Nonverbal Behavior and Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Intimacy

Marital dysfunction is a complex problem with myriad negative outcomes, so researchers have spent a great deal of time trying to understand risk and protective factors. Both intimacy and conflict have been strongly linked to satisfaction, although they appear to be regulated by two different systems. Researchers have predominantly focused on finding ways to reduce conflict among couples, hoping this will increase intimacy and satisfaction. Few studies have instead focused on whether increasing intimacy, even in the presence of continued conflict, may in fact increase satisfaction. Intimacy is achieved through self-disclosure and responsiveness to one’s partner; nonverbal behavior is a more consistent means of self-disclosure than verbal disclosure, in which emotions are filtered through cognitive processes. In the current study, married couples completed a two-week diary study measuring nonverbal behavior, supportiveness, verbal disclosure, commitment, intimacy, and satisfaction. During week two, participants were divided into two groups in which they either increased nonverbal behavior or behