, self-esteem, social structure and personality characteristics. For example, Heavey, Layne and Christensen(1993) believe that most demand/withdraw pattern is based on two perspectives: the Individual Differences Perspective and the Conflict Structure Perspective. Individual Differences Perspective is associated with the "...differences between men and women, such as personality or biological differences" (Heavey, Layne and Christensen, 1993). This perspective might include the way the women's issues were discussed, specifically by examining "...the roles they adopt during conflict" (Heavey, Layne and Christensen, 1993). The role each partner often reveals is that some type of socialization has taken place and contributes to why the couple chose the roles they did. Usually, these chosen conflict roles might be based on gender roles. Heavey et al. (1993) found that "...women are socialized to be highly relationship oriented and to seek closeness and intimacy, whereas men are socialized to be independent and achievement oriented". Women typically adopt the demand role because of their desire for intimacy with their partner, which is what these researchers believe that women were socialized to do. On the other hand, men withdraw based on their need to maintain their independence or avoid closeness. Eldridge and Christensen (2002) also noted that although gender or personality difference is very influential in how demand/withdraw pattern might occur, overall characteristics of the relationship that are independent of gender or personality could also identify with the Individual Differences Perspective and the occurrence of the conflict.

Personality characteristics are one of the most important individual differences between couples. For example, Caughlin and Vangelisti (2000) indicated that according to Big Five factor theory, neuroticism which is known as trait anxiety, emotional instability, or negative affectivity has been linked to conflict behaviors such as negativity

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(Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; Huston & Houts, 1998), enduring vulnerabilities (Karney and Bradbury, 1997) and complaining (Buss, 1991). They added, given the conceptual overlap between demanding communication and negativity and/or complaints (Heavey et al., 1993), an association between neuroticism and demand/withdraw pattern seemed likely.

Caughlin and Vangelisti (2000) showed in their research a number of significant associations between neuroticism and demand/withdraw. Each spouse's neuroticism was a significant positive predictor of patterns in which they demanded and patterns in which they withdrew. In addition, both husbands' and wives' neuroticism were positively related to the observers' ratings of both husband demand/wife withdraw and wife demand/husband withdraw. That is spouses' neuroticism tends to be associated with a relationship in which the partners engage in both forms of demand/withdraw. Also, in their research, agreeableness was a negative predictor of demand/withdraw in a relationship. spouses' agreeableness predicted relationships in which neither husband demand/wife withdraw nor wife demand/husband withdraw occurred frequently.

The other perspective offered by Heavey et al. (1993), the Conflict Structure Perspective, is usually associated with the fact that roles within the conflict are determined by how the conflict is structured. According to their study, "...the higher status and power typically accorded men leads them to avoid conflict because they have no interest in change, whereas women typically have less power and see conflict engagement as their primary means of obtaining what they want" (Heavey et al., 1993). This idea implies a belief that women are, for the most part, dissatisfied with their marriage and the role that they have within the marriage based on society's standards. Therefore, dissatisfied women begin to see demand/withdrawal pattern as "...their only means of restructuring the relationship according to their desires" (Heavey et al., 1993). Eldridge and Christensen (2002) discovered another version to this perspective which emphasized the "...structure of a traditional marriage specifically". A traditional marriage often places men within a "...better position than women "and demands for change often are met with withdraw behaviors because change would deviate from the structure of a traditional marriage (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002). What is important to realize about either one of these versions is the idea that power and structure are emphasized within this perspective.

Researchers have been concerned with how this type of communicational pattern might be communicated between a couple, as well as the role this type of pattern has on marital satisfaction. For example, Caughlin and Huston (2002) found that the possibility that the correlation between demand/withdraw and dissatisfaction merely reflects the ubiquitous finding that expressions of negative affect are associated with dissatisfaction. They believe that the association between demand/withdraw and dissatisfaction is less strong when spouses have a highly affectionate marriage.

Some researchers see the attachment styles of couples as an important factor in demand/withdraw communications (Minuchin, 1985; Feeney, 2003; Fournier, Brassard and Shaver, 2011). Specially, they believe that attachment style is a determining factor in wife demand/husband withdraw pattern. For example, Feeney (2003) believes that anxious attachment style of women and avoidance attachment style of men have an interactional and mutual effect on each other. Avoidant husband fails to provide the assurance that anxious woman craves, and anxious woman is unable to accept the emotional distance. It creates a vicious cycle in which the woman's need for assurance and the man's need for distance aggravate each other.

