

Conflicts in romantic relationships: a literature review



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Conflict. We all experience conflicts, arguments, or fights in our lives and in our relationships. It is present for and affects everyone, whether they have have platonic, intimate, close, friendly, or other types of relationships. Conflict exists whether someone is fifteen or fifty five years of age, but what does change are the topics causing the conflict. Conflicts within romantic relationships can lead to yelling, tears, hurt feelings, and sometimes even broken things, including broken hearts. Understanding the topics of conflict within romantic relationships is important because people sometimes express their frustrations as a way to produce a desired change to meet their personal needs within the relationships. My own relationships have brought this to my attention. I have started fights because I want something to change, because I wasn't happy with how things were. Disagreements and conflicts are inevitable, but vital to the evolution of any relationship. According to Jaelline Jaffe, Ph. D and Jeanne Segal, Ph. D (2007), disagreements will occur in any intimate relationship because it just isn't realistic (or possible) for two people to have the same expectations, ideas, needs, and/or opinions all of the time. Successfully resolving these relational disagreements is crucial for the development and continuance of all successful relationships. It is essential to ponder the topics of argument and then conflict management within relationships since literally everybody is involved in and needs relationships in one way or another. If we can better recognize the topics that create conflict within relationships, we could theoretically decrease the amount of conflict that is present and thus increase relationship satisfaction overall.

Guerrero et al. (2001) have identified conflict to be a “disagreement between two interdependent people who believe that they have dissenting goals.” Conflict plays a very significant role within romantic relationships. Not only does it potentially affect the duration of said relationship, but also the level of satisfaction each person has within that relationship. Julia T. Wood (2007) stated that “conflict affects the power dynamic between couples by forcing them to negotiate and renegotiate the extent to which they share power.” Guerrero et al. (2001) also said that close, romantic relationships that are devoid of conflict are rare, unrealistic, and highly extraordinary. Essentially, relationships just cannot exist without some kind of conflict. “In truth, satisfied couples are more likely to discuss issues of discrepancy, whereas discontented couples are more likely to abate or elude conflict” (Guerrero et al., 2001). Even though conflict is so prevalent in relationships, very few scholars have actually done significant research on the subject (Walker, 2000). The “dark side” of relationships, that much of the research refers to, is generally considered to be the “bad” things; fighting, disagreement/arguments, and conflict. It is very difficult to understand conflict within relationships and how to manage it since scholars have not yet completely broken into the realm of interpersonal conflicts. Guerrero et al. state, “the need to examine the dark side of close relationships is more important than focusing on the positive aspects of interpersonal relationships.” Walker goes on to say that studies have a “Pollyanna-like perspective which only highlights that individuals need to be open, honest, polite, and attractive in relationships, while ignoring other negative relational dynamics.” As Walker also states, conflict is just as essential (and common) in relationships as the positive aspects, thus <https://assignbuster.com/conflicts-in-romantic-relationships-a-literature-review/>

creating validity and the necessity to cultivate a better understanding of the topics that people fight about in relationships (Walker, 2000).

There are not many things in this world that are more communicative than emotions can be. “ A rapidly growing body of research indicates that the transition from casual dating to serious commitment is marked by intensified emotions, increased emotional jealousy, greater reactivity to conflict and uncertainty, and more negative appraisals of irritations” (Theiss & Soloman, 2006). The first fight a couple might have may occur at this point in their relationship progress, the beginning. The couples who dissolved their relationship after the first big fight reported having been feeling chaotic or ambiguous about their relationship as a whole (Guerrero et al., 2001).

Accordingly, the partners who stayed together gained a greater comprehension of their emotional state with regards to each other, felt like they were well suited to problem solve together, and were assured that both would be willing to make sacrifices for the relationship/each other. Guerrero et al. (2001) estimated that “ most romantic couples have somewhere between 1-3 disagreements per week, of which 1 or 2 disagreements each month is particularly unpleasant. Additionally, couples who are dissatisfied often experience 5. 4 incidences of conflict over a 5-day period.” Guerrero et al. (2001) state that “ most disagreements are related to the fair division of household labor, jealousy and possessiveness, sex, money and possessions, the social network (including families), and children.” More research has shown that work has an effect on relationships, including unearthing stressors such as low support from partners, the amount of time devoted to relationship activities, and even issues such potential children and their

ages/names (Cinamon, 2006). In addition, partners might complain about the amount of time spent together and justify engaging in infidelities (Guerrero et al., 2001). Arguments about sex, household chores, money, jealousy, possessions, social media, the future, and children are of course not the lone or single sources of disagreement that couples can experience, but they tend to be the most frequent types of conflict within intimate and romantic relationships.

After distinguishing what types of conflict can arise, it is particularly important to also understand that there are different levels of conflict as well. Guerrero et al. (2001) claim that there are four levels of conflict. As defined by Guerrero et al. (2001), the first conflict level is when couples argue about “ specific, concrete behaviors such as how to specifically clean the kitchen. The second level of conflict is when couples argue about relational rules and norms such as working late without informing your partner or forgetting your significant other’s birthday or anniversary” (Guerrero et al., 2001). Thirdly, Guerrero et al. define the third level of conflict to be when partners argue about their varying personality traits. Finally, the fourth level of conflict is when couples “ argue about the process of conflict itself, otherwise known as metaconflict. This may also include accusing your partner of pouting, nagging, throwing a temper tantrum, not listening, or fighting unfairly” (Guerrero et al., 2001).

In conclusion, the research reviewed in this literature review has suggested that conflict within relationships occurs very commonly and in nearly all relationships. We can assume that the majority of couples involved

romantically will experience 1-3 disagreements per week (Guerrero et al., <https://assignbuster.com/conflicts-in-romantic-relationships-a-literature-review/>

2001). These studies also suggest that a majority of arguments among couples are a product of money, sex, household duties, jealousy, social media, the future, and children. Additionally, the research demonstrated four levels of conflict, which can be alleviated once the topics are identified and conflict management employed.

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