

Relationship power and couple satisfaction. The mediating role of commitment and dependency

Elena Alexandra Mîndrilă^{1*}, Maria-Nicoleta Turliuc¹

Abstract: The relationship between power and satisfaction has been extensively studied in psychology, but little is known about the processes that mediate this association. Also, there is little empirical evidence that has tested the various theoretical frames proposed over time. The purpose of this study was to empirically explore the association between relational power and couple satisfaction using the latest model of power in a couple's life proposed by Simpson and his colleagues (2015), the Dyadic Power Social-Influence. We also investigated if commitment and dependency mediate this relationship. Data were gathered from 252 participants who volunteered to participate in this research. The participants filled in four self-report scales that were distributed online. Using Structural Equation Modeling, our results show that commitment and dependency act as mediators in the association between relationship power and couple satisfaction. Limits and recommendations for future research are proposed in the discussion section.

Keywords: Relationship power, Couple satisfaction, Commitment, Dependency, Mediation

Introduction

Relationship satisfaction is undoubtedly one of the most studied concepts in the research of romantic relationships. Data have extensively shown that relational satisfaction is a vulnerable aspect of couples' lives that can be impacted by many variables, including relationship power (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; Gray-Little et al., 1996). When power is equally distributed, satisfaction is positively impacted (Zvonkovic et al., 1994). This idea was verified and tested by many authors in the past few decades, but most of the research presents fundamental problems, such as poor conceptualization and unstandardized measures. Simpson and his colleagues (2015) proposed the latest conceptualization of power in a couple's life, the Dyadic Power Social-Influence Model, which suggests that power is influenced by individual and dyadic variables and impacts the individual and relational outcomes. At an interpersonal level, the

¹ Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iași, Romania

* E-mail of corresponding author: alexandrina.mindrila@gmail.com

authors suggested that commitment and dependency impact dyadic power and relationship outcomes. The authors also created an instrument to measure relational power. Since the model and the instrument are relatively new, very few studies tested them empirically. The purpose of the present study was to test the association between relational power and couple satisfaction and to explore the mediating role of commitment and dependency, as dyadic variables in the association between relational power and couple satisfaction.

Relationship power, as a multidimensional concept

Throughout history, definitions of power have been based on three main common ideas: power as an influence, power as a potential to influence and power as a resource or control of resources. Power as influence refers to the situation in which a person causes or influences someone else to behave in a certain way. Therefore, the first has power over the latter (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). Other authors have defined power in terms of the potential to influence. According to these definitions, power exists without the actual influence, unlike previous theoretical approaches in which power is defined only by what is observed, post-factum (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 2008). For example, an individual with a good income will have a high level of power in a context that values a high financial status; thus, he/ she can influence others through financial resources, even if the actual influence does not occur in a particular context.

For this reason, operationalization was more difficult because power could only be measured after the influence had already taken place, only analyzing its consequences. Some authors, who have seen power as a potential influence, have argued that this ability comes from controlling or possessing valuable resources (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007) by rewarding or withdrawing specific resources, either by punishment. Those who control the resources of others have the power, whether they want it or not. Resources and punishments can be material (food, money, status / economic opportunities, personal injury or dismissal) and social (knowledge, affection, friendship, decision-making, verbal abuse, ostracism). The value of resources or punishment refers to the degree of people's dependence on these resources (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983).

Over time, researchers have aimed to empirically explore to which degree possessing various resources can influence romantic couples' power levels. For example, in his study, Pyke (1994) showed that women did not have a greater power level if they earned more in couples where women's employment was not considered a resource. At the same time, unemployed women did not have a lower level of power. Another study on employment and earnings as a power source showed similar results. Wives who earned more than their husbands or had a higher-status occupation did not report having a higher power level in their relationships (Bokek-Cohen, 2011).

On the other hand, researchers agree on the fact that love and commitment are valuable power resources. When partners report different levels of love and admiration for one other, the person who invests more in their relationship will have lower power over the partner on the principle of least interest (Lemay & Dobush, 2015; Lennon et al., 2013; Waller, 1938). Although authors have arrived at a certain consensus in defining this concept over time, relational power (defined as one partner's ability to exert influence over the other) has been proven to be challenging to assess in empirical research, which stems from the fact that power is not a unitary construct. To date, three primary evaluation approaches have been used, first, in terms of resources, such as education or income, which form the basis of the two partners' power. Second, the evaluation of behavioral indicators, such as the use of direct or indirect influence strategy. Another area of measures is based on the decision-making process and who has the final say in problem-solving interactions (Loving et al., 2004). The last evaluation has been used the most. Research has also operationalized the power through task division, "who does what": who does the shopping, who is responsible for household maintenance. In other words, a more equitable division of labor between partners reflects an equal balance of power in the relationship (Bartley et al., 2005).