Caughlin and Vangelisti (2000) argue that there are many more factors functioning behind demand/withdraw pattern than just the Individual Differences Perspective and the Conflict Structure Perspective. Their research found that the Individual Differences Perspective has more layers and details to it than originally found in the previous studies on demand/withdraw pattern within marriage. Caughlin and Vangelisti (2000) introduced the concepts, within Individual Differences Perspective, called Self-Influence Model (SIM) and the Relational Influence Model (RIM). The SIM is based on the idea that "...people's attributes primarily influence their own behavior" (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2000). This concept attests to the fact that within demand/withdraw pattern a person's "...desire for more closeness would directly influence their own communication behaviors and would indirectly affect their partner's communication because of the partner's reactions" (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2000). This perspective places a large emphasis on how a person's demand within a conflict would affect their own communication behaviors, and does not emphasize the influence it might have on their partner.

The Relational Influence Model (or RIM) varies from the SIM because it seeks to attribute the conflict response to factors other than behavior. This model includes more of the communication between the two partners that might be going on within the marriage as well. According to Caughlin and Vangelisti (2000), relational influence model would imply that some individual differences predict the extent to which couples engage in demand/withdraw. This model suggests that individuals' attributes are related directly to both partners' communication, not just their own behaviors. Whatever characteristics each partner brings to the marriage will eventually have some part in the overall conflict they have, as well as when the conflict is specifically

demand/withdraw. Through their studies with couples in the demand/withdraw pattern scenario, this conclusion was seen many times, especially when a couple's personalities were conducive to this type of conflict.

Christensen and Heavey (1990) found in their studies that wife-demand/husband-withdraw interaction was more likely than husband-demand/wife-withdraw interaction and both husband and wife were more likely to be demanding when discussing a change they wanted and more likely to be withdrawing when discussing a change their partner wanted.

These studies examining demand/withdraw pattern have demonstrated various attempts to better understanding of this pattern and defining its origins. Yet further investigations are required for deeper understanding of it.

The present study:

Considering the researches and theoretical ideas reviewed above, the present research, by analyzing 175 couples (350 people) addresses the following major hypotheses:

- 1- Personality characteristics can predict demand/withdraw conflict.
- 2- Attachment styles can predict demand/withdraw conflict.
- 3- Self-esteem can predict demand/withdraw conflict.

Method

In order to study the goals and hypotheses, we used the regression method. The sample was chosen from couples who referred to counseling centers in Isfahan, Iran, The sampling method was systematic clustering. First, 5 centers selected from a list, then the couples group were selected from the centers. The group included 175 couples (300 people). The research inventories were given to them.

The research tools were the Big Five factors personality questionnaire, attachment Inventory, self-esteem Inventory, demographic questionnaire, and Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ).

The Big Five factors personality questionnaire has 240 items and measures the big five personality characteristics introduced by Costa and McCrae (1989). These five factors include: neuroticism, extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. The short form of the questionnaire includes 60 items and each 12 items assess one of the five factors of personality. Scoring of the questionnaire was accomplished by Likert method and each question, considering the answer given to it will be scored 1 to 6. The scores of each item are measured separately. Finally 5 numbers will be obtained which are related to the 5 characteristics.

Kiamehr (2001), validated the short format of the above questionnaire on a sample (380 unit) of students in Tehran University. In his study, the correlation of Concurrent validity between short and long forms of this questionnaire was 0/41 to 0/71. Also, in his research the validity which was measured by reexamination, was 0/65 to 0/86. In the present investigation, Cronbach Alpha coefficients were measured for all scales: neuroticism(0/87), extraversion(0/76), openness(0/57), agreeableness(0/54) and conscientiousness (0/75).

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)(1965) was used in present study. It consists of 10 items and it uses a 4-point Likert-like scale format (ranging from absolutely disagree to absolutely agree). Shavelson et al.(1976) reported for its construct validity a high and significant positive correlation with the five self-concept dimensions. Albo et al.(2007) evaluated its reliability and showed good levels of internal consistency and temporal stability after a 4-week interval, in accordance with previous studies. In present investigation, the scale showed satisfactory internal Consistency with Cronbach Alpha 0.77.

