

Partner Phubbing, Gaslighting, Conflict Resolution Styles, and Relationship Satisfaction among Married and Romantic Heterosexual Adults

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of partner phubbing, gaslighting, and conflict resolution styles on relationship satisfaction among married and romantic heterosexual adults. A quantitative research method was used, with data collected from 357 participants via Google Forms. Four standardized instruments were employed: the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI-4), Partner Phubbing Scale, Gaslighting Relationship Exposure Inventory (GREI), and Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI). Results revealed significant negative correlations between relationship satisfaction and gaslighting ($r = -0.531$), partner phubbing ($r = -0.204$), and conflict resolution styles ($r = -0.410$). Gaslighting positively correlated with partner phubbing ($r = 0.489$) and conflict styles ($r = 0.446$). Regression analysis identified gaslighting as a significant negative predictor of relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -0.259$, $p < .001$), while the other variables were not. Differences between married and romantic heterosexual adults were significant, with married individuals reporting higher satisfaction and lower phubbing and gaslighting. The study highlights the importance of addressing digital distractions and emotional abuse in relationship counseling.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution Styles, Gaslighting, Married Adults, Partner Phubbing, Relationship Satisfaction, Romantic Relationships

Introduction

Individuals in romantic relationships represent a significant demographic in interpersonal relationships, playing a vital role in the foundation of families and communities. Understanding the dynamics of these partnerships is crucial to exploring their impact on individual well-being and societal stability. Therefore, maintaining good interpersonal relationships throughout one's life requires sensitivity to the dynamics involved in such relationships. Compared to friendships or familial relationships, they tend to be characterized by greater levels of interactional involvement, which is subject to challenges (Khazanchi et al., 2018).

Romantic relationships, particularly marital relationships, can positively and negatively impact one's physical and emotional well-being (Rus & Tiemensma, 2017). Intimacy, emotional support, and a structure for companionship are needed in romantic relationships for good psychological well-being (Holt-

Lunstad et al., 2010). Given the complexities of modern relationships, it is essential to explore the multifaceted variables that can influence relationship satisfaction within this population.

One such variable is "partner phubbing," which refers to the act of ignoring one's partner in favor of mobile phone use. Recent research has shown that phubbing can lead to feelings of neglect and misunderstandings, directly destabilizing relationship satisfaction among couples (Roberts & David, 2022). Based on their research, phubbing behavior caused subjects to feel less appreciated and also disconnected from their romantic partners. When one partner perceives that their emotional needs are ignored due to technological distractions, it can result in decreased intimacy and connection, ultimately affecting the overall quality of the relationship. The increasing use of mobile phones and social media in recent years has revolutionized couples' communication. This type of emotional distance would have long-term consequences on relationship satisfaction as well as its direct impact on communication.

Another pressing issue is gaslighting, a form of emotional manipulation wherein one partner undermines the other's perception of reality. Studies indicate that gaslighting can severely diminish relationship satisfaction by eroding trust and open communication (Dickson et al., 2023). One partner may gaslight the other, thus undermining the mental health of both parties by making the victim feel worthless and inadequately placed in reality, further rooting the victim in depression and anxiety. The victim would sometimes disengage with the support structures that they would have otherwise had access to since they may be unwilling to express what he is experiencing or even doubt what he is experiencing. The perpetrator can take advantage of the victim's acceptance of their epistemic inadequacy as "fact" by manipulating their victim's behavior and avoiding responsibility for their actions (Klein et al., 2023). Such behavior may lead to bewilderment, low self-esteem, and a generalized sense of instability concerning the victim's perception of reality.

Conflict resolution styles also play a crucial role in determining relationship satisfaction among couples. Various approaches, including collaborative, compromising, and avoidant styles, influence how couples navigate disagreements (Adriani & Ratnasari, 2021). Research indicates that dysfunctional conflict resolution practices can exacerbate issues related to phubbing and gaslighting, leading to decreased satisfaction in partnerships. Understanding how couples engage in conflict and their corresponding strategies is vital for fostering healthy communication and emotional support. Healthy strategies can reduce misunderstandings and improve resolution, whereas unhealthy strategies can increase tensions and lead to relational devastation (Gottman et al., 2019). Compared to those couples employing destructive patterns, those couples who use constructive processes often have greater levels of relationship satisfaction.

