

Exploring the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in couples: role of self-esteem in aggressive and submissive coping styles

Exploración de la Profecía Autocumplida en la pareja: papel de la autoestima en estilos de afrontamientos agresivos y sumisos

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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Introduction: Self-fulfilling prophecy involves an erroneous contextualization that can influence behavior and confirm original beliefs. This prophecy can be positive (Pygmalion) or negative (Golem) and occurs in significant relationships. It is postulated that low self-esteem may contribute to this phenomenon, and that different coping styles, such as submission, aggression, assertiveness, and passive aggression, according to the two-dimensional model of assertiveness, may be related to self-fulfilling prophecy. The hypothesis posits the correlation between submissive coping styles and low self-esteem with the self-fulfilling prophecy in interpersonal relationships. Also that aggressive coping styles and high self-esteem are related to this phenomenon. **Method:** The sample consisted of 15 heterosexual couples between 18 and 30 years old, with at least one year of relationship and were administered the ASPA, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale and an Ad Hoc. questionnaire. **Results:** The results revealed a significant inverse association between male self-esteem and self-fulfilling prophecy in men with a submissive style, explaining 38% of the variance of the dependent variable. **Discussion:** This supports the hypothesis that low self-esteem along with a submissive style are related to self-fulfilling prophecy. It is important to keep in mind the limitations of this study, such as the small sample size and the possibility of desirability bias.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave:

efecto golem, profecía autocumplida, autoestima, estilos de afrontamiento, relaciones interpersonales.

Introducción: La profecía autocumplida supone una contextualización errónea que puede influir en el comportamiento y confirmar las creencias originales. Esta profecía puede ser positiva (Pígalión) o negativa (Golem) y ocurre en relaciones significativas. Se postula que la baja autoestima puede contribuir a este fenómeno, y que los diferentes estilos de afrontamiento, tales como la sumisión, la agresión, la asertividad y la agresión pasiva, según el modelo bidimensional de la asertividad, pueden estar relacionados con la profecía autocumplida. La hipótesis plantea la correlación entre los estilos de afrontamiento sumisos y una baja

autoestima con la profecía autocumplida en relaciones interpersonales. También que los estilos de afrontamiento agresivos y una alta autoestima están relacionados con este fenómeno. **Metodología:** La muestra consistió en 15 parejas heterosexuales de entre 18 y 30 años, con al menos un año de relación y se les administraron el ASPA, la escala de Autoestima de Rosenberg y un cuestionario Ad Hoc. **Resultados:** Los resultados revelaron una asociación significativa inversa entre la autoestima masculina y la profecía autocumplida en hombres con un estilo sumiso, explicando el 38% de la varianza de la variable dependiente. **Discusión:** Esto respalda la hipótesis de que una baja autoestima junto con un estilo de sumisión está relacionada con la profecía autocumplida. Es importante tener en cuenta las limitaciones de este estudio, como el tamaño reducido de la muestra y la posibilidad de sesgo de deseabilidad social. Estas áreas podrían ser abordadas en futuras investigaciones para mejorar nuestra comprensión de este fenómeno.

Introduction

In the complexity of couple relationships, dynamics unfold that go beyond the mere interaction between two individuals. At times, emotional relationships become so intertwined that individual identity is compromised for the sake of meeting the needs and expectations of the other (Smith & Johnson, 2018). This phenomenon, known as loss of identity in favor of relationship, poses a blurred line where the boundaries between "I" and "we" become blurred, leaving room for mutual influence and conformity to the partner's desires.

This dynamic bears similarities to self-fulfilling prophecy, a phenomenon that explains how one person's expectations about another's behavior can influence the latter's performance and development (Jones et al., 2020). The self-fulfilling prophecy, described by Marton (1948), involves an erroneous contextualization that will determine an action that will make that contextualization true. A more current view on this self-fulfilling prophecy talks about how, in an interaction, whether inter- or intrapersonal, expectations toward a situation condition the behavioral response to meet those expectations (Sternberg, 2011; Madon et al., 2011). In the event that the subject about whom expectations were held fulfills that false belief, what is known as a self-fulfilling prophecy will occur. From this concept, two types of effects were successfully described: the Pygmalion Effect, which refers to how positive expectations about a person improve that person's performance, and the Golem Effect, which refers to how negative expectations about a person determine poor performance (Babad, Inbar, & Rosenthal, 1982; Davidson & Eden, 2000; Leung & Sy, 2018).

This need for validation can give rise to the Golem Effect, as described by Rowe and O'Brien (2002), where a connection is made between one person's negative expectations and another's poor behavioral performance. These expectations usually originate from significant figures such as parents, teachers, bosses and even highly relevant interpersonal relationships (Rowe and O'Brien, 2002). Expectations can accumulate over time, and studies have shown that they exert a stronger influence as the relationship lengthens, becoming stronger over time (Madon et al., 2011). It has been concluded that these expectations exert a stronger influence and shape the behavior of the other person more clearly as time passes in that affective relationship. This is because a person's expectations are dynamic, not static, and tend to intensify with the strengthening of the relationship, compounding the initial prophecy (Madon et al., 2011).

Studies conducted about self-fulfilling prophecy have had a tendency to target education, focusing on the relationship between teachers and students (Solís García and Borja González, 2017; Máñez and Fernández, 2020; Sánchez and Pacora, 2023; Cobos-Sanchiz et al., 2020; Madon et al., 2011). Here, the direct relationship between the affective-emotional bond generated between the two was shown as the main factor for this Pygmalion or Golem Effect to occur, and the frequency of their interaction and the quality of these interactions, a pleasant climate and positive reinforcement by the teacher were highlighted. Fortunately, this limitation was an impetus for other authors such as Madon, et al. (2008) who focused on a maternal-filial relationship to carry out several longitudinal studies in which they verified that outside the field of education it is also possible for self-fulfilling prophecy to occur. Within a romantic relationship, a study showed the ability of partners to modulate the perceived emotionality of their partners based on their expectations (Sels et al., 2017) thus relating to self-fulfilling prophecy.

These studies also sought to test the hypothesized causal relationship between self-fulfilling prophecy and self-verification theory as an independent variable (Madon et al., 2011). This theory accounts for the genuine human characteristic of wanting to fulfill one's own concepts even if they are negative, as it allows maintaining the stability of the self and helps to

predict the environment (Swann, et al, 2002). Maintaining coherence and stability is something common in human beings, this protects us against uncertainty and allows us to manage the future, which is basic to learning. Social interaction plays a key role in the construction of self-concept, since, according to Swann et al. (2002) this is developed from the observation of the reactions of the environment. Social experiences influence the formation of the belief system that includes the idea of oneself in one's environment. Furthermore, it was verified that the effects of these beliefs are long-lasting and tend to stability (Madon et al., 2011), as they are integrated into the personal self-concept. Therefore, individuals tend to reaffirm and reinforce these beliefs in order to maintain the coherence of their self-image.

Leung and Sy (2018) investigated self-concept as a mediator of the Golem Effect, indicating that a strong and positive self-concept can alleviate the effect of expectations on subject behavior. Self-concept is defined as the set of perceptions that the subject has of him/herself in different areas based on his/her experience and interactions (Gutiérrez and Martín, 2021). This self-concept has a valuational component of the person towards himself/herself, this corresponds to self-esteem, which, although they are constructs with similarities, they differ from each other. Self-esteem is a construct that varies in its definition, but it can be defined as the affective component of a person with respect to him/herself, in addition to including a link with what is related to those self-expectations in relation to him/herself, his/her social environment and his/her future (Gutiérrez and Martín, 2021).

Self-esteem is largely built by the subject's social relationships, and interpersonal romantic relationships are one of the major influences on a person's self. The affective partner's own expectations, or the context of the relationship, condition the person creating this self-fulfilling prophecy, influencing the subject's behavior and *self* in a more direct way than in other types of relationships (Downey et al., 1998). Here, research has focused on the influence of couple conflict in conditioning the cognitions and behaviors of the couple. One trait is mentioned within the couple, sensitivity to rejection (Downey et al., 1998). This trait is a continuum ranging from high or low sensitivity and describes the person's anxiety to rejection or anger from his or her partner that may lead to the end of the relationship. From this point on, a person with a high sensitivity to rejection will seek to meet the expectations and pleasures of his or her partner to avoid a breakup, fulfilling the self-fulfilling prophecy. It is then when self-esteem emerges as a fundamental variable in these processes. Those with strong self-esteem can maintain a sense of identity and autonomy within the relationship, resisting the pressure to conform completely to the other's expectations (Garcia & Martinez, 2019). In contrast, those with low self-esteem may feel a greater need to seek external validation, sacrificing their individuality in the process.

