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Disclosing Romantic Relationship Conflicts with a Third Party: A Test of the Disclosure Decision-Making Model

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Abstract

This study utilized Greene's (2009) health disclosure decision-making model (DD-MM) to better understand the process of romantic relationship conflict (RRC) disclosures to a confidant outside the relationship. In doing so, I investigated the changes in relational quality between the discloser and their romantic partner/confidant, while also proposing that the DD-MM would be valid for use in RRC disclosures. Results indicated that while relational quality does not change significantly between the discloser and their romantic partner/confidant after an RRC disclosure, the depth of disclosure is significantly correlated with greater relational quality with the confidant. The relational quality an individual had with their romantic partner and confidant was also positively correlated with the disclosure efficacy they had toward their confidant. Overall, this study successfully validated the DD-MM for use (with only minor adjustments) in the new context of RRC disclosures. Implications and future directions are discussed.

Comments

Additional Committee Members: Dr. Matthew Isbell & Dr. Heather Witt

A TEST OF THE DISCLOSURE DECISION-MAKING MODEL

INTRODUCTION

For the past decade, Greene's (2009) Disclosure Decision-Making Model (DD-MM) has primarily been used to understand the process of disclosing a personal health issue (i.e., HIV, mental illness, cancer). Because self-disclosure plays such a large role in obtaining social support and increasing relational quality between individuals, there is much to consider when disclosing such personal information.

The purpose of this study was to:

1. Test whether the DD-MM translates to the new context of romantic relationship conflict (RRC) disclosures.
2. Understand how relational quality changes pre/post disclosure as individuals seek out social support from a third-party confidant about their RRC.

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QUANTITATIVE METHODS

Surveys via social media

- 81 participants (64 females, 16 males, 1 non-specified)
 - 81% White/Caucasian (n = 66)
- Participants identified as:
 - Currently being in a romantic relationship
 - Having experienced an RRC in that relationship within the past two months
 - Having disclosed the RRC to someone outside the relationship
- Questions focused on the experienced RRC, the participant's relational quality with their partner and confidant, and their disclosure practices.

RESULTS

- The DD-MM is valid for use in the context of RRCS with only minor adjustments.
 - Adds to the generalizability of the model
- There are positive associations between relational quality, perceived support, and disclosure efficacy.
- No significant change found in relational quality between the discloser and their romantic partner/confidant after the RRC disclosure.
- **New finding:** Relational quality with one's romantic partner was positively correlated with disclosure efficacy toward the confidant.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: Is the Disclosure Decision-Making Model valid for use in romantic relationship conflict disclosure?