The Dyadic Power Social Influence Model

The latest and the most comprehensive power theory in couples' lives is The Dyadic Power – Social Influence Model (DPSIM) proposed by Simpson and his colleagues (2015). The authors define power as the ability to change the thoughts, feelings or behavior of another person (i.e., partner) so that they align with desired preferences, along with the ability to resist the partner's attempts to influence (Farrell et al., 2015). This model is based on the idea that power is a characteristic of the relationship and not a personal trait of one partner more than the other. According to the DPSIM model, power bases arise from individual traits (e.g., physical attractiveness, personality traits) and dyadic characteristics (e.g., commitment, dependency). Partners then choose different influence tactics to apply in a given situation based on their power bases (Farrell et al., 2015). These processes also occur dynamically, reflecting the interdependence that exists between the partners. Another advantage of DPSIM is that power is not necessarily considered stable, either over time or in all decision-making areas, within a relationship. For example, a husband with more power over financial decisions may have less power than his wife over household decisions (Farrell et al., 2015). Moreover, the authors of the DPSIM theory identified the lack of standard measure techniques for the concept of power, and they developed and validated a new instrument, Relationship Power Inventory (RPI; Farrell et al., 2015), to measure perceived power in a romantic relationship. The lack of

previous standardized measures highlights the importance of further applying this instrument in empirical research to understand the concept better.

Relationship power and couple satisfaction

Marital quality or satisfaction with the romantic relationship is the general evaluation of an individual to the degree of contentment/fulfillment regarding the romantic relationship (Kamp et al., 2008). This present study focused on relationship satisfaction as someone's global evaluation regarding his/her romantic relationship. A high level of satisfaction is associated with reasonable adjustment, healthy communication and happiness in the family (Oyamoto et al., 2010).

A series of cross-sectional studies found associations between marital power and marital satisfaction (Ball et al., 1995; Bulanda, 2011; LeBaron et al., 2014). Marital power distribution is shown to impact the marriage's overall functioning, including perceived marital satisfaction, domestic violence, marital stability and conflict (Loving et al., 2004). Studies on the relationship between power and marital satisfaction have consistently shown two results: couples in which power is distributed approximately evenly are associated with the highest level of marital satisfaction (Gray-Little & Burks, 1983; Wilkie et al., 1998; Sprecher et al., 2006). Conversely, asymmetrical relationships, especially those in which the wife is dominant, are generally associated with low satisfaction levels (Bulanda, 2011; Oyamoto et al., 2010).

Additional evidence for the link between an equal distribution of power and high marital satisfaction comes from studies showing that domestic violence occurs less frequently in marriages where spouses have a similar power level (Gray-Little et al., 1996). Schwarzwald and colleagues (2008) conducted an important study on marital power and satisfaction, analyzing whether the Power Interaction Model can explain the choice for different power tactics in conflict. The results show that the preference for the use of power tactics, in general, was associated with lower marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is significantly lower in couples who use power tactics more frequently, specifically, harsh tactics. On the other hand, soft tactics are associated with a lower degree of dissatisfaction. Dominant spouses that use soft tactics are more attentive, less directive, and they admit greater involvement from their partner (Schwarzwald et al., 2008).

Another study examined marital power and marital quality among retired adults, with ages between 51 and 61. The results show that women report a lower level of satisfaction with their marriage, marital interaction and marital power than their husbands on average (Bulanda, 2011). In conclusion, studies analyzing the link between power and marital satisfaction indicate that when power is distributed almost equally, marital satisfaction is higher compared to other

families in which one spouse has more power. In addition, in couples where the wife's dominant role appears, the partners are less satisfied with the quality of their relationships than those who are equal or in which the husband has a higher level of power.

Commitment and dependency as mediators

Researchers have explored many other variables in analyzing the link between power and couple satisfaction, including commitment and dependency. Many studies have shown that when relative power is extremely imbalanced, high-power partners have little commitment and dependence (Overall et al., 2016; Carpenter, 2017) as well as a decreased satisfaction with the relationship (Sprecher, 2001; Neilands et al., 2019).

Commitment as a mediator

Commitment has long been recognized as a significant factor in the development and continued stability of close personal relationships (Adams & Jones, 1997). Happily married couples indicate that commitment is one of the most critical factors contributing to their marriages' success (Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Weigel, 2006). At an earlier time worldwide, marriage was perceived as a life-long commitment. However, mounting data suggests that marital commitment has changed from the investment in marriage as an institution toward the commitment to a specific partner. During the 20th century, researchers observed a transition from institutional marriage, when what mattered was to respect social norms, to companionship marriage with an emphasis on mutual affection and consensus (Hsiao, 2003). Commitment is often defined as one's desire to remain in a relationship throughout a prolonged time (Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Despite the differences in definitions, most theorists agree that interpersonal commitment is a three-dimensional construct. The first dimension, the affective component, consists of the individual's dedication and psychological attachment to the partner. It can be found in the literature under personal commitment (Johnson, 1991) or commitment to the spouse (Adams & Jones, 1997). The second dimension reflects the costs that can appear in ending a relationship, the desire to avoid any types of penalties (eg. social, financial) that might result from divorce or separation (Adams & Jones, 1997, Zhang & Tsang, 2013). In the literature, one can find this dimension under the term of structural commitment (Johnson, 1973), barriers (Levinger, 1976) or feelings of entrapment (Adams & Jones, 1997). The third dimension is a moral obligation to continue the relationship (Johnson, 1991), because they believe in marriage's sanctity as a sacred institution and in their sense of obligation to honor their marriage vows (Adams & Jones, 1997; Zhang, 2013). This type of commitment is known in previous theories as a moral commitment (Johnson, 1991) or commitment to

marriage (Adams & Jones, 1997; Hsiao, 2003). Although many authors support this three-dimension perspective, Amato (2007) argued that it makes little sense to state that people who are “trapped” in a relationship are considered as “committed” to it. Therefore, it seems that only the concept of being committed, due to intrinsic desires, captures the meaning of commitment. In other words, partners are committed when they are fully satisfied with their relationship, and a few structural factors prevent them from leaving the relationship (Amato, 2007, Zhang & Tsang, 2013).

Built on the social exchange theory, the Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980, 1983) explains commitment as the sum of three relationship mechanisms: (1) relationship satisfaction, (2) investment in the current relationship and (3) the quality of alternative partners that are available to the individual outside the current relationship. Previous literature has proven that individuals are more likely to report relatively high relationship commitment levels when they report higher satisfaction levels, higher investment levels and lower quality alternative partners (Rusbult, 1980, 1983).

An investigation conducted by Lennon and colleagues (2013) on 120 dating couples tested the relationship between power and commitment using the factors established by interdependence theory as mediators: satisfaction, quality of alternatives and investment. The results suggest that having greater power does improve the quality of alternatives available and reduces commitment, as the principle of least interest would suggest but also decreases satisfaction with the relationship.

The investment model posits that satisfaction with the relationship is essential to foster and maintain a commitment to an intimate relationship. If partners perceive more rewards than costs in the relationship, they will be more satisfied (Rusbult, 1980, 1983). A meta-analysis found satisfaction to be the higher associated variable with commitment within the investment model (Le & Agnew, 2003). Compared to individuals whose relationships persist, those whose relationships terminate frequently report lower satisfaction and more attractive alternatives (Rusbult, 1983; Simpson, 1987).

A more recent study (Traeder & Zeigler-Hill, 2019) revealed that the desire for power was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction and investment, whereas it was positively associated with the quality of alternatives. In turn, relationship satisfaction and investment were positively associated with commitment, whereas the quality of alternatives was negatively associated with commitment. Also, relationship satisfaction mediated the association between the desire for power and commitment. Finally, for women, the desire for power was negatively correlated with perceived power, relationship satisfaction, investment and commitment, whereas it was positively correlated with the quality of alternatives (Traeder & Zeigler-Hill, 2019). The dyadic power-social influence

model (Simpson et al., 2015) posits that personal and relational characteristic – one of them being commitment – influence the sources of power they possess, which, in turn, affect the influence strategies/tactics they use in the relationship, influencing the individual and relationship outcomes (Simpson et al., 2015; Washburn-Busk, 2020). In addition, a higher degree of perceived power imbalance was inversely associated with positive relationship indicators, such as relationship satisfaction and commitment (Neilands et al., 2019). According to the principle of least interest first described by Waller, asymmetries in relationship commitment across relationship partners are associated with power imbalances (French & Raven, 1959; Keltner et al., 2003), according to the principle of least interest first described by Waller (Waller, 1938; Lemay & Dobush, 2015). According to this principle, the less interested partner has a greater ability to fulfill his or her personal goals and exploit the more interested partner. As a result, the less committed partner has a higher level of power (Felmlee, 1994; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997; Sprecher et al., 2006).

In conclusion, commitment is without doubts one of the most important concepts in romantic relationships. As studies show, committed partners have longer and more satisfied relationships. Also, the level of commitment one partner experience within the relationship can influence power (Simpson et al., 2015). The present study aimed to further test if commitment acts as a mediator between the level of power and couple satisfaction.

Dependency as a mediator

Another factor affecting power and couple satisfaction is the psychological dependence of one partner on another and their relationship. The concept of “dependence” refers to an individual’s trust, or to count on another person to satisfy their needs or the degree to which partners count on each other uniquely to gratify important outcomes (Rusbult et al., 1998; Attridge et al., 1998). Fei and Berscheid (1977) considered dependency a psychological condition associated with a specific relationship partner, rather than a stable dispositional character expected to exhibit itself in all of the individual’s interactions. (Attridge et al., 1998).

Dependence is a central concept in the most influential interpersonal relationship research theories, and it is a core characteristic of close interactions and relationship stability (Attridge et al., 1998). If individuals are highly dependent on their partners, they tend to be more responsive and show more interest in their partners’ characteristics (e.g., beliefs, preferences, attitudes; Carpenter, 2017). In addition, individuals with high dependence frequently accommodate their partners’ preferences (Joel et al., 2013) and may adjust their needs and choices to align more closely with their partners to prevent conflict. On the other hand,

individuals with low reliance place a substantial value on feelings of self-worth and act more selfishly in relationships (Cong et al., 2018).

The more a person relies on their relationship, the more they become dependent on the partner who provides those benefits. Thus, the greater the dependency on the partner, the higher the degree of commitment to the relationship (Hsiao, 2003). Whereas reliance on a partner for needs' fulfillment is dependence (Le & Agnew, 2001), commitment is the subjective psychological experience of that dependence (Agnew et al., 1998; Rusbult et al., 1998). According to the interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelly, 1959), if a relationship's outcomes are advantageous and fulfilling to the individuals involved, the relationship will continue. A reciprocal dependency state grows as individuals begin to control the degree to which their partners' results are achieved and vice versa (Le & Agnew, 2003; Lemay & Dobush, 2015). Commitment and dependence are related constructs, both variables being associated with stay-leave decisions. However, dependency does not replace commitment. The dependency concept directly affects the stay-leave decisions, while personal commitment is relatively more indirect and abstract—it is a global, internal, subjective basis for stay-leave decisions (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992). The interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) also proposes that relationship commitment asymmetries reflect analogous asymmetries in dependence. Drigotas and his colleagues (1999) argued that, although the level of dependence is an essential aspect of power, commitment is the more direct predictor of the perceived level of power (Drigotas et al., 1999).

Commitment is the state of being dependent on the partner to meet one's relational needs. Someone can be more or less dependent on his/ her partner, but more important is the extent to which that person wishes to maintain the relationship. For example, A might be dependent on his/her romantic partner, B. Still, if A is more willing to leave B than B is of A, A is the one who has a higher level of power, because fear of ending the relationship ultimately matters to B. Additionally, Drigotas et al. (1999) argued that someone might not be aware of the dependence in a relationship, but he/she is aware of the level of commitment.

Objectives and hypotheses

This study aimed to continue the extensive work done by previous researchers and further explore the link between social power and relational satisfaction by assessing the mediating role of commitment and dependency. It is well known that there is an association between the power partners have and their satisfaction with the relationship. At the same time, we aimed to explore if this relationship is different by creating a model where commitment and dependency mediate this association. We predicted that:

H1. Relationship power is associated with couple satisfaction.

H2. Commitment mediates the association between relationship power and couple satisfaction.

H3. Dependency mediates the association between relationship power and couple satisfaction.

Method

Participants

Data for this research was gathered from 252 participants (83.7% female and 16.3% male) from Romania with ages between 18 and 63 years old ($M = 29.62$) who were in a long term ($M = 8.01$ years) romantic relationship (minimum one year). The initial sample counted 264 participants, but 12 were not included in the research as they were in a romantic relationship for less than one year. Only 37.3% of the couples were married, the other 62.7% participants were in a romantic relationship when filling in the survey but not married. Most of the participants are college graduates (61.4%) or have a master's/doctoral degree (22.7%). Only 15.9% of the participants did not follow a university program. The majority of the participants and their partners have an income that is above the average salary in Romania.

Measures

Sociodemographic data. Data regarding the participants and their relationship was collected: gender, age, personal level of studies and partner's level of studies, personal and partner's income, marital status and relationship length.

Relationship Power Inventory, Overall version (RPI; Farrell et al., 2015). The RPI was designed to measure the level of power the respondents perceived themselves as having in their romantic relationship. All 20 items of the instrument were applied, and participants had to rate their answer on a 7-points Likert scale where 1 meant "strongly disagree" and 7 "strongly agree" to items such as "*I have more influence than my partner does on decisions in our relationship,*" "*My partner is more likely to get his/her way than me when we disagree about issues in our relationship*". Low scores on the RPI show low relational power, whereas higher scores represent an increased power level. In our research, the RPI was found to possess an internal consistency of .86.

The Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al. 1998) was used to measure commitment. We selected from the scale the 15 commitment level items. The participants were encouraged to describe their feelings regarding their level of commitment to their current romantic relationship. The instrument has 15 items and uses a 9-point Likert scale where 1 means "do not agree at all," 4 – "agree somewhat," and 9 – "agree completely": "*When I make plans about future events*

in life, I carefully consider the impact of my decisions on our relationship” or “There is no chance at all that I would ever become romantically involved with another person”. A higher score on this questionnaire shows higher commitment, while low scores reflect the respondent has a lower level of commitment with the relationship. The Alpha Cronbach coefficient of the commitment questionnaire in the present study was .91.

Dependency and Insecurity Instrument (Fei & Berscheid, 1977). This scale has 16 items (e.g., “*I’d be extremely depressed for a long time if my relationship with X were to end*”, “*I spend a great deal of time thinking about X*”) on a 6-point Likert scale, where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 6 “strongly agree.” We reversed the negative items and added up the scores, obtaining a total key indicator. A higher score obtained at this scale suggests a higher level of relational dependency, whereas a lower score demonstrates higher independence. In this study, the scale had an Alpha Cronbach of .90.

Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI-16; Funk & Rogge, 2007). This scale has 16 items in which the respondents have to report the general degree of happiness of their relationship by rating items such as “*My relationship with my partner makes me happy*”, “*In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?*”. Higher scores indicate higher levels of relationship satisfaction. In this study, the internal consistency of the CSI was $\alpha = 0.94$.

Procedure

The survey was posted on social media, and volunteers filled in the online Google form. The participants were explicitly informed that the participation is anonymous and the data is confidential, gathered only for scientific purposes.

Overview of the SEM statistical analysis

Based on Dyadic Power – The Social Influence Theory (DPSIM) proposed by Simson et al. (2015), we created a model to test if the relationship between power and couple satisfaction is mediated by commitment and dependency. To test the model and the study's hypothesis, we used Structural Equation Models (SEM) and the AMOS extension for IBM SPSS (Arbuckle, 1999). These results exceed the established standards of goodness-of-fit, including a CFI and TLI above .95 (Byrne, 2001) and an RMSEA below .05 (Arbuckle, 2006). The proposed hypotheses can be summarized in Figure 1.

