



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

Predicting romantic relationship satisfaction from life history strategy [☆]

Sally Olderbak ^{*}, Aurelio José Figueredo

Ethology and Evolutionary Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Arizona, 1503 E University Blvd Building 68, Tucson, AZ 85721, PO Box 210068, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 October 2008

Received in revised form 17 December 2008

Accepted 22 December 2008

Available online 24 January 2009

Keywords:

Life history strategy
Relationship satisfaction
Attachment style
Communication

ABSTRACT

Attachment style and communication style have been shown in previous research to predict relationship satisfaction. We hypothesized that the ultimate cause underlying the relationship among attachment style, communication style, and relationship satisfaction is Life History Strategy (LHS). Furthermore, we hypothesized that LHS would not only predict relationship satisfaction indirectly through a couple's attachment style and communication style, but would also predict relationship satisfaction directly. Two structural equation models were constructed to model and test each of these hypotheses. The first showed that the indirect causal pathways from LHS to attachment style, attachment style to communication style, and communication style to relationship satisfaction predicted 16% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. The second added a causal pathway directly from LHS to relationship satisfaction which reduced the estimate for the influence of communication style on relationship satisfaction and increased the total variance predicted in relationship satisfaction to 60%. These results challenge the notion that it is primarily the communication between two romantic partners which influences their relationship outcome by proposing that their LHS may be influential: (1) indirectly through their attachment style and communication style; and (2) directly upon relationship satisfaction.

Published by Elsevier Ltd.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the connections among several predictors of romantic relationship satisfaction that have been empirically demonstrated and to examine these connections within an evolutionary context. The relationship of Life History Strategy (LHS) with attachment style, attachment style with communication patterns, and communication patterns with relationship satisfaction are connections that have been explored separately by many researchers. Our goal is to explore the hypothesized causal structure among these connections and present a new hypothesis to help explain these relationships. We hypothesized that LHS would be highly predictive of relationship satisfaction, promoting the maintenance of long-term relationships and fostering high degrees of parental investment in offspring. Whereas previous theorists proposed that attachment style and communication patterns contributed to relationship satisfaction, we hypothesized that these only partially mediate the effects of LHS. Because whether they either partially or fully mediated the predicted relationship between LHS and relationship satisfaction was unclear, both alternative hypotheses were tested in this study and compared for goodness of fit to the data.

2. Life history strategy

Life History Theory describes the systematic patterns of behavior through which an organism allocates limited bioenergetic and material resources between individual survival (somatic effort) and the production of new organisms to serve as vehicles for their genes (reproductive effort). Reproductive effort is further allocated into energy directed at obtaining and retaining sexual partners (mating effort) and assisting in the survival of either the organism's own offspring or the offspring of genetic relatives (parental/nepotistic effort). Life History (r-K) Theory explains species, and members within the species, vary in their allocation of reproductive effort due to varying environmental selective pressures by ranging from extremely r-selected (maximum mating effort, minimum parental effort) to extreme K-selected (minimum mating effort, maximum parental/nepotistic effort; Mealey, 2000). Because r-selected species live in a constantly changing and unpredictable environment, they produce a vast number of offspring that are genetically diverse to fit the varying environmental conditions. They provide very limited parental care and have a very high mortality rate; examples are rabbits and oysters. Because K-selected species live in a more stable and predictable environment, they have fewer offspring that are more adapted to their particular environment. They provide extensive parental care and have a high survival rate; examples are elephants and humans (Figueredo et al., 2006).

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 928 542 9166; fax: +1 520 621 9306.
E-mail address: sallyo@email.arizona.edu (S. Olderbak).

According to Differential-K Theory (Rushton, 1985), although humans as a species generally exhibit slow (High K) LHS when compared to most other species, there is considerable interindividual variability as well. Humans fall on a continuum which ranges from relatively slow (e.g. High K) to relatively fast (e.g. Low K) LHS. Those who have a slow LHS demonstrate qualities of high investment and commitment in various aspects of their life including their romantic relationships. They are very selective in their choice of sexual partners, provide extensive parental investment, make long-term plans, and maintain long-term relationships. These individuals are characteristically monogamous, altruistic, cautious risk-takers, long-term thinkers, adhere to social rules, cooperate, and both give and receive substantial social support. Those who have a fast LHS tend to have a high number of sexual partners in their lifetime, provide low parental investment, only plan for the short-term, and prefer short-term sexual relationships. These individuals are characteristically impulsive, promiscuous, give and receive little social support, disregard social rules, and are incautious risk-takers (Figueredo et al., 2005).

