



When we're asked to change:

The role of suppression and reappraisal in partner regulation outcomes

Sisson et al. (2022)

Being asked to change something about yourself by your romantic partner can prompt negative feelings. How might the way you deal with this negative emotion affect your likelihood of actually changing?



We Conducted Two Studies:

One where 111 Canadian couples discussed a desired change in each other and both partners rated how motivated they were to make their partner's requested change.

Two weeks later, these couples rated how much progress they had made toward each other's requested change (i.e., how much effort they made to change, and how successful they were).



... And one where 150 North American couples focused on a preselected change their partner wanted them to make (e.g., to be more organized)

They then completed 8 weekly surveys assessing the progress they made towards their partner's requested change and to what extent they felt that they were living up to each other's ideals.

In both studies, partners being asked to change rated how much they hid their true negative feelings about the requested change (i.e., suppressed), and to what extent they changed the way they thought about the requested change (i.e., reappraised) to reduce their negative feelings.

Results Showed That...

when partners hid their negative emotions, they did not report better or worse change progress but did report being further from the requesting partner's ideals (and the requesting partner agreed).

However, when they changed the way they thought about the requested change, they reported more change progress and felt closer to their partner's ideals.



In Short

This research demonstrates that when being asked to change by your partner, suppressing your feelings does not help or hurt change progress but may lead to feeling as though you're failing to meet your partner's ideals over time. In contrast, reappraising the way you view or think about the change request may help you make more change progress and feel closer to meeting your partner's ideals.