

Are You Satisfied?

Examining the Association between Marital and Parental Satisfaction, and Satir's Concept of Congruence

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ABSTRACT

Research demonstrates that marital and parental satisfaction influence each other, as those who have more satisfaction with their marital partners are generally more satisfied in their parenting practices, and vice-versa. Virginia Satir's concept of congruence is believed to improve relationships. Current researchers propose examining whether congruence, marital satisfaction and parental satisfaction influence each other. Married couples will be given the Bonnie Lee Congruence Scale, Cleminshaw-Guidubaldi Parent Satisfaction Scale, and ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. Researchers hypothesize that there will be a positive three-way interaction between the variables. Correlational analysis, a 3-way mixed model ANOVA, and Regression Analysis will be used to determine interactions among the variables. If the hypotheses are supported, this may further promote teaching congruency in therapeutic settings. Further implications and future research directions are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Virginia Satir is known as one of the founders of experiential systemic therapy. In her practice, Satir focused on two main concepts: self-esteem and an individual's *congruence*. When referring to congruence, Satir defined this concept as a state of being and communicating with others (Satir et al., 1991). Congruence is a state of awareness, openness and acceptance exhibited through a balanced flow of life energy through all experiential dimensions within an individual's body (Lee, 2002a). Congruence is multidimensional, as one's congruence consists of the intrapsychic, the interpersonal, as well as the universal-spiritual dimensions (Lee, 2002b; Satir, 1991). When examining congruence within personal interactions, studies have found that one's congruence can influence various types of relationships, such as improving one's religious and spiritual quest in their relationship with God (Lee, 2002a), more openness, growth and transformation within the couples system (Bentheim, 2005), as well as within the family system (family processes and family dynamics) (Wretman, 2016).

When examining the family system, there has been extensive research on the mother and father in the family, especially in terms of their marital relationship and the couple as parents. Researchers typically have specifically been interested in the couple's perceived fulfillment in their marital relationship, which is referred to as *marital satisfaction*, as well as their fulfillment in their relationship as parents, which is referred to as *parental satisfaction*. Previous research has shown that marital satisfaction and parental satisfaction influence each other, such as showing that how the couple practices parenting is a substantial trait in marital satisfaction (Pedro et al., 2012), as well as parental satisfaction and marital satisfaction influencing each other as role conflict in parenting is minimized when having a more supportive spouse (Werde et al., 1999).

While it has been shown that congruence influences family processes and dynamics, there has been no research that has shown the influence that congruence has on marital satisfaction or parental satisfaction. Additionally, there has been no research on any influences on congruence. Therefore, researchers are interested in determining whether there is an interaction between congruence, marital satisfaction, and parental satisfaction. We are interested to see if parental satisfaction positively or negatively influences congruence, as well as shows consistency in positively influencing marital satisfaction. Researchers are additionally interested to see whether marital satisfaction positively or negatively influences congruence, as well as shows consistency in positively influencing parental satisfaction. Finally, researchers are interested in determining whether congruence positively or negatively influences marital satisfaction and parental satisfaction separately.

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

Research Questions:

1. Does congruence positively or negatively impact both marital and parental satisfaction?
2. Does marital satisfaction effect congruence and parental satisfaction?
3. Does parental satisfaction influence congruence and marital satisfaction?

Hypotheses:

1. Higher congruency levels influence individuals to have both higher marital and parental satisfaction.
2. Higher marital satisfaction will produce higher levels of congruency and an increase in parental satisfaction.
3. Higher parental satisfaction will produce higher levels of congruency and an increase in marital satisfaction.

METHODS

Participants

- Monogamous cohabitating married couples (both heterosexual and homosexual) with child(ren), between the ages of 25-50.
- 100 couples (200 individuals)
- Recruitment will be via flyers posted in therapeutic agencies, email and social networks.

Procedures

- Two sets of couples will be allowed for one time slot. Each couple will be introduced to the study and informed consent will be obtained.
- Partners will be separated into two different rooms. Each member of the couple will be in the respective room for two hours. Cell phones will be removed and held in lockbox.
- Each participant will fill out questionnaires in two 40-minute increments, with a 10-minute break between each increment
 - 40 min. for Congruence Scale (75 Q's)
 - 40 min. for combined Marital and Parental Satisfaction (65 Q's)
- After completion, couples will be debriefed and excused

MEASURES

Bonnie Lee Congruence Scale

- 75 item, 7-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree).
- 3 aspects of congruence are measured: Interpersonal, Intrapsychic, Universal-Spiritual
- Higher mean scores will result in higher congruence ratings

Cleminshaw-Guidubaldi Parent Satisfaction Scale

- 50 item, 4-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 4-strongly agree)
- Five subscales: Spouse Support, Child-Parent Relationship, Parent Performance, Family Discipline/Control, & General Satisfaction.
- Higher mean scores will result in higher parental satisfaction ratings

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale

- 15 item, 5-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree, 5-strongly agree)
- Subscales: Marital Quality and Marital Conventionalization
- Higher mean scores will result in higher marital satisfaction ratings

- For each measure, overall mean scores will be created by combining all mean scores for each instrument and averaging them. This will determine whether congruency, parental satisfaction, or marital satisfaction ratings will be high (above the overall mean) or low (below the overall mean).

RESULTS

- Results will be obtained by using a combination of correlational analysis, as well as a 2 X 2 X 2 mixed model ANOVA to calculate a potential 3-way interaction.
- Correlational analysis will be used to determine whether any positive or negative correlations are present among the variables (congruence, marital satisfaction, and parental satisfaction).
- The 2 (Congruent vs. Incongruent) X 2 (Marital Satisfaction vs Marital Dissatisfaction) X 2 (Parental Satisfaction vs Parental Dissatisfaction) mixed model ANOVA will be used to determine whether the variables influence each other, whether there is an interaction among all of the variables, as well as take into account outside factors (e.g. factors outside of the variables influencing the interaction).
- In extra exploratory research, we plan to use Regression Analysis to determine potential causal effects for each variable on each other (e.g. does higher congruency cause healthier marital satisfaction or does more marital satisfaction improve parental fulfillment?)

DISCUSSION

- If a positive interaction between congruency, marital satisfaction and parental satisfaction is found, this evidence may support teaching congruency in therapeutic settings when working with married couples with kids. If higher congruency correlates with higher parental and marital satisfaction, then it is seen as beneficial for married couples with children to learn about congruency to potentially help with their marriage and their fulfilment as parents.
- Additionally, each variable may potentially have causal effects on each other. If this is correct, this may be extremely influential on helping couples determine what improves their satisfaction as parents and as a married dyad. If parental satisfaction is causing better marital satisfaction, then it would be wise to work on aspects of improving this aspect to improve both parental satisfaction and marital satisfaction. Same can be said with congruency causing marital satisfaction and/or parental satisfaction.
- Further research will need to be conducted in determining if gender plays a role in parental/marital satisfaction and congruence, as well as if the age of child(ren) determine the couples parental/marital satisfaction and congruence. Future research should also explore whether the congruency of the child(ren) determines the parental satisfaction of the married couple. Additional research may also be needed to determine whether sexuality influences the concept of congruency, and its effect on parental and marital satisfaction. Finally, future research should examine potential mediation effects of congruency on marital and parental satisfaction.