Relationship satisfaction is a fundamental aspect of interpersonal relationships that significantly impacts individual well-being and overall life satisfaction. As modern societal norms evolve, understanding the complexities of relationship dynamics becomes increasingly important, particularly in the context of married and romantic heterosexual adults. Research indicates that relationship satisfaction is closely linked to various variables, including communication, emotional support, shared values, and conflict management strategies (Johnson et al., 2021). The nature of communication within these relationships has also changed along with the constant development and predominance of technology. Relationship satisfaction and conflict resolution strategies may be greatly impacted by the additional challenges brought about by this change. It can be seen through the observation of the population as a whole that romantic partners are likely to undergo some stressors affecting their interactions. Such disfigurement not only influences individual perceptions but also influences conflict resolution within couples. Intimacy,

emotional support, and a structure for companionship are needed in romantic relationships (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010b) to promote psychological well-being. It is vital to interpersonal competence as well as emotional regulation and social integration; romantic relationships aren't just for companionship.

Recent studies highlight the prevalence of factors such as partner phubbing, gaslighting, and conflict resolution styles as critical contributors to relationship satisfaction (Roberts & David, 2022b; Dickson et al., 2023). Romantic partners are a very relevant population for this study because of the unique circumstances under which interpersonal interactions occur in real time. Compared to friendships or familial relationships, they tend to be characterized by greater intimacy and emotional involvement, subjecting them to unique challenges (Rosen, 2017). Conflict resolution styles also play an essential role in determining relationship satisfaction. Research reveals that couples who employ collaborative and constructive approaches to resolving conflicts tend to experience higher levels of satisfaction than those who engage in avoidance or hostile strategies (Adriani & Ratnasari, 2021). The interplay among these variables further complicates the dynamics of relationships, suggesting a complex relationship where phubbing and gaslighting can lead to maladaptive conflict resolution practices, ultimately permeating a couple's overall satisfaction.

Understanding relationship satisfaction through these lenses highlights the significance of addressing emotional and behavioral patterns in couples' interactions. By exploring the intricacies of how partner phubbing, gaslighting, and conflict resolution styles interconnect, researchers and practitioners can develop targeted interventions aimed at improving communication, enhancing emotional support, and fostering healthier relationships. This research not only contributes to the theoretical framework surrounding relationships but also has practical implications for promoting relational well-being and stability in contemporary society.

Partner phubbing and gaslighting can render conflicts in love relationships more intense. Though phubbing fosters emotional distance by limiting communication attempts during conflicts, gaslighting disrupts the capacity to facilitate effective discussion by modifying perceptions of reality (Musick & Bumpass, 2012). Together, these behaviors create a climate that complicates resolving conflicts. When these two patterns are merged, they might trap couples in a negative cycle: While gaslighting erodes trust and confidence, phubbing dissolves emotional connections. Couples can be caught in habits that limit effective conflict resolution as they face issues with such dynamics.

Although the distal influences of partner phubbing, gaslighting, and styles of conflict resolution on relationship satisfaction have been studied, there is no crisp understanding of their combined impact, especially with married and heterosexual adults. This study closes this gap via examination of the interrelations among these variables and their combined influence on relationship satisfaction in married and romantic heterosexual couples.

Method

Statement of the Problem

To understand the role of Partner Phubbing, Gaslighting, and Conflict Resolution Styles on Relationship Satisfaction among Married and Romantic Heterosexual Adults.

Objectives of the study

1. To determine the relationships between Partner Phubbing, Gaslighting, and Conflict Resolution Styles among Married and Romantic Heterosexual Adults.

2. To examine the influence of Partner Phubbing, Gaslighting, and Conflict Resolution Styles on Relationship Satisfaction among Married and Romantic Heterosexual Adults.
3. To analyze the difference in Relationship Satisfaction between Married and Romantic Heterosexual Adults.

