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Approaching Relationship Conflict By Thinking About It As An Outsider

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Image Caption: Study results point to a personal strategy that those in relationships should adopt when thinking about conflict - "What advice would you give a friend?" Credit: Thinkstock.com

Brett Smith for redOrbit.com – Your Universe Online

People in monogamous relationships may argue with their partner about anything from financial decisions to infidelity – and a new study in the journal *Psychological Science*, has found that people in these conflicts can make wiser decisions if they think about them as someone outside the situation.

"These results are the first to demonstrate a new type of bias within ourselves when it comes to wise reasoning about an interpersonal relationship dilemma," said study author [Igor Grossmann](#), a psychologist at the University of Waterloo in Canada, in a recent [statement](#). "We call the bias Solomon's Paradox, after the king who was known for his wisdom, but who still failed at making personal decisions."

In the study, researchers asked volunteers – who were all in monogamous romantic relationships – to think about relationship conflict. Participants were asked to clearly imagine a situation involving either their partner or a friend's partner being unfaithful. Next, they were asked a set of questions on the scenario they were told to imagine.

The questions were built to tap into aspects of wise reasoning, such as the ability to see one's own limits, look for a compromise, think about the perspectives of others, and determine the possible ways that the situation could unfold.

Results from the tests indicated that volunteers who were asked to think about a friend's relationship conflict made wiser reactions than those who were required to think about their own relationship conflict.

In another set of experiments, the researchers looked to see if personal distance might make a difference in thinking about relationship conflict. The method was comparable to the first experiment, but this time they clearly asked volunteers to either "put yourself in this situation" or "put yourself in your friend's shoes" when thinking about the issue.

The study team discovered that the result of this trial mirrored those of the first trial. Volunteers who considered their own relationship clash from a first-person perspective exhibited less wise thinking than those who imagined

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a friend's relationship conflict. However, those who considered their own conflict through the prospective of a friend were just as wise as when they thought about their friend's problem.

Finally, the researchers looked to see if age made a difference by recruiting two different groups of volunteers – younger adults between the ages of 20 and 40, and older adults between 60 and 80 years old. The study team said that when it comes to romantic relationships – older people were not wiser when it comes to reasoning about their own relationships.

The study team said their results point to a personal strategy that those in relationships should adopt when thinking about conflict – namely, 'what advice would you give a friend?'

"We are the first to demonstrate that there is a simple way to eliminate this bias in reasoning by talking about ourselves in the third person and using our name when reflecting on a relationship conflict," Grossmann said. "When we employ this strategy, we are more likely to think wisely about an issue."

Source: Brett Smith for redOrbit.com - Your Universe Online

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