

Effect of Power Source and Conflict Coping Strategy on Marital Relationships

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This study explored the marital power from the spouses' perception and the perspective of power source-process-outcome, distinguished the patterns of power source among couples, and examined whether the effects of dyadic power source patterns on marital quality was different due to the conflict-coping strategy and the gender. Data were collected from 342 married couples in Greater Taipei area. The measurement included six sources of power (referent, coercive, reward, expert, informational and legitimate powers) reported by the spouse, conflict-coping strategies (dialogic, evasive and controversial strategies by second order factor analysis), marital quality (satisfaction and regret), and control variables. The main results showed that (1) husbands perceived their wives had higher coercive, reward, expert and legitimate powers, and wives evaluated their husbands had higher informational power. Wives used more controversial strategy than husbands, while husbands reported higher levels of marital quality than wives. (2) The dyadic power source patterns could be identified as Husband Authority, Dual Multiple Powers, Husband Knowledgeable and Wife Knowledgeable. The four patterns had proportions of about 9%, 24%, 24% and 43%, respectively. (3) The results of hierarchical linear models showed that the Dual Multiple Powers couples reported the highest marital quality than the other three. Couples who used higher dialogic, lower evasive, or lower controversial strategy had better marital quality. Moreover, the interaction terms of gender and dyadic power source pattern and conflict-coping strategy showed significant effects on marital quality. These results highlight the unique role and function of power sources and conflict-coping strategies in the marital relationships.

Keywords: *conflict-coping strategy, marital quality, patterns of marital power, power sources*

Extended Abstract

Most research on wife-husband marital power has focused on the “final say” in family decision making, distinguishing marital power types as Wife Dominant, Husband Dominant, or Egalitarian regarding general, major, or the most important family affairs (Webster, 1998). The impacts on marital power of relative resources, cultural norms, family structure, family development stage, and mutual dependence and need have been analyzed and discussed (Chien & Yi, 2014).

However, some scholars have pointed out the diversified, dynamic, and procedural features of power and have emphasized the complex dynamic process of power operation between wife and husband. Cromwell and Olson (1975) delineated three domains of family

power: bases, processes, and outcomes. The bases of family power primarily comprise six types of resources that individuals may possess that increase their ability to exercise control in a given situation. The family power processes focus on the interactions between family members, including negotiating and bargaining as strategies for conflict solution, persuasion, and control. The outcomes include communicative consequences and effects on decision making, division of labor, and marital quality.

With respect to bases/sources of power, French and Raven (1959) and Raven, Centers, and Rodrigues (1975) refer to six principal bases of power in social relations: coercive, reward, expert, legitimate, referent,

and informational power, which are based, respectively, on punishment, return/reward, superior knowledge, rights conferred by group or organizational norms, identification, and persuasive mastery. Of particular importance is that the bases/sources of social power of one person (O) over another person (P) are defined psychologically in terms of how P perceives the situation. Particularly in a wife-husband interaction, the spouse's perception and evaluation of the individual are more meaningful than the individual's own.

Nevertheless, a scale for the source of social power in marital couples has not yet been developed. In fact, very little empirical research has examined multi-dimensional power sources and the power process in couples. Taking the power source–process–outcome perspective, this study used the spouse's perceptions to examine the multi-dimensional sources of marital power and distinguish the patterns of power sources in marital couples. Figure 1 shows the research framework used to explore the dyadic power source patterns, conflict-coping strategies, and marital quality.

Methods

The participants were 342 married Taiwanese couples from the greater Taipei area who had been married for an average of 17.38 years ($SD = 13.57$). The average age was 45.92 years for the husbands and 43.20 years for the wives.

The main variables examined in this study were power source, conflict coping strategy, and marital quality.

The power source scale included 21 items based on the six sources of power defined by French and Raven (1959) and the characteristics of the wife-husband relationship. The answers were based on a 4-point Likert-type scale. The result of the confirmatory factor analysis showed that the power sources could be divided into six categories: referent (e.g., "Her/his demeanor is worth learning"), coercive (e.g., "If I don't obey her/his intentions, s/he will be angry and giving attitude"), reward (e.g., "S/he will appreciate me and praise me"), expert (e.g., "S/he is very capable in handling the daily chores"), informational (e.g., "Her/his knowledge is very broad"), and legitimate (e.g., "S/he believes the ideal division of labor is husband as breadwinner and wife as housekeeper").

The conflict coping strategy scale developed by Jou (2009) was used, which includes 24 items and 7 factors and uses a 4-point Likert-type scale. The seven conflict-coping strategies (reason appeal, concealment and cold war, tolerance and acquiescent endurance, nagging, self-harm, intercession by others, and indirect appeal) were combined into "dialogic," "evasive," and "controversial" strategies during the second-order factor analysis.