Hypothesis

H01: There is no relationship between Partner Phubbing, Gaslighting, and Conflict Resolution Styles among Married and Romantic Heterosexual Adults.

H02: There is no influence of Partner Phubbing, Gaslighting, and Conflict Resolution Styles on Relationship Satisfaction among Married and Romantic Heterosexual Adults.

H03: There is no difference in Relationship Satisfaction between Married and Romantic Heterosexual Adults.

Operational definition of the variables

Partner Phubbing: The act of one partner ignoring the other in favor of using a mobile device during interactions, leading to feelings of neglect.

Gaslighting: A manipulative behavior where one partner causes the other to doubt their perceptions and reality, often resulting in confusion and decreased self-esteem.

Conflict Resolution Styles: The methods used by individuals to address disagreements, including avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, and collaboration.

Relationship Satisfaction: Overall sense of contentment, fulfillment, and happiness an individual feels in their romantic relationship. It reflects how well a person's emotional, psychological, and practical needs are being met by their partner and the relationship as a whole.

Sample

The sampling technique used was the purposive sampling method. A sample of 357 participants consisting of currently married and romantic relationships was taken for the study.

Inclusion criteria

Participants who have been in romantic relationships for at least one month.

Participants who have been married for at least one month.

Participants must have access to a mobile device (smartphone, tablet, or laptop).

Participants above the age of 18.

Exclusion criteria

Participants who are currently in a long-distance relationship/marriage.

Participants who are currently undergoing couple's therapy or individual therapy for relationship issues.

Procedure

The procedure for this study began with the identification of participants. Once participants expressed interest, a questionnaire was prepared using four scales (Couple Satisfaction Index, Partner Phubbing Scale, Gaslighting Relationship Exposure Inventory, and Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory), and Google Forms were sent out to collect data. Participants completed the online questionnaire, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality throughout the data collection. After collecting the responses, data analysis

was conducted using statistical software to examine the relationships between the variables. Ethical considerations were paramount; informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Assessment Tools

The Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI-4)

The Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI-4) is a 4-item measure of relationship satisfaction developed by Funk and Rogge in 2007. It has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, including excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .98$), strong convergent validity with existing scales like the Dyadic Adjustment Scale ($r = .89$), and robust support for measurement invariance across various groupings. This scale will be used as a screening tool to select participants who are in a relationship.

Partner Phubbing Scale

The Partner Phubbing Scale, developed by Roberts and David in 2016, comprises 9 items that assess the extent to which individuals experience partner phubbing in their relationships. The scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, including high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of approximately 0.83, indicating reliable measurement. Additionally, the scale has been validated across different cultural contexts, including adaptations for Iranian and Brazilian populations, which confirmed its reliability and validity in measuring partner phubbing behaviors in diverse settings.

Gaslighting Relationship Exposure Inventory (GREI)

The Gaslighting Relationship Exposure Inventory (GREI) was developed by researchers including Dr. Aimee L. D. C. G. de Jong and Dr. Marieke M. E. M. van der Laan in a study done in 2024. GREI is an 11-item measure designed to assess exposure to gaslighting by a romantic partner. The GREI has been shown to have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 in the U.S. and 0.91 in Mexico, demonstrating excellent internal consistency and reliability in measuring gaslighting experiences across different cultures.

Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI)

The Conflict Resolution Styles Inventory (CRSI), developed by Kurdek in 1994, is a 16-item questionnaire designed to assess individuals' preferred styles of conflict resolution in relationships. It measures four distinct styles: conflict engagement, withdrawal, compliance, and positive problem-solving. The CRSI has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, including good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.81 for the various styles.

Research ethics

Participants were informed about the study and can withdraw at any time.

Data was collected anonymously to protect identities.

Statistical analysis

Statistical analysis involving correlation, regression, and independent sample t-test was utilized in the study using JAMOV software.