The other tool was Adult Attachment Questionnaire(AAQ) (Hazan& Shaver, 1987). It's a self-report questionnaire which includes 15 items based on three pattern of attachment: secure, avoidant, and anxious. It asks the group to think back across their most important romantic relationships and decide which of the three types was most self-descriptive. It uses a 5-point Likert-like scale format. In present investigation, it's reliability was measured by retesting method on 100 people and the result was 0.78. Also, Cronbach Alpha coefficients were measured for the questionnaire: 0.77.

Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ) also was used to assess demand/withdraw. It has 35 items which uses a 9-point Likert-like scale format. It asks people to report the likelihood of various communication patterns before and during the discussion of a problem. this retrospective measure addressed the possibility that demand/withdraw sequences may occur over periods other than an observation period (Christensen &Heavey, 1993). In present investigation, it's reliability was measured by retesting method on 100 people and the result showed 0.69. Also, Cronbach Alpha coefficients were measured for the questionnaire: 0.73.

The data analysis method

The statistical calculation was done in descriptive and inferential statistics levels. In the descriptive level, frequency, mean standard deviation and upper and lower bound. and in the inferential level, Linear Regression were used. In both descriptive and inferential statistics, SPSS-16software was used.

Conclusion

The table (1) includes the group descriptive data in attachment styles, five factor personality characteristics, self-esteem, and demand/withdraw pattern.

The tables (2), (3) and (4) show the results of regression analysis of the variables related to demand/withdraw pattern.

Table 2 shows the correlation coefficients of demand/withdraw pattern and the variables: neuroticism, anxious attachment and agreeableness. These are respectively 0/65, 0/68 and 0/69. The table 3 shows the coefficients of step by step regression equation. In the first step, neuroticism was entered the model. In the second step, anxious attachment was entered it and in the third step, agreeableness was entered. These results show that neuroticism, anxious attachment and agreeableness are significant predictors for demand/withdraw pattern. It shows that the increase in anxious attachment style and neuroticism, and the decrease in agreeableness can lead to increase in the probability of demand/withdraw occurrence. The significance of regression coefficients show that in the first step, the neuroticism can predict 0/43 of demand/withdraw variance ($P < 0/01$). In the second step, addition of the anxious attachment increases the prediction power. That is, the neuroticism and anxious attachment can predict 0/46 of demand/withdraw variance, together ($P < 0/01$). Also, addition of the agreeableness in the third step, increases the prediction power and the three variables can predict 0/48 of demand/withdraw variance, together ($P < 0/01$). The Beta coefficients of the predictors are respectively: 0/57, 0/26, and -0/16.

The results of table 4 show the excluded variables which were not entered the model. That is, they have less power for predicting the demand/withdraw pattern in the presence of neuroticism, anxious attachment and agreeableness.

Discussion

The findings regarding the first hypothesis show that among the big five factors of personality characteristics, the neuroticism and agreeableness were significant predictors of demand/withdraw pattern. Some explanations exist in this regard: first, neurotic individuals are prone to negative and instable emotions and the instability can lead to some undulations in their interpersonal relationships. Their affection and romantic behaviors are not stable and smooth, because they have some undulations in their mood and it may shape an interactional pattern which has periods of excessive intimacy and excessive avoidance. In the other words, when a neurotic person is very energetic and has a positive mood, he/she may demand her or his spouse and want to increase the intimacy; but when (s)he has a negative mood, it may lead to avoidance and disaffection and results in formation of the withdraw pattern.

Second, according to Karney and Bradbury (1997) neuroticism creates enduring vulnerabilities which affect how couples adapt to stressful experiences. Life stresses are an unavoidable part of marital life and all couples encounter them occasionally. What is important here is the couple's encountering style. The neurotic couples are less capable in this regard and it leads to increasing the probability of emerging pathologic interactional patterns such as demand/withdraw pattern.

According to this result, agreeableness was the other personality characteristic which can predict demand/withdraw pattern. It was a negative predictor of demand/withdraw interactions, i.e., there is a reverse relation between agreeableness. This result is similar to Caughlin and Vangelisti (2000) investigation. Some explanations exist in this regard. For example, one of the most important components of agreeableness is the ability of understanding others and putting oneself in the other one's shoes. When the couples do this and understand the spouse's feelings, it can decrease the negative effects and interactions between them. On the other hand, agreeableness is a trait which leads couples to build a mutual trust and friendly relationships. Agreeable couples see the spouse's affects and requests as an important and notable thing and it may decrease the withdraw and avoidance behaviors.