The marital quality scale comprised 14 items in two subscales, satisfaction and regret, and the control and demographic variables comprised degree of conflict, educational level, years of marriage, number of children, and monthly income of the family.

Results

Repeated t-test analysis was used to test the

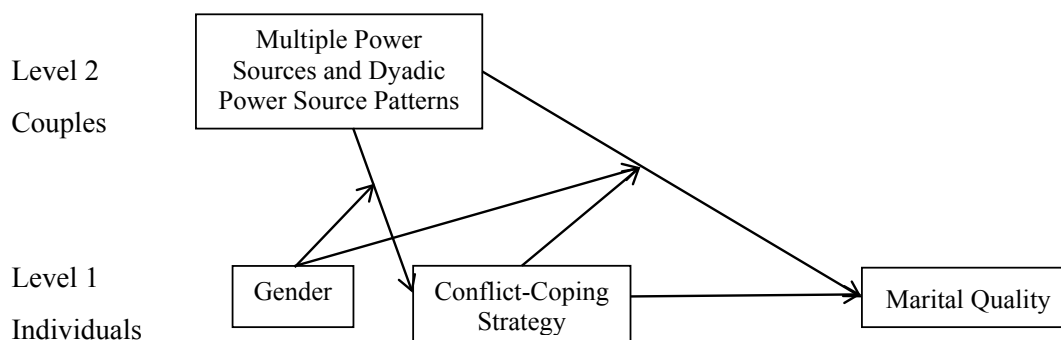


Figure 1. Research Framework

differences between husbands and wives. The husbands perceived their wives to have greater coercive, reward, expert, and legitimate power, and the wives perceived their husbands to have greater informational power. The wives made more use of controversial strategies than their husbands, whereas husbands reported better marital quality than wives. These results are generally consistent with the results of previous studies.

A latent profile analysis was used to characterize the pattern and distribution of the couples' dyadic power sources. Based on the fit statistics and distinct patterns, a four-class model was selected as the best fit. In the first category, Husband Authority, the wives perceived that their husbands had greater coercive and legitimate power, whereas the husbands perceived that their wives had less power of all types. In the second category, Dual Multiple Power, both husbands and wives perceived their spouse to have greater reward, expert, informational, and referent power. In the third category, Husband Knowledgeable, wives perceived their husbands to have greater expert, informational, referent, and legitimate power, but husbands did not perceive this to apply to

their wives. In the fourth category, Wife Knowledgeable, husbands perceived their wives to have greater expert, informational, referent, and legitimate power, whereas the wives did not perceive this to apply to their husbands. The proportions of the four patterns were about 9%, 24%, 24%, and 43%, respectively. The results are shown in Table 1.

A hierarchical linear model was used to test the effects of the dyadic power source patterns and gender on the couples' conflict-coping strategies using the following equations.

Level 1 (individuals):

$$\text{Conflict coping strategy} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{gender}) + \beta_{2j}(\text{conflict}) + \varepsilon_{ij}$$

Level 2 (couples):

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01-03}(\text{dyadic power source patterns}) + \delta_{0j}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10-40} + \gamma_{11-13}(\text{dyadic power source patterns})$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20}$$

The main results indicated that wives made

Table 1. Dyadic Power Source Patterns

| | Total | Pattern 1 | Pattern 2 | Pattern 3 | Pattern 4 |
|---|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <u>Wives' power sources evaluated by husbands</u> | | | | | |
| Coercive | 2.05 | 2.12 | 1.83 | 2.12 | 2.12 |
| Reward | 3.10 | 2.56 | 3.61 | 2.72 | 3.13 |
| Expert | 2.95 | 2.68 | 3.34 | 2.33 | 3.13 |
| Informational | 2.85 | 2.62 | 3.22 | 2.27 | 3.00 |
| Referent | 2.94 | 2.65 | 3.33 | 2.53 | 3.01 |
| Legitimate | 2.60 | 2.56 | 2.81 | 2.48 | 2.56 |
| <u>Husbands' power sources evaluated by wives</u> | | | | | |
| Coercive | 1.85 | 2.27 | 1.70 | 1.96 | 1.77 |
| Reward | 2.90 | 1.91 | 3.49 | 2.84 | 2.83 |
| Expert | 2.60 | 1.49 | 3.31 | 2.74 | 2.38 |
| Informational | 2.97 | 1.77 | 3.53 | 3.20 | 2.81 |
| Referent | 2.93 | 1.90 | 3.47 | 2.99 | 2.81 |
| Legitimate | 2.41 | 2.83 | 2.36 | 2.52 | 2.28 |
| Proportion | 1.00 | .0949 | .2384 | .2350 | .4316 |

Note. Pattern 1: Husband Authority; Pattern 2: Dual Multiple Power; Pattern 3: Husband Knowledgeable; Pattern 4: Wife Knowledgeable

more use of controversial strategies, and couples who reported greater conflict used more of both evasive and controversial strategies. Dual Multiple Power couples reported the greatest dialogic and lowest use of evasive strategies compared to the other three. The effect of dyadic power source patterns on evasive strategies differed by gender, as Husband Knowledgeable wives used more evasive strategies than the Dual Multiple Power wives, whereas there was no evasive strategy difference between the husbands in these two patterns.