Human LHS is highly heritable ($h^2 = 0.65$; Figueredo, Vásquez, Brumbach, & Schneider, 2004) but may be influenced by environmental factors as well. Like r-selected species, individuals who live in a volatile or constantly changing environment are more likely to develop a fast LHS. Like K-selected species, individuals who live in stable and predictable environments tend to develop a slow LHS (Figueredo et al., 2006). LHS is believed to be a primary influence in reproduction, mate choice, and parental care of offspring. As such, it is an influential trait which can be selected against depending on the specific evolutionary pressures to which a lineage has been exposed.

Because high levels of biparental care are essential to the implementation of human slow LHS, we hypothesized that high levels of relationship satisfaction would promote the long-term romantic relationships required to facilitate biparental investment. Moreover, we hypothesized that secure attachment styles would help promote high levels of relationship satisfaction.

3. Attachment style

Attachment style has been described as a characteristic of LHS (Belsky, 1997). Originally discussed by Bowlby (1969), attachment behavior was presented as an evolved behavior designed to maintain proximity of the parent and child in order to promote the child's survival. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) elaborated on Bowlby's attachment theory and, in their classic 'Strange Situation' study, described three attachment styles they observed in infants. Since then, there have been many reconceptualizations and reorganizations of attachment behavior into either three or four categories, depending on the researcher or age group described. For this study, we used the categories described by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998) who explained that attachment behavior can be categorized into being on either end of two continua: (1) *avoidance*, which is feeling discomfort in close or dependent relationships; and (2) *anxiety*, which pertains to being anxious about being abandoned. *Secure attachment* is defined as being low on both avoidance and anxiety, *avoidant attachment* is low on anxiety and high on avoidance, *anxious-ambivalent attachment* is high on anxiety and low on avoidance, and *disoriented/disorganized attachment* is high on both anxiety and avoidance.

Since the development of Attachment Theory, researchers have drawn the connection between LHS and attachment styles. Belsky (1997) has illustrated how the continuum presented in Differential-K theory is highly congruent with the descriptions and goals of the different attachment styles. Individuals with an insecure-

avoidant attachment style (similar to the avoidant, anxious-ambivalent, and disoriented/disorganized attachment styles described above) are characterized as having unstable pair bonds, several sexual partners, many children, provide limited care for their children, and invest more effort and resources in mating than in parenting (Chisholm, 1996). As mentioned above, this behavior is typically characteristic of individuals with a fast (low-K) LHS. Individuals with a secure attachment style are characteristically more likely to develop close, enduring, and emotionally rewarding relationships, be more skilled in maintaining those relationships, and because they were typically raised by highly invested parents, subsequently learn to invest more in their offspring than in mating effort. This behavior is similar to that of individuals with a slow (high-K) LHS (Belsky, 1997).

Some argue that an organism's attachment style evolved to assist in transmitting information about the current stability of the environment from the parent(s) to the offspring (Belsky, 1997). There is evidence that attachment styles are stable throughout development (Benoit & Parker, 1994; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) suggesting that preparing an offspring for their environment when they are young can be beneficial throughout their development. Parents who live in a more stable environment should foster a secure attachment style in their offspring, whereas parents who are in a less stable environment should foster an insecure attachment style. Attachment styles are not completely static and this allows them to be adaptable and changeable based on the stability or variability of the environmental conditions (Belsky, 1997). Attachment styles, along with LHS, are both partially heritable, and partially influenced by the environment suggesting lineages are able to adapt over generations (Brussoni, Jang, Livesley, & Macbeth, 2000; Crawford et al., 2007; Finkel & Matheny, 2000).

Attachment style has been linked to relationship satisfaction, and this effect might be mediated through supportive communication (Koski & Shaver, 1997). We further hypothesized that the effect of LHS upon relationship satisfaction would be at least partially mediated by secure attachment style and supportive communication.

4. Communication style

Anders and Tucker (2000) found the communication styles of undergraduate students are linked to their attachment styles: those with avoidant or anxious attachment styles, compared to those with secure attachment styles, typically seek and provide less support from their partners, are less expressive, worse at conflict resolution, and show less conversational skill.

Gottman (1994) has found evidence strongly linking communication to long-term relationship outcomes. He described four affective patterns of communication which are detrimental to a relationship and can predict relationship dissolution (referred to as the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse"): (1) *criticism*, which involves attacking a romantic partner's personality or character; (2) *contempt/disgust*, in which disgust is communicating being repulsed or sickened and contempt refers to forms of insult, mockery, or sarcasm about the partner; (3) *defensiveness*, which involves avoiding taking responsibility and making excuses and is considered an attempt to defend oneself against a perceived attack; and (4) *stonewalling*, which is when one refuses to respond to their romantic partner. Contempt/disgust and defensiveness are considered the worst of the four. Supportive communication, or at least absence of negative communication, has been shown to assist, if not entirely predict, the maintenance of a long-term romantic relationship. Thus, we hypothesized that supportive communication would at least partially mediate the effect of secure attachment

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/892384>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/892384>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)