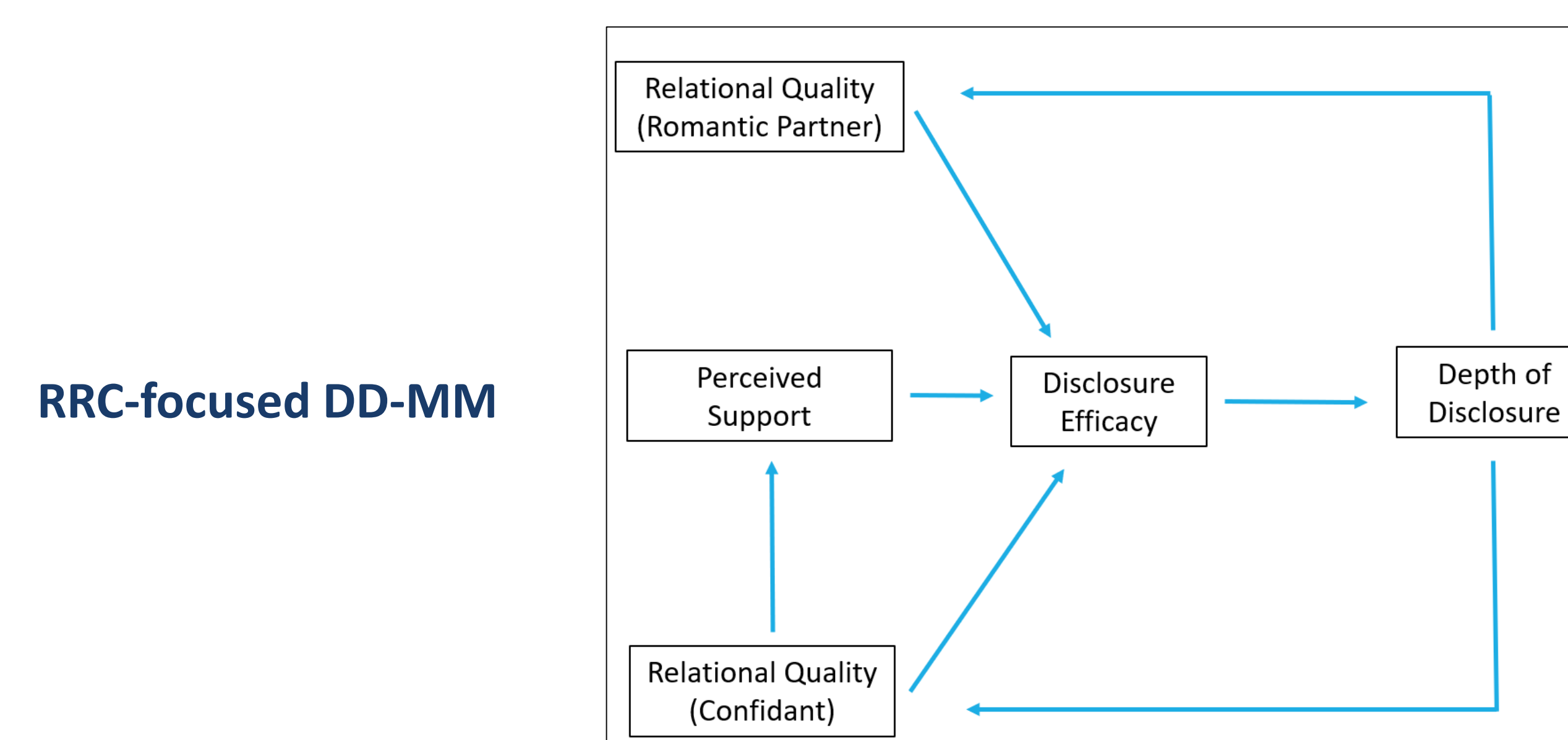
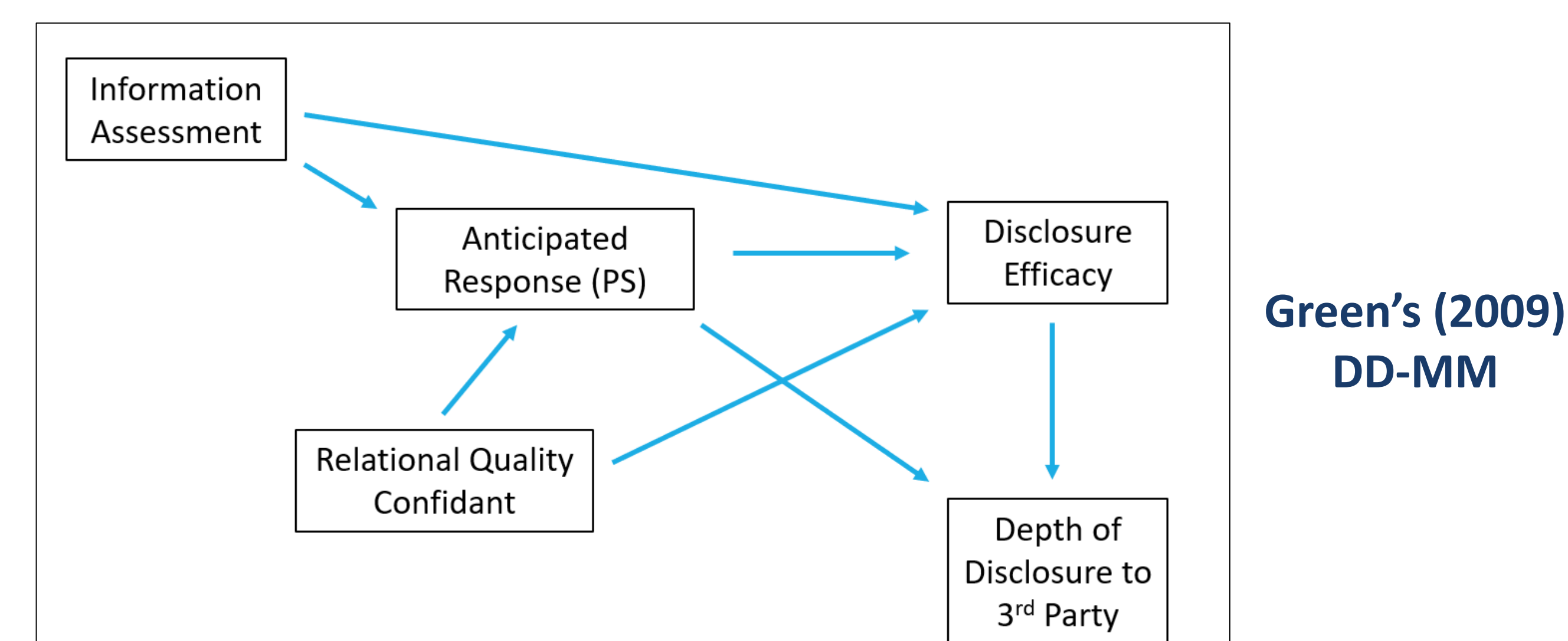
H1: Higher relational quality with a confidant is positively related to perceived support.

H2: Higher relational quality is positively related to disclosure efficacy toward the confidant.

RQ2: How does an RRC disclosure influence relational quality between discloser/confidant and discloser/romantic partner?

RQ3: How does *depth of disclosure* to the confidant influence relational quality between discloser/confidant and discloser/romantic partner?

MODELS



CONCLUSION

Take-aways for a discloser:

- When searching for a confidant, one may want to choose someone they anticipate receiving the most support from, which is often someone they have high relational quality with.
- More intimate disclosures are positively related to higher relational quality with the confidant.
- Be aware that while disclosing to a confidant may be helpful for support, it may also cause the confidant to "feel caught" in the middle of the RRC.

Take-aways for a potential confidant:

- Wants to be the recipient of deeper disclosures? A great way to do so is by showing a willingness to listen and offering signs of support!
- Support is a key aspect for enabling the disclosure process and for increasing personal well-being.

Limitations:

- Retrospective reporting
- Lack of triadic responses