In relation to conflicts in couple relationships, according to the two-dimensional model of assertion, 4 types of coping style are distinguished when faced with a conflict situation in the couple (Carrasco, 2013). These form a spectrum where 4 features are distinguished, at the extremes would be located: Submission (S) and Aggression (AG). Carrasco (2013) defines them as follows: Aggression (AG) is the expression of feelings or opinions using coercive force to seek agreement, this force may be expressed through punishment or threats of possible punishment; Assertion (AS) is a way of expressing both positive and negative emotions in a clear and respectful direct manner; Passive Aggression (PA) encompasses those responses that include a direct non-expression of communication and yet an indirect coercive style through punishment or threats; finally, Submission (S) involves the total lack of expressiveness of feelings and opinions, lowering oneself to the authority of the other person.

Murray Bowen's systems theory, according to Kerr and Bowen (1988; cited in Lampis et al., 2017), emphasizes the importance of differentiation of the self in interpersonal dynamics. This differentiation implies the ability to maintain close emotional relationships with others without losing emotional autonomy. According to this theory, highly differentiated individuals

are able to resolve conflicts in a calm and effective manner, which may correspond to an AS style of conflict resolution. On the other hand, those with low differentiation tend to react by resorting to mechanisms such as emotional fusion, which corresponds to an S style, or emotional reactivity, which corresponds to AG, and may also resort to AP styles to coerce their partner depending on the sentimentality that has occurred. Individuals who lose that individuality react by attempting to adopt the values and attitudes of the other, satisfying their partner's needs and expectations at the expense of their own needs and desires (Lampis et al., 2017; Skowron and Friedlander 1998; Skowron and Schmitt 2003; Skowron et al., 2003). In addition, the study by Fišerová et al. (2021) addressed gender differences in conflict styles in couples, observing more reactivity in women and avoidance in men.

Thus, it is hypothesized that submissive coping styles, combined with low self-esteem, are correlated with the manifestation of self-fulfilling prophecy in interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, aggressive coping styles, together with high self-esteem, are correlated with the occurrence of self-fulfilling prophecy in such contexts.

Method

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 15 couples, totaling 30 subjects. Inclusion criteria required that couples were heterosexual, had been in a relationship for at least one year, were in the age range of 18 to 30 years, and that at least one partner was a college student. Exclusion criteria included not understanding the Spanish language, none of the members being students, and inability to understand the tests.

Instruments

This study has 3 evaluation instruments. The Assertion Questionnaire in Couple, or ASPA (Carrasco, 2013) tries to find out coping styles of conflict coping in the couple in 4 dimensions. It is divided into two parts, part A deals with how the subject perceives the partner and part B with how the subject perceives his or her partner. Both parts, A and B, consist of 40 Likert-type response items (1 almost never, 6 almost always), 10 for each coping style (assertive, submissive, passive-aggressive and aggressive). Part A obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 and part B of 0.90.

Also included is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), the validated Spanish version (Morejón et al., 2004). This test consists of 10 Likert scale items (1 strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree). It shows an internal consistency of between 0.76 - 0.87, and a reliability of 0.8. The first 5 items are written in positive and the last 5 in negative to avoid bias or random responses.

Participants must also complete an Ad Hoc questionnaire (See Appendix 1) specifically designed to explore partner expectations and possible changes in behavior through the presentation of four hypothetical situations. Each situation contains four questions that inquire about anticipated thoughts, feelings, actions, and beliefs about the partner. This questionnaire allows for open-ended responses, making it easy for participants to express their thoughts and emotions in a detailed and free manner. Its inclusion in the study seeks to complement the quantitative measurements of the previous instruments, providing qualitative information on everyday aspects not addressed in the previous tests.

Procedure

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the European University of the Atlantic and the sample was recruited through the snowball system, disseminating a link through social networks. Participants had the option to sign the informed consent and comply with the Organic Law on Data Protection to provide their personal data. Once enrolled, couples were assigned alphabetic codes to preserve their anonymity and the tests were administered.

Once enrolled, the subjects were coded with an alphabetical system composed of the initials of their first and last names as a pair. Once the couples had been grouped according to codes and gender (male-female), it was administered. To ensure the proper treatment of personal data, the information was stored in two different databases. This process ensured the confidentiality and correct use of the study participants' data.