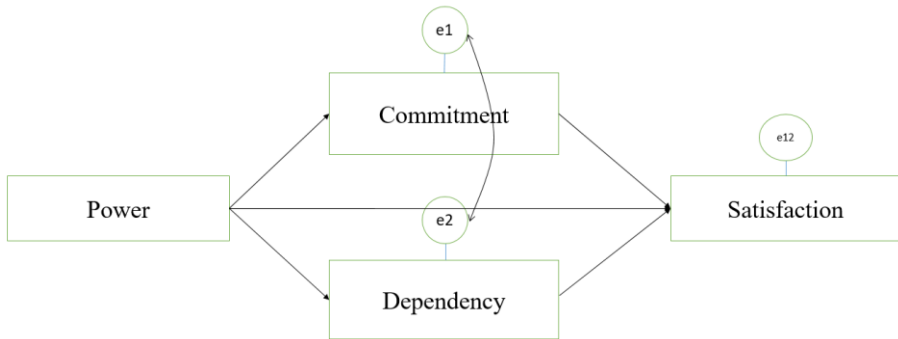


Figure 1. The conceptual mediation model

Results

Preliminary results

Before proceeding with our hypothesis's statistical analysis, we assessed the sample's general parameters and inspected the study variables' descriptive statistics. Data was examined on a sample of 252 participants (N = 252). As assessed with the RPI, the power had a mean of 89.20 (SD = 14.55), and the couple satisfaction's mean was 73.61 (SD = 13.23). Commitment and dependency had a mean of 97.79 (SD = 16.88) and respectively 76.71 (SD = 12.58). Correlations among all the variables of the study were also examined. All the data are summarized in Table 1. Data shows that there is a low negative association between power and couple satisfaction. Also, power is negatively correlated with commitment and dependency, and the link is significant but low. Commitment and dependency have both a strong positive association with couple satisfaction. Last, there is a significant positive link between commitment and dependency

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between the study's variables

	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Power	89.20	14.55	-		
2. Couple satisfaction	73.61	13.23	-.13**	-	
3. Commitment	97.79	16.88	-.26**	.67**	-
4. Dependency	76.71	12.58	-.21**	.71**	.80**

Note: ** p<.01 (2-tailed)

Direct effects

When we first ran the analysis, the model was underidentified. Since the direct effect of power on satisfaction was not significant in the first set of data ($\beta = 0.48, p = .282$), we fixed it as 0, and we reran the analysis. The second attempt

was successful. First, we verified the goodness-of-fit indicators to check if the model was adequate. The GFI was .998, RFI was .985, the CFI and IFI were 1.000, and the RMSEA was .025, with a χ^2 of 1.153 (df = 1, p = .283).

We set the direct effect of power on couple satisfaction as zero, as the model was underidentified. However, it was not statistically significant in the first data analysis. After introducing the mediators, power had a significant and negative indirect effect on couple satisfaction. Thus, the H1 was confirmed.

The data show a significant negative association between power and commitment ($\beta = -.268$, $p = .002$) and a significant positive association between commitment ($\beta = .281$, $p = .003$) and couple satisfaction. Also, there is a significant negative association between power and dependency ($\beta = -.213$, $p = .02$) and a significant positive association between dependency ($\beta = .488$, $p = .004$) and couple satisfaction.

Indirect effects

After introducing both mediators, power has a significant and negative indirect effect on couple satisfaction ($\beta = -.179$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [-.326; -.069]). Thus, the results show that commitment and dependency fully mediate the relationship between power and couple satisfaction. The hypotheses H2 and H3 were accepted. All the direct, indirect and total effects can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Total, direct and indirect effects of power, commitment and dependency and relational satisfaction

	Beta	S.E.	P	95% CI
Direct effects				
Power – Satisfaction ¹	.048	.040	.282	
Power – Commitment	-.268	.071	.002	
Power – Dependency	-.213	.053	.020	
Commitment – Satisfaction	.281	.056	.003	
Dependency – Satisfaction	.488	.075	.004	
Indirect effect				
Power – Commitment – Dependency – Satisfaction	-.179	0.067	.005	[-.326; -.069]

Note: ¹ data retrieved from the underidentified model

Discussions

This present study examined the mediating effect of commitment and dependency in the relationship between power and couple satisfaction. This is the first study that tested whether the dyadic processes can mediate the relationship between power and satisfaction. Over time, researchers explored the correlation between the two concepts, and various theories have been proposed. The Dyadic

Power Social-Influence Model proposed by Simpson et al. (2015) indicates that power is not a characteristic of an individual but a relationship trait. However, since the conceptual model is relatively new, little data has tested the model and the questionnaire that the authors proposed empirically.

The first hypothesis of the study was confirmed. The first relation we tested was the one between power and couple satisfaction. The results show that power has a significant and negative association with couple satisfaction. When partners have a high level of power, the level of satisfaction is decreased. Previous research found associations between power and satisfaction (Oyamoto et al., 2010; Ball et al., 1995; Bulanda, 2011; LeBaron et al., 2014). More than this, data shows a consensus in the idea that the asymmetry in couple power distribution is associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction (Bulanda, 2011; Oyamoto et al., 2010). An explanation can be that in couples where power is unevenly distributed, dominant partners use influence techniques, mostly harsh tactics, are less attentive and have higher expectations from their partner, which was associated with lower relationship satisfaction (Schwarzwald et al., 2008).

