

Within-Couple Associations Between Communication and Relationship Satisfaction Over Time

Johnson et al. (2021)

Is having more or less positive or negative communication than usual associated with changes in relationship satisfaction now or in the future?

Data From 3 Studies Were Analyzed.

Data from the Relationship Development Study were analyzed from 316 participants in non-marital mixed-sex intimate partnerships from the United States who reported their relationship satisfaction and negative communication every 4 months across 16 months.

Data from the Impact of Stress on Relationship Development of Couples and Children were analyzed from 365 mixed-sex couples from Switzerland

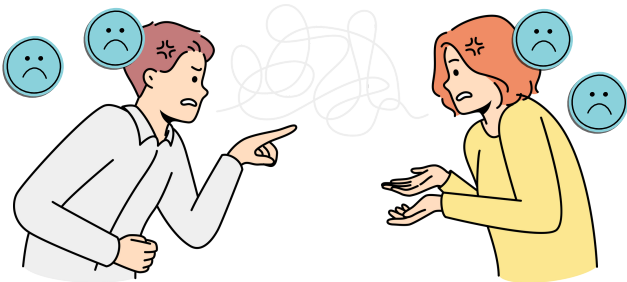
who reported their positive and negative communication and relationship satisfaction before discussing a high-tension issue for 8 minutes. Observational and self-report data were gathered annually across five years.



Data from the German Family Panel study were analyzed from 3,405 mixed-sex couples who reported their positive and negative communication and relationship satisfaction at 5 annual time points.

The Results Showed That...

When couples experienced less negative communication (e.g., felt less belittled, criticized...) than usual, they also reported being more satisfied with their relationship than usual...



...But the reported changes in positive communication (e.g., actively listening, talking calmly) were not associated with changes in relationship satisfaction.

In Short

The findings suggest that negative (but not positive) communication is associated with lower relationship satisfaction, but that this association does not extend over months or years. Rather, at times when couples communicated less negatively than usual, they were also more satisfied than was typical for them.

These findings challenge popular perspectives in relationship science that contend that communication is a strong predictor of future relationship satisfaction. Rather, satisfaction and communication are linked within time, but unfold independent of one another across time.