Results

Table 1: Correlation for Relationship Satisfaction, Partner Phubbing, Gaslighting, and Conflict Resolution Styles

	Variables	N	1 ¹	2 ¹	3 ¹	4 ¹
1.	Relationship Satisfaction	357	-	-	-	-

2.	Partner Phubbing	357	-0.248***	-	-	-
3.	Gaslighting	357	-0.531***	0.489***	-	-
4.	Conflict Resolution Styles	357	-0.410***	0.446***	0.647***	-

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 1 shows a strong negative correlation was identified between relationship satisfaction (RS) and gaslighting (G), with a Spearman's rho of -0.531. Partner Phubbing (PP) also demonstrated a negative correlation with relationship satisfaction (RS), recorded at -0.204. Additionally, a positive correlation of 0.489 was found between gaslighting (G) and partner phubbing (PP). Conflict resolution styles (CRS) also exhibited a significant negative correlation with relationship satisfaction (RS), marked at -0.410. Moreover, a positive correlation of 0.446 was noted between gaslighting (G) and conflict resolution styles (CRS).

Table 2: Model Summary for linear regression of Relationship Satisfaction, Partner Phubbing, Gaslighting, and Conflict Resolution Styles

Predictor Variables	Standardized beta value	t	Model summary
Gaslighting	-0.259	-9.3	$R=0.526$; $R^2=0.276$
Partner Phubbing	0.033	1.09	Adjusted $R^2= 0.270$; $F=44.9$
Conflict Resolution Styles	0.020	0.67	$p<.001$

Note. Models estimated using a sample size of $N=357$

Table 2 shows the overall model is statistically significant in predicting relationship satisfaction, with an R^2 value of 0.276. This suggests that approximately 27.6% of the variance in relationship satisfaction can be explained by the predictors included in the model. The F-statistic was 44.93, which is significant at $p<0.01$, indicating that the model as a whole is a good fit. Gaslighting has a significant negative impact on relationship satisfaction, with an estimate of -0.2599 and a t-value of -9.391, which is statistically significant with $p<0.01$. The coefficient for partner phubbing was 0.0338 with a p-value of 0.276, indicating a lack of statistical significance. Similarly, the conflict resolution styles predictor had a coefficient of 0.0209 and a p-value of 0.502, suggesting no meaningful effect on relationship satisfaction.

Table 3: Difference between Married and Romantic Heterosexual Adults on Relationship Satisfaction

	Variables	N	t	Significance
1.	Relationship Satisfaction	322	9959	$<.001$

Table 3 indicates a statistically significant difference in relationship satisfaction between married and romantic heterosexual adults ($t = 9.959$, $p < 0.001$). This result strongly suggests that the relationship satisfaction levels of individuals in marriage differ significantly from those in non-marital romantic relationships. The high t -value signifies a robust effect size, pointing to the practical importance of marital status in understanding relationship satisfaction outcomes.

Discussion

The interplay between partner phubbing, gaslighting, and conflict resolution styles significantly impacts relationship satisfaction among married and romantic heterosexual adults. Understanding these relationships is essential for fostering healthier couple interactions in an increasingly technology-driven world.

The findings reveal significant correlations between relationship satisfaction and the other variables examined. Notably, relationship satisfaction is negatively correlated with partner phubbing ($r = -0.248$) and gaslighting ($r = -0.531$), indicating that higher levels of perceived partner phubbing and gaslighting experiences are associated with lower relationship satisfaction. This aligns with Johnson (2022), who noted that phubbing contributes to a perceived lack of attention and emotional neglect in relationships, thereby diminishing satisfaction. Furthermore, the strong negative correlation between gaslighting and relationship satisfaction supports Dickson et al. (2023), who highlighted that gaslighting often undermines trust and self-esteem, significantly affecting relational contentment.

Conversely, conflict resolution styles exhibited a positive correlation with partner phubbing ($r = 0.446$) and gaslighting ($r = 0.647$), suggesting that individuals who employ more constructive conflict resolution styles are less likely to experience negative impacts from phubbing and gaslighting. This finding echoes research by Adriani & Ratnasari (2021), which emphasizes that effective conflict resolution contributes to healthier relational dynamics and may mitigate harmful behaviors within partnerships.

Furthermore, the linear regression analysis indicates that gaslighting ($\beta = -0.259$) is a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, reinforcing its detrimental impact highlighted in prior literature. The model's R^2 value of 0.276 suggests that approximately 27.6% of the variance in relationship satisfaction can be explained by the predictor variables. This underscores a noteworthy finding; as gaslighting behaviors increase, relationship satisfaction diminishes, which is consistent with the conclusions drawn by March et al. (2023) regarding the destructive influence of manipulative tactics in intimate relationships.

Interestingly, partner phubbing and conflict resolution styles did not emerge as significant predictors of relationship satisfaction in this model, with β values of 0.033 and 0.020 respectively. This finding contrasts with the expectations set forth by Carnelley et al. (2023), who argue that perceived partner phubbing influences relationship quality. However, the lack of significance may suggest that while these variables correlate with relationship satisfaction, they do not independently contribute to explaining its variance when gaslighting is present. This highlights the critical role that gaslighting plays over other factors in determining relational outcomes, reinforcing the need for focused interventions on awareness and management of gaslighting behaviors in couples' therapy.

Moreover, there is a significant difference in relationship satisfaction between married and romantic heterosexual adults ($t = 9.959$, $p < .001$), suggesting that marital status plays a crucial role in influencing relationship dynamics and satisfaction levels. Previous research has indicated that marriage often fosters a greater sense of commitment and stability, which can enhance satisfaction (Gottman et al., 2019). This

difference underscores the potential advantages of the legal and social recognition inherent to marriage, contributing to improved relational satisfaction when compared to non-marital romantic partnerships.

The study highlights the complex interplay between partner phubbing, gaslighting, conflict resolution styles, and relationship satisfaction. Gaslighting significantly harms relationship satisfaction, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. While partner phubbing and conflict resolution styles do not independently predict satisfaction, their correlations suggest relevance for further exploration. Additionally, differences in satisfaction levels between married and romantic heterosexual adults emphasize the importance of relationship structure in understanding these dynamics.

Conclusion

The research underscores the profound interplay among partner phubbing, gaslighting, conflict resolution styles, and relationship satisfaction. By shedding light on these connections, the study not only contributes to the theoretical understanding of relationship dynamics but also suggests actionable pathways for enhancing relational well-being. Further research is needed to continuously explore these complex interactions and their ramifications on diverse populations, helping to refine interventions that promote healthier relationship experiences.

Limitations

This study has limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, as participants might provide socially desirable responses rather than reflecting their true feelings regarding partner phubbing and relationship satisfaction. Second, the study's focus on married and heterosexual adults restricts the generalizability of the findings to diverse populations, including LGBTQ+ individuals and those in nonmarital romantic relationships. Future research should aim to include a more diverse sample that reflects various demographics, such as age, cultural background, and socioeconomic status. Finally, technological advancements continue to evolve rapidly; therefore, the nature of mobile device interaction may change, potentially affecting the relevance of the findings in the future.

Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for both practitioners and individuals involved in romantic relationships. Mental health professionals and relationship counselors can utilize insights from this research to develop targeted interventions addressing the negative effects of partner phubbing and gaslighting. Given the demonstrated relationship between phubbing and diminished relationship satisfaction, couples may benefit from strategies aimed at fostering healthier communication practices and setting boundaries around technology use. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills, suggesting that therapy sessions could incorporate techniques that enhance couples' ability to navigate conflicts effectively. These targeted interventions could help mitigate the adverse impacts of disruptive technology on relationship quality, ultimately promoting a healthier dynamic between partners.

Directions for Further Research

Future research should focus on several key areas to build on the findings of this study. Longitudinal studies are needed to explore how the interactions between partner phubbing, gaslighting, and conflict

resolution styles develop over time, revealing potential causal relationships and offering a more comprehensive understanding of their impact on relationship satisfaction. Additionally, expanding the scope of research to include a more diverse population would enhance the generalizability of the findings and allow for comparative studies between different relationship types, such as LGBTQ+ couples, long-distance relationships, and non-marital partnerships. Finally, investigations into technological interventions, such as apps designed to promote mindful phone usage during interactions, could provide further insight into practical solutions for couples struggling with these issues. By addressing these areas, future research can continuously refine the understanding of relational dynamics and inform interventions that foster healthy relationship experiences in an increasingly digital world.

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