Finally, hierarchical linear models were used to test the effects of the dyadic power source patterns and conflict-coping strategies on marital quality. Three different two-level hierarchical linear models were used as follows.

Baseline model

Level 1 (individuals): Marital quality = $\beta_{0j} + \varepsilon_{ij}$

Level 2 (couples): $\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \delta_{0j}$

Model 1: Main effect

Level 1 (individuals):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Marital quality} = & \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{gender}) + \beta_{2j}(\text{conflict}) \\ & + \beta_{3-5j}(\text{conflict coping strategy}) \\ & + \varepsilon_{ij} \end{aligned}$$

Level 2 (couples):

$$\begin{aligned} \beta_{0j} &= \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01-03}(\text{dyadic power source patterns}) + \delta_{0j} \\ \beta_{1-5j} &= \gamma_{1-50} \end{aligned}$$

Model 2: Interactive effect

Level 1 (individuals):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Marital quality} = & \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{gender}) + \beta_{2j}(\text{conflict}) \\ & + \beta_{3-5j}(\text{conflict coping strategy}) \\ & + \beta_{6-8j}(\text{gender}) * (\text{conflict coping} \\ & \text{strategy}) + \varepsilon_{ij} \end{aligned}$$

Level 2 (couples):

$$\begin{aligned} \beta_{0j} &= \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01-03}(\text{dyadic power source patterns}) + \delta_{0j} \\ \beta_{mj} &= \gamma_{m0} + \gamma_{m1-m3}(\text{dyadic power source patterns}), \\ & m = 1, 3-8 \\ \beta_{2j} &= \gamma_{20} \end{aligned}$$

The results of the hierarchical linear models are shown in Table 2. The Dual Multiple Power couples

reported the highest marital quality of the four types of couples. Couples who used higher dialogic, lower evasive, or lower controversial strategies had better marital quality.

Furthermore, the interaction terms for gender, dyadic power source pattern, and conflict coping strategy showed significant effects on marital quality. In Husband Authority couples, wives had lower marital quality than husbands, and a dialogic strategy enhanced their satisfaction. For Husband Knowledgeable couples, evasive strategies reduced their satisfaction. In the lower dialogic strategy group, Husband Authority husbands had greater regret than Dual Multiple Powers husbands, but this was not true for their wives; however, in the higher dialogic strategy group, Husband Authority wives reported greater regret than Dual Multiple Power wives, but this was not true for their husbands. In the lower evasive strategy group, Husband Knowledgeable wives had lower regret than Dual Multiple Power wives, while Husband Knowledgeable husbands had greater regret than Dual Multiple Power husbands, but this was not true for their wives. However, in the higher evasive strategy group, Husband Knowledgeable wives had greater regret than Dual Multiple Power wives.

Discussion

First, husbands perceived their wives to have greater coercive, reward, expert, and legitimate power, while wives perceived their husbands to have greater information power; that is, husbands evaluated their wives' as having multiple forms of power, and also felt their spouses were more likely to be angry and giving attitude; in contrast, wives perceived their husbands to have greater knowledge and information skills. This is quite consistent with our general observation of couples (Perelberg & Miller, 2011).

Second, at the dyadic level, marital couples' power source patterns were classified into four distinct types, Husband Authority, Dual Multiple Power, Husband Knowledgeable, and Wife Knowledgeable, based on the multi-dimensional power integration derived from spouses' evaluations. Reward, expert, informational,

Table 2. The Main Results of Hierarchical Linear Model

| | Satisfaction | | Regret | |
|---|--------------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| | <i>b</i> | <i>s.e.</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>s.e.</i> |
| Intercept | 25.34*** | .35 | 10.22*** | .38 |
| Gender (Husband=1, wife=-1) | .03 | .18 | -.04 | .21 |
| Conflict | -.07*** | .01 | .07*** | .01 |
| <u>Dyadic power source patterns^a</u> | | | | |
| Pattern 1 | -5.08*** | .70 | 3.76*** | .75 |
| Pattern 3 | -2.92*** | .47 | 1.02* | .49 |
| Pattern 4 | -2.45*** | .41 | .94* | .43 |
| <u>Conflict-coping strategy</u> | | | | |
| Dialogic | .72 | .46 | -2.03*** | .49 |
| Evasive | -.23 | .42 | .31 | .45 |
| Controversial | -.14 | 1.06 | .03 | 1.15 |
| <u>Gender*Dyadic power source patterns</u> | | | | |
| Gender*Pattern 1 | 2.30*** | .50 | -1.68** | .56 |
| Gender*Pattern 3 | .02 | .27 | .05 | .31 |
| Gender*Pattern 4 | .52* | .23 | -.40 | .25 |
| <u>Pattern*Strategy</u> | | | | |
| Pattern 1* Dialogic | 2.36** | .90 | .44 | .98 |
| Pattern 3* Dialogic | .89 | .69 | .30 | .75 |
| Pattern 4* Dialogic | .62 | .57 | .54 | .61 |
| Pattern 1* Evasive | .97 | .79 | .07 | .86 |
| Pattern 3* Evasive | -1.35* | .64 | 1.22 | .69 |
| Pattern 4* Evasive | -.26 | .54 | .34 | .58 |
| Pattern 1* Controversial | -1.44 | 1.66 | 3.62* | 1.80 |
| Pattern 3* Controversial | -.63 | 1.25 | 2.35 | 1.35 |
| Pattern 4* Controversial | -1.79 | 1.21 | 1.93 | 1.30 |
| <u>Gender*Pattern*Strategy</u> | | | | |
| Gender*Pattern 1* Dialogic | 1.02 | .71 | -1.68* | .78 |
| Gender*Pattern 3* Dialogic | .27 | .44 | -.77 | .49 |
| Gender*Pattern 4* Dialogic | .00 | .27 | .37 | .30 |
| Gender*Pattern 1* Evasive | .32 | .60 | -1.08 | .67 |
| Gender*Pattern 3* Evasive | .20 | .44 | -1.06* | .49 |
| Gender*Pattern 4* Evasive | -.17 | .29 | -.29 | .32 |
| Gender*Pattern 1* Controversial | -.80 | 1.13 | -2.22 | 1.25 |
| Gender*Pattern 3* Controversial | .75 | .58 | .46 | .65 |
| Gender*Pattern 4* Controversial | .41 | .50 | -.32 | .55 |
| <u>Random Effect</u> | | | | |
| Couples level | 3.5100*** | | 3.3600*** | |
| Individual level | 5.3016 | | 6.7024 | |

^a Pattern 1: Husband Authority; Pattern 2: Dual Multiple Power (referent group); Pattern 3: Husband Knowledgeable; Pattern 4: Wife Knowledgeable.* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

and referent power sources have relatively similar properties in that they are more intellectual, implicit, and soft. However, these properties have been relatively neglected in prior marital power research. Relative to the family decision-making types of Blood and Wolfe (1960), the patterns of Husband Authority and Husband Knowledgeable correspond to the Husband Dominant type, the pattern of Dual Multiple Power corresponds to the Egalitarian type, and the pattern of Wife Knowledgeable corresponds to the Wife Dominant type. In about 25% of the couples in this study, both parties had similar powers; in about 35%, the husbands held greater power; and in over 40%, the wives held greater power. These patterns reflect the characteristics of marital couples in the Greater Taipei area.

In particular, there were noteworthy effects of these dyadic power source patterns on conflict coping strategies and marital quality. Among the power source categories, the Dual Multiple Power couples had the best marital quality, suggesting that marital relationships may benefit when both wife and husband evaluate their spouse's power source similarly. This finding is consistent with Kao and Lu (2006), who found that conjugal congruence on individual traditionality/modernity was positively related to marital adjustment. In contrast, if the husband was perceived to have greater power (Husband Authority and Husband Knowledgeable), the couple responded negatively, with wives especially preferring evasive strategies. However, if the wife was perceived to have

greater or equal power, the couple adopted a positive coping strategy. This indicates that the sources of marital power do influence the choice of conflict coping strategy.

Finally, the effect of the dyadic power source on marital quality varied according to the choice of conflict coping strategy, and the direct or indirect effect differed for wives and husbands. Use of the dialogic strategy promoted satisfaction in Husband Authority couples, whereas evasive and controversial strategies reduced marital quality in Husband Knowledgeable couples. Notably, however, use of dialogic strategies increased regret among wives in Husband Authority couples. Perhaps, in the face of a traditional and severe husband, the wife's rational and soft communication could alleviate the negative impact of conflict but cause greater pressure on the wife, who has fewer power sources. In this situation, if the husband spontaneously adopts a dialogic strategy when facing conflict, the marital quality improves for both parties.

Future studies could explore the power source characteristics of other interpersonal relationships (e.g., parent-child, siblings, peers, work colleagues). In addition, this study used cross-sectional data, but the long-term nature of marital life should be considered, as should changes due to life experience or major life events. Long-term and follow-up studies should be conducted to examine the longitudinal associations and transitions between marital power sources, marital interactions, and marital quality.