Both hypotheses on mediation (H2 and H3) were confirmed by the data derived from the SEM analysis, the model proposed being one with a strong significance. There is a relationship between power and satisfaction, which is fully mediated by commitment and dependency. As expected, when there is an increased level of relationship power, couple satisfaction is decreased. This is sustained by previous research, which showed that the higher the power level is, the lower the satisfaction with the relationship (Sprecher, 2001; Neilands et al., 2019, Lennon et al., 2013). Simultaneously, the participants who reported a high level of power are less committed and depend less on their partners to satisfy their needs.

On the other hand, the participants with a lower level of power who are more committed and depend more on their partners also have a higher level of couple satisfaction. Many studies have shown that high power partners have little commitment and dependence in couples where relative power is extremely imbalanced (Overall et al., 2016; Carpenter, 2017). Committed partners are more satisfied with their relationship as well as the ones who reported a higher degree of dependency, as can be observed in the results of this research, confirmed by previous data (Traeder & Zeigler-Hill, 2019, Neilands, 2019).

Commitment and dependency are two pillars of a fulfilled, satisfying romantic relationship. The higher the commitment and dependency, the higher the couple's satisfaction. On the other hand, less committed individuals have a higher level of power which creates power imbalances between partners (French & Raven, 1959; Keltner, 2003). An explanation for this comes from the principle of least interest, first described by Waller (1938; Lemay & Dobush, 2015). This states that the partner who is less invested in the relationship has a greater ability

to fulfill their needs, and as a consequence, they depend less on their partner and the relationship.

This present study has also shown that commitment and dependency mediate the link between power and satisfaction. Previous research studied mainly direct relations, and little previous research explored the mediating role of satisfaction in the relation between power and commitment (Traeder & Zeigler-Hill, 2019; Lennon et al., 2013). Previous mediation tests found that the desire for power had negative indirect associations with commitment through relationship satisfaction (Traeder & Zeigler-Hill, 2019). No past research tested the mediating role of commitment and dependency in the correlation between power and couple satisfaction.

Theoretical and practical implications

Previous research focused extensively on the associations between power and couple satisfaction. However, there is not much data on the dyadic aspects of couples' lives. Also, existing data is not always conclusive, using poor theoretical conceptualization and unstandardized measures. This present study has substantial theoretical and practical implications, being the first research to propose and empirically test a mediation model based on the latest and the most complex theoretical conceptualization on relational power proposed by Simpson et al. in 2015 - The Dyadic Power Social-Influence Model. Using the latest theoretical frame and valid measurements, we aim to contribute to future research on power and couple satisfaction, not only from an individual perspective but also from a dyadic point of view.

Future recommendations, strengths, and limitations

First, future research should focus on collecting and analyzing data in dyads. A better understanding of the relation between power and couple satisfaction can result from testing these hypotheses in dyads as well as collecting data from both partners of a couple. In this present study, data were collected and analyzed individually. The participants who were in a long-term romantic relationship (minimum one year) were invited to fill out self-report scales via online platforms. They decided to participate in the study voluntarily, being intrinsically motivated. Most of the previous data were collected on students who were rewarded with extra points in the exams, which sometimes can make them give answers that are not accurate or real. A consistent number of people participated in the study; however, the majority of the participants were female. Future research should focus on a more balanced sample. Finally, a general limitation of research using structural equation modeling is the potential omission of predictor variables that affect the total criterion variance, referred to as a specification error (Kline, 2005). While literature was reviewed and variables

were discussed and examined for this study, there is the possibility that specification error exists. Future research could focus on the gender differences that could affect the link between relationship power and couple satisfaction in order to understand these dynamics better. In this study, power was operationalized using the Relationship Power Inventory that focuses on power as a process in decision-making interactions. Future research should explore other facets of the power construct, for example, gender role ideology, status, income, global power and household division.

Conclusions

This present research explored the mediating role of commitment and dependency in the association between relationship power and couple satisfaction. Starting from the Dyadic interaction-power theory (Simpson et al., 2015), we created a model that was tested using the Structural Equations Model in AMOS. The analysis confirmed the hypotheses of the research. There is a negative association between relationship power and couple satisfaction, mediated by commitment and dependency. This mediation model is fundamental, as power is essential when exploring human interactions and dynamics in close relations.

References

- Adams, J. M., & Jones, W. H. (1997). The Conceptualization of Marital Commitment: An Integrative Analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(5), 1177-1196. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.5.1177>
- Agnew, C. R., Van Lange, F? A. M., Rusbult, C. E., & Langston, C. A. (1997). Cognitive interdependence: Commitment and the mental representation of close relationships, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 939-954.
- Amato, P. R. (2007). Transformative processes in marriage: Some thoughts from a sociologist. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(2), 305-309. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00365.x>
- Attridge, M., Berscheid, E., & Sprecher, S. (1998). Dependency and insecurity in romantic relationships: Development and validation of two companion scales. *Personal Relationships*, 5(1), 31-58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.1998.tb00158.x>
- Ball, F. L. J., Cowan, P., & Cowan, C. P. (1995). Who's Got the Power? Gender Differences in Partners' Perceptions of Influence During Marital Problem-Solving Discussions. *Family Process*, 34(3), 303-321. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.1995.00303.x>
- Bartley, S. J., Balton, P. W. & Gilliard J. L., (2005). Husbands and Wives in Dual-Earner Marriages: Decision-Making, Gender Role Attitudes, Division of Household Labor, and Equity. *Marriage & Family Review*, 37(4), 69-94. https://doi.org/10.1300/J002v37n04_05
- Bokek-Cohen, Y. (2011). Marital power bases as predictors of spousal influence strategies in a vacation purchase decision. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and*