The findings related to the second hypothesis emphasized the importance of the couple's attachment styles. The significance of anxious attachment in the regression equation indicates that the couples anxious attachment is a positive predictor of demand/withdraw interactions. The most important explanation discussable there might be that when a person has an anxious attachment style, (s)he fears the loss of intimacy and lovely interactions in the marriage intensively and may stick to the partner spouse and overload him or her with emotional requests. It may lead the partner to retreat and withdraw and finally the demand/withdraw pattern will emerge in the couple relationships.

The third hypothesis of present investigation was that self-esteem can predict demand/withdraw pattern. The findings show that it was not a significant predictor and the hypothesis was not proven. One explanation which exists in this regard is that among other variables, such as attachment styles and personality characteristics, the self-esteem have less important in the shaping of demand/withdraw interactions. In the other word, considering the fact that in step by step regression, often the more important variables enter the equation, it can be said that the

personality characteristics and attachment styles are stronger predictors and self-esteem may not be as much important among them.

The present findings emphasize the role personality characteristics and attachment styles play in marital communications and highlight the importance of considering these variables in counseling and psychological services. Paying attention to these variables in the next researches helps to develop better marriages in society and naturally it will decrease the prevalence of marital conflicts.

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Table (1): the group's descriptive data

Variable	N	mean	Std.Deviation	minimum	maximum
Secure attachment	350	17/47	3/04	10	24
Avoidance attachment	350	14/11	4/79	6	25
Anxious attachment	350	14/35	4/58	7	25
Neuroticism	350	37/05	8/27	22	53
Extraversion	350	41/14	7/50	22	56
Openness	350	35/62	5/33	26	50
agreeableness	350	39/72	6/58	20	56
conscientiousness	350	40/40	7/17	21	55
self-esteem	350	21/60	4/02	14	30
demand/withdraw pattern	350	31/34	12/12	10	53

Table (2): Model summary

model	Variable	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig
1	Neuroticism	0/65	0/43	0/42	262/04	0/00
2	Anxious attachment	0/68	0/46	0/45	149/02	0/00
3	agreeableness	0/69	0/48	0/47	107/50	0/00

Table (3): the stepwise regression equation

Step		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig
		B	Std.Error	Beta		
1	Neuroticism	0/96	0/05	0/65	16/18	0/00
2	Neuroticism	0/80	0/06	0/55	12/11	0/00
	Anxious attachment	0/55	0/12	0/20	4/57	0/00
3	Neuroticism	0/84	0/06	0/57	12/76	0/00
	Anxious attachment	0/70	0/12	0/26	5/64	0/00
	agreeableness	0/29	0/08	-0/16	3/69	0/00

Table (4): Excluded Variables

Model		Beta In	t	Sig	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics
						Tolerance
1	Secure attachment	-0/05	-1/31	0/19	-0/07	0/80
	Avoidance attachment	0/07	1/43	0/15	0/07	0/64
	Anxious attachment	0/20	4/57	0/00	0/23	0/74
	Extraversion	0/00	-0/009	0/99	0/00	0/99
	Openness	-0/06	-1/57	0/11	-0/08	0/89
	Agreeableness	-0/07	1/80	0/07	0/09	0/88
	Conscientiousness	-0/01	-0/29	0/76	-0/01	0/98
	self-esteem	-0/05	-1/45	0/14	-0/07	0/99
2	Secure attachment	-0/03	-0/77	0/43	-0/04	0/79
	Avoidance attachment	0/01	0/36	0/71	0/01	0/60
	Extraversion	-0/009	-0/21	0/82	-0/01	0/98
	Openness	-0/02	-0/61	0/54	-0/03	0/84
	Agreeableness	-0/16	3/69	0/00	0/19	0/77
	Conscientiousness	0/02	0/65	0/51	0/03	0/94
		self-esteem	-0/03	-0/84	0/40	-0/04
3	Secure attachment	-0/01	-0/33	0/74	-0/01	0/78
	Avoidance attachment	0/06	1/27	0/20	0/06	0/57
	Extraversion	-0/05	-1/33	0/18	-0/07	0/90
	Openness	-0/07	-1/62	0/10	-0/08	0/79
	Conscientiousness	-0/08	-1/68	0/09	-0/09	0/64
		self-esteem	-0/02	-0/53	0/59	-0/02