As soon as both parties of the couple sign up, the three scales are administered individually via Gmail to the e-mail addresses provided. In order not to make it tedious for the participants, the tests were divided into two. One link provided access to answer the ASPA and another, being shorter, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale together with the Ad Hoc questionnaire.

Once the couples had answered both questionnaires, the scores for each of the scales and dimensions were calculated using Excel, which facilitates the digitization of information. Later, the information was linked to *PSPP* to proceed with data analysis.

Analysis analysis

This is an observational, cross-sectional, correlational study. The variables are observed in a natural context to observe the possible relationship between them at a given moment in time, looking for significant relationships between them.

The *T-Student* was calculated for independent samples in order to compare the means of different groups separated in this case by gender and, in addition, to determine if there are significant differences in the response tendency S, AG, AP and AS, as well as significant differences in self-esteem between men and women.

Next, a linear regression model is used to determine the influence of the two independent variables, in this case, Male Self-Esteem and Female Self-Esteem, on the dependent variable Self-Fulfilling Prophecy (Pelaez, 2016). The dependent variable is calculated from a member's ASPA-A scores on a trait, subtracting his or her partner's ASPA-B responses on the same trait. Four dependent variables are then created, one for each part of the pair and for trait S and AG. Since there are 4 dependent variables, a regression model is made for each dependent variable, that is, four models.

On the other hand, a bivariate correlation table is made to measure the relationship between the different variables. In this case it is calculated thanks to *Pearson's* correlation to work from a 6 x 6 table, observing how the six variables correlate with each other. The purpose of this table is to find statistical strength to support the hypothesis proposed.

Results

Table 1.

T-Student for independent samples, differences by gender.

| <i>Group</i> | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|----------|
| <i>Men (n = 15)</i> | | <i>Women (n = 15)</i> | | <i>t</i> |
| <i>M</i> | <i>DT</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>DT</i> | |
| | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-------------|-------|-------|-------|------|--------|
| Self-esteem | 31.13 | 6.35 | 31.47 | 1.08 | -.17 |
| AG | 15.31 | 4.44 | 14.26 | 2.64 | .78 |
| S | 23.28 | 6.01 | 18.39 | 5.79 | 2.27 |
| AP | 19.47 | 5.64 | 18.96 | 4.84 | .27 |
| AS | 41.94 | 12.11 | 48.39 | 8.41 | -1.70* |

Note.

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

Here significant differences were observed between groups in the variable AS, being higher in women with a result of $t(28) = -1.70$ ($p = .033$).

Table 2.
Multiple Regression Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Men by Trait S

| Measure | B | SEB | β |
|------------------|------|-----|---------|
| Self-esteem Male | -.92 | .34 | -.61* |
| Self-esteem Fem | .13 | .51 | .06 |

Note. Dependent variable: $\Delta R^2 = .38$

Adjustment: $F(2, 14) = 3.72$, $p = .055$.

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

Table 3.
Multiple Regression Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Men by Trait AG

| Measure | B | SEB | β |
|------------------|------|-----|---------|
| Self-esteem Male | .00 | .22 | .00 |
| Self-esteem Fem | -.67 | .34 | -.50 |

Note. Dependent variable: $\Delta R^2 = .25$

Adjustment: $F(2, 14) = 1.96$, $p = .183$.

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

Table 4.
Multiple Regression Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Women by Trait S

| Measure | B | SEB | β |
|------------------|-----|-----|---------|
| Self-esteem Male | .28 | .26 | .307 |
| Self-esteem Fem | .08 | .39 | .838 |

Note. Dependent variable: $\Delta R^2 = .09$
 Adjustment: $F(2, 14) = .58, p = .577$.
 $*p < .05, **p < .01$.

Table 5.
Multiple Regression Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Women by Trait AG

| Measure | B | SEB | β |
|------------------|------|-----|---------|
| Self-esteem Male | .18 | .18 | 1.01 |
| Self-esteem Fem | -.01 | .28 | -.01 |

Note. Dependent variable: $\Delta R^2 = .08$
 Adjustment: $F(2, 14) = .52, p = .607$.
 $*p < .05, **p < .01$.

In these linear regression models, a significant relationship was observed between the variable Male Self-Esteem and the variable Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Men by trait S, the β showed a reverse direction $\beta = -.61$ ($p = .020$) and the R^2 shows 38% variance. No statistically significant relationships were found in the rest of the models.