- Hospitality Research*, 5(2), 144 - 157.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/17506181111139564>
- Breznsnyak, M., & Whisman, M. A. (2004). Sexual Desire and Relationship Functioning: The Effects of Marital Satisfaction and Power. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 30(3), 199–217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00926230490262393>
- Bulanda, J. R. (2011). Gender, Marital Power, and Marital Quality in Later Life. *Journal of Women & Aging*, 23(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2011.540481>
- Carpenter, C. J. (2017). A Relative Commitment Approach to Understanding Power in Romantic Relationships. *Communication Studies*, 68(1), 115–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2016.1268639>
- Cong, R., Luo, B., Li, T., & Wang, C. (2018). It is for you, or it is for me: How relationship dependence affects gift image consistency in romantic relationships. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 17(4), 343–354. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1724>
- Drigotas, S. M., Rusbult, C. E., & Verette, J. (1999). Level of commitment, mutuality of commitment, and couple well-being. *Personal Relationships*, 6(3), 389–409. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.1999.tb00199.x>
- Drigotas, S. M., & Rusbult, C. E. (1992). Should I stay, or should I go? A dependence model of breakups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62(1), 62–87. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.62.1.62>
- Farrell, A. K., Simpson, J. A., & Rothman, A. J. (2015). The relationship power inventory: Development and validation. *Personal Relationships*, 22(3), 387–413. <https://doi.org/10.1111/per.12072>
- Fei, J., & Berscheid, E. (1977). *Perceived dependency, insecurity, and love in heterosexual relationships: The eternal triangle?* Unpublished manuscript, Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota.
- Felmlee, D. H. (1994). Who's on top? Power in romantic relationships. *Sex Roles*, 31(5–6), 275–295. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01544589>
- Fiske, S. T., & Berdahl, J. (2007). Social power. In A. W. Kruglanski, E. Higgins, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. Higgins (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (2nd ed., pp. 678–692). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- French, J. R. P., Jr., & Raven, B. H. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in social power* (pp. 150–167). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press
- Funk, J.L., & Rogge, R.D. (2007). Testing the Ruler with Item Response Theory: Increasing Precision of Measurement for Relationship Satisfaction with the Couples Satisfaction Index. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21, 572–583. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-3200.21.4.572>
- Gray-Little, B., & Burks, N. (1983). Power and satisfaction in marriage: A review and critique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 93(3), 513–538. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.93.3.513>
- Gray-Little, B., Baucom, D. H., & Hamby, S. (1996). Marital power, marital adjustment, and therapy outcome. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 10(3):292–303. <https://doi.org/10.1037/08933200.10.3.292>
- Hsiao, Y.-L. (2003). Commitment to Marital Relationships —The Case of American Newlyweds. *Euramerica*, 33(4), 711–755. <https://doi.org/10.56431662>

- Joel, S., Gordon, A., Impett, E., Macdonald, G., & Keltner, D. (2013). The Things You Do for Me: Perceptions of a Romantic Partner's Investments Promote Gratitude and Commitment. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, 39(10), 1333-1345. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213497801>
- Johnson, M. P. (1991). Commitment to personal relationships. *Advances in Personal Relationships*, 3, 117-143. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-4773-0_4
- Johnson, M. P. (1973). Commitment: A conceptual structure and empirical application. *Sociological Quarterly*, 14, 395-406. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1973.tb00868.x>
- Kamp Dush, C. M., Taylor, M. G., & Kroeger, R. A. (2008). Marital happiness and psychological well-being across the life course. *Family Relations*, 57(2), 211-226. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2008.00495.x>
- Keltner, D., Gruenfeld, D. H., & Anderson, C. (2003). Power, approach, and inhibition. *Psychological Review*, 110(2), 265-284. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.110.2.265>
- Kline, R. B. (2005). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Le, B., & Agnew, C. R. (2003). Commitment and its theorized determinants: A meta-analysis of the Investment Model. *Personal Relationships*, 10(1), 37-57. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6811.00035>
- LeBaron, C. D. L., Miller, R. B., & Yorgason, J. B. (2014). A Longitudinal Examination of Women's Perceptions of Marital Power and Marital Happiness in Midlife Marriages. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy*, 13(2), 93-113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332691.2013.852492>
- Lemay, E. P., & Dobush, S. (2015). When Do Personality and Emotion Predict Destructive Behavior During Relationship Conflict? The Role of Perceived Commitment Asymmetry. *Journal of Personality*, 83(5), 523-534. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12129>
- Lennon, C. A., Stewart, A. L., & Ledermann, T. (2013). The role of power in intimate relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 30(1), 95-114. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407512452990>
- Levinger, G. (1976). A social psychological perspective on marital dissolution. *Journal of Social Issues*, 32, 21-47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1976.tb02478.x>
- Loving, T. J., Heffner, K. L., Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K., Glaser, R., & Malarkey, W. B. (2004). Stress Hormone Changes and Marital Conflict: Spouses' Relative Power Makes a Difference. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(3), 595-612. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00040.x>
- Neilands, T. B., Dworkin, S. L., Chakravarty, D., Campbell, C. K., Wilson, P. A., Gomez, A. M., Grisham, K. K., & Hoff, C. C. (2019). Development and Validation of the Power Imbalance in Couples Scale. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 48(3), 763-779. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1190-y>
- Overall, N. C., Hammond, M. D., McNulty, J. K., & Finkel, E. J. (2016). When power shapes interpersonal behavior: Low relationship power predicts men's aggressive responses to low situational power. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 111(2), 195-217. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000059>

