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MISCOMMUNICATION AS A PREDICTOR OF EMOTION, EXPRESSIVE SUPPRESSION, AND RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN DATING COUPLES

Isabelle Davis

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Relating to others effectively and positively is a crucial part of life, and a large part of this relation rests on effective communication. When communication in a relationship is poor, undesirable consequences tend to follow. The present study looks at dating couples, studying the association between miscommunication and observed emotion and expressive suppression while discussing conflict, in addition to self-reported relationship satisfaction. We hypothesized that poorer communication would be associated with more negative affect, less positive affect, more instances of expressive suppression, and lower relationship satisfaction. In addition, we predicted that lower relationship satisfaction would be associated with more instances of expressive suppression. Participants each filled out surveys indicating their overall relationship satisfaction, and conflict levels in 13 different categories within their relationship (e.g., money, religion, sex, careers), and were then assigned to discuss a conflict area both partners had rated highly for 10 minutes. This conversation was filmed and afterwards participants watched the film and made note of each time they regulated their emotions. Twenty different emotions were later coded for in each partner using the Specific Affect Coding System. We partially confirmed our hypotheses in finding that poorer communication predicted more negative affect, more expressive suppression, and less relationship satisfaction, but it did not predict less positive affect. In addition, we confirmed our hypothesis in finding that lower relationship satisfaction predicted greater instances of expressive suppression. These findings imply that couples who are experiencing distress in their relationship may have problems rooted in miscommunication, suggesting that improving communication could help resolve this distress. A future study may benefit from using a different technique for observing couples' conflict discussions, in order to broaden the implications of this research to include day-to-day interactions outside of a laboratory setting.