Table 6.
Table of bivariate correlations

| | Self-esteem Male | Self-esteem Fem | P.A. Masc S | P.A. Masc AG | P.A. Fem S | P.A. Fem AG |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------|------------|-------------|
| Self-esteem Male | - | -.094 | -.616* | .049 | .290 | .282 |
| Self-esteem Fem | -.094 | - | .113 | -.497 | .030 | -.037 |
| P.A. Masc S | -.616* | .113 | - | -.299 | .037 | -.392 |
| P.A. Masc AG | .049 | -.497 | -.299 | - | -.344 | -.299 |
| P.A. Fem S | .290 | .030 | .037 | -.344 | - | -.126 |
| P.A. Fem AG | .282 | -.037 | -.392 | -.299 | -.126 | - |

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

Here we found a significant inverse correlation between Male Self-Esteem and Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Men by trait S with a correlation coefficient of *Pearson correlation* of $-.616$ ($p = .014$).

Discussion and Conclusions

This study hypothesizes that submissive coping styles, combined with low self-esteem, are correlated with the manifestation of self-fulfilling prophecy in interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, aggressive coping styles, together with high self-esteem, are correlated with the occurrence of self-fulfilling prophecy in such contexts.

Observing Table 6, it can be seen that the variable Self-esteem Male shows a significant inverse correlation with respect to the variable Self-prophecy in Men with a coping style S. The β obtained from the regression model of this variable (Table 2) also confirms the direction of

the relationship which in this case is negative, so it is concluded that, the less self-esteem in men, the more the self-fulfilling prophecy occurs with respect to submissive coping (S). This confirms the hypothesis that the subject with low self-esteem together with a submissive coping style in part of the couple favors the appearance of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

However, no statistically significant results were found to indicate that high self-esteem has a relationship with a type of AG coping style that determines a self-fulfilling prophecy, so that part of the hypothesis is rejected.

Based on the theoretical models explained above, it can be understood that low self-esteem encourages the person to adjust to the expectations of his or her partner in order to avoid conflicts that may lead to problems in the couple. This can be explained on the basis of rejection sensitivity or systems theory with emotional fusion in which the subject seeks to please and adapt to expectations about his or her behavior. According to these theories, it can be understood that self-esteem functions as a way of preserving the ability to resist the external pressure of a partner's expectations. Then, those individuals with low self-esteem, resort to styles characterized by submission due to the need to obtain the external validation that those expectations produce for them (Leung & Sy, 2018; García & Martínez, 2019).

In comparing this study with other research, Merton (1948) introduced the concept of self-fulfilling prophecy, describing how expectations can influence behavior and confirm original beliefs. This research extends this concept to the realm of couple relationships, exploring how low self-esteem and certain coping styles can trigger behaviors that reinforce the self-fulfilling prophecy in submissive contexts.

This was also observed in the study by Sels et al. (2017) in which they explored the influence of one partner's perceived emotionality expectations toward the emotions of the other partner, seeing changes in the latter. This opens the possibility that emotionality may also be influenced by coping styles and the individual's own self-esteem.

On the other hand, Rusbult (1980) examined couple dynamics suggesting that high levels of investment can lead to loss of individuality. This study also addresses the loss of individuality, but in the specific context of submission and low self-esteem in couple relationships. Within clinical pathology, sensitivity to rejection is a characteristic feature of borderline and dependent personality disorders. This may make it difficult for the person to set boundaries by opting to seek satisfaction from his or her partner (Belloch et al 2020). Within the nonclinical population, the impact of past trauma should not be underestimated, as previous experiences of abuse, rejection, or dysfunctional relationships can shape both self-esteem and coping styles of individuals, increasing the likelihood of falling into patterns of behavior that perpetuate the self-fulfilling prophecy (Herman, 2015). These traumatic experiences may generate a greater susceptibility to submission or the need to control the relationship in an aggressive manner, as emotional protection mechanisms for fear of repeating old traumas. Therefore, addressing these factors from a therapeutic approach could be key to prevent the reproduction of destructive dynamics in interpersonal relationships.

In the study by Murray et al. (2000), investigated how self-esteem affects relationship security and responses to partners, the present study goes further by relating low self-esteem to the occurrence of self-fulfilling prophecy and submission. Building on Leung and Sy's (2018) research where they concluded that self-concept functioned as a mediator of the Golem Effect, this study opens the possibility that self-esteem also becomes a modulator of self-fulfilling prophecy in subjects with submissive coping tendencies.