- Oyamot, C. M., Fuglestad, P. T., & Snyder, M. (2010). Balance of power and influence in relationships: The role of self-monitoring. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 27(1), 23–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407509347302>
- Pyke, K. D. (1994). Women's employment as a gift or a burden?: Marital Power Across Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage. *Gender & Society*, 8(1), 73–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124394008001005>
- Raven, B. H. (2008). The Bases of Power and the Power/Interaction Model of Interpersonal Influence: Bases of Power. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 8(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1530-2415.2008.00159.x>
- Robinson, L. C., & Blanton, P. W. (1993). Marital strengths in enduring marriages. *Family Relations*, 42, 38–45.
- Rusbult, C. E. (1980). Commitment and satisfaction in romantic associations: A test of the investment model. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 16(2), 172–186. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031\(80\)90007-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(80)90007-4)
- Rusbult, C. E. (1983). A Longitudinal Test of the Investment Model: The Development (and Deterioration) of Satisfaction and Commitment in Heterosexual Involvements. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(1), 101–117. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.45.1.101>
- Rusbult, C. E., & Buunk, B. P. (1993). Commitment Processes in Close Relationships: An Interdependence Analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 10(2), 175–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026540759301000202>
- Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., & Agnew, C. R. (1998). The Investment Model Scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal Relationships*, 5(4), 357–387. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.1998.tb00177.x>
- Rusbult, C. E., Wieselquist, J., Foster, C. A., & Witcher, B. S. (1999). Commitment and Trust in Close Relationships. In J. M. Adams & W. H. Jones (Eds.), *Handbook of Interpersonal Commitment and Relationship Stability* (pp. 427–449). Springer US. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-4773-0_25
- Schwarzwald, J., Koslowsky, M., & Izhak-Nir, E. B. (2008). Gender Role Ideology as a Moderator of the Relationship between Social Power Tactics and Marital Satisfaction. *Sex Roles*, 59(9–10), 657–669. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-008-9454-y>
- Simpson, J. A. (1987). The dissolution of romantic relationships: Factors involved in relationship stability and emotional distress. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 683–692. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00365.x>
- Simpson, J. A., Farrell, A. K., & Rothman, A. J. (2019). The dyadic power-social influence model: Extensions and future directions. In C. R. Agnew & J. J. Harman (Eds.), *Power in close relationships* (pp. 86–101). New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108131490.006>
- Simpson, J. A., Farrell, A. K., Orina, M. M., & Rothman, A. J. (2015). Power and social influence in relationships. In M. Mikulincer, P. R. Shaver, J. A. Simpson, & J. F. Dovidio (Eds.), *APA handbook of personality and social psychology, Vol. 3: Interpersonal relations* (pp. 393–420). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

- Sprecher, S. (2001). Equity and Social Exchange in Dating Couples: Associations With Satisfaction, Commitment, and Stability. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(3), 599–613. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00599.x>
- Sprecher, S. & Feilmlee, D. (1997). The Balance of Power in Romantic Heterosexual Couples over Time From 'His' and 'Her' Perspectives. *Sex Roles*, 37(5–6), 361–79.
- Sprecher, S., Schmeekle, M., & Feilmlee, D. (2006). The principle of least interest: Inequality in emotional involvement in romantic relationships. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27, 1255–1280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X06289215>
- Thibaut, J.W. & Kelley, H.H. (1959). *The social psychology of groups*. John Wiley & Sons, New York
- Traeder, C. K., & Zeigler-Hill, V. (2019). The Desire for Power and Perceptions of Heterosexual Romantic Relationships: The Moderating Roles of Perceived Power and Gender. *Sex Roles*, 82(1–2), 66–80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-019-01037-9>
- Waller, W. (1938). *The family: A dynamic interpretation*. New York: Gordon.
- Washburn-Busk, M. (2020). *Examining manifestations of power in couples: Influence tactics, self-concept, and wellbeing across time (Doctoral dissertation)*. Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas
- Weigel, D. J. (2006). Roles and Influence in Marriages: Both Spouses' Perceptions Contribute to Marital Commitment. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 35(1), 74–92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077727X06289423>
- Wilkie, J. R., Ferree, M. M., & Ratcliff, K. S. (1998). Gender and Fairness: Marital Satisfaction in Two-Earner Couples. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60(3), 577. <https://doi.org/10.2307/353530>
- Zhang, H., & Tsang, S. K. M. (2013). Relative Income and Marital Happiness Among Urban Chinese Women: The Moderating Role of Personal Commitment. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14(5), 1575–1584. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-012-9396-5>
- Zvonkovic, A. M., Schmiede, C. J., & Hall, L. D. (1994). Influence Strategies Used When Couples Make Work-Family Decisions and Their Importance for Marital Satisfaction. *Family Relations*, 43(2), 182-188. <https://doi.org/10.2307/585321>