Similarly, research conducted by Richter and Finn (2021) discusses the relationship between couple conflict and self-esteem. This study concludes that the perception of dysfunctional behaviors in a person about his or her partner negatively conditions the partner's self-esteem. This is interesting because from the perspective offered by this study we can see

that certain styles of coping in conflicts can influence the self-esteem of the other person, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy in a negative way, or Golem Effect.

Fišerová et al. (2021) further investigated how attachment and interpersonal relationships influenced each other, looking for the emergence of self-fulfilling prophecy, however, they did not find relevant conclusions about this, but saw that there were significant patterns where women tended to reactive conflict coping styles, and men avoidant. This study addresses this dynamic by including self-fulfilling prophecy as a dependent variable and self-esteem mediation as an independent variable, exploring a complementary and causal relationship between the two (Ripoll-Núñez, 2011).

On the other hand, at the clinical level, this study is relevant because it allows us to observe how self-esteem influences not only couple conflicts, but also the appearance of the self-fulfilling prophecy. This could direct primary prevention towards education and the development of healthy self-esteem, as well as training in constructive conflict resolution tools, to avoid dynamics of submission and aggression that affect both the relationship and the individual.

In addition, the creation of group interventions focused on conflict coping skills is suggested, stressing the importance of self-esteem and individuality within the couple.

Likewise, from the independent samples *T*-Student (Table 1), significant differences were observed in the AS coping style between groups, being higher in women. However, these results may have been conditioned by the limitations of the study itself. This coping style was the highest in both groups, i.e., a tendency to respond to behaviors related to socially well-liked behaviors, specifically the AS trait, was observed, so the possibility of social desirability bias could have influenced the accuracy of the participants' responses, which could affect the validity of the results. To address this bias in future research, it is recommended that the instruments be administered individually and face-to-face, thus ensuring that both partners complete the questionnaires separately.

Other limitations could arise from the exclusivity of the heterosexual sample and certain ages, which could limit the applicability of the findings to other populations, such as same-sex couples or couples of different age groups. The small sample size, together with time constraints during sample selection, may have influenced the representativeness of the results. For future more complete research, it is suggested to use a larger sample and to dedicate an adequate period of time to the selection of participants.

In addition, although several instruments were used to measure key variables, other relevant factors, such as attachment and other individual personality characteristics, may not have been considered in this study, which could have influenced the observed results. Therefore, these limitations suggest areas for future research that could address and improve understanding of the relationship between self-fulfilling prophecy, coping styles, and self-esteem in interpersonal relationships.

As mentioned above, based on the limitations encountered, we propose future lines where it would be interesting to explore, on the one hand, these effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy in the long term with a longitudinal study, covering a longer period of time to observe the influence of time on the relationship and coping styles.

Likewise, it is proposed to study the possible influence of attachment styles within the occurrence of self-fulfilling prophecy in couples since, attachment constitutes a determinant factor of satisfaction in couple relationships (Fišerová et al., 2021). Within this, it would be interesting to address how different personality factors, such as trait extraversion, may determine the occurrence of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Finally, based on this study, the idea of exploring how assertive coping styles can influence self-fulfilling prophecy and, in turn, contribute to the increase of the other person's

self-esteem, as well as the role of passive-aggressive styles in conflicts and their possible relationship with self-esteem.

From this study it has been possible to determine that self-esteem is a determining factor in the occurrence of the self-fulfilling prophecy in couples, particularly in men, together with a coping style characterized by submission. However, conflicts in couples are complex and are not homogeneous; therefore, further research is a key to address and prevent future conflict dynamics that affect its members.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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Annex

Annex A.

Ad Hoc Questionnaire

Case 1. "You have argued with your partner about what you can have for dinner today. Yesterday you had a hamburger for dinner and your partner wants to repeat, but you don't."

Case 2. "You've had a long day and at bedtime your partner insists on having sex, but you don't feel like it because you're tired."

Case 3. "Your group of friends suggest you to go to a party and you really feel like it. When you tell your partner about it, he or she comments that he or she is not happy about you going.

Case 4. "It's a sunny day and you feel like going for a walk with your partner. However, your partner tells you that he/she prefers to stay at home watching TV."

In all four cases, the following questions were included and should be answered as briefly and concisely as possible: "What do you think?", "What do you feel?", "What do you do?" and "What do you think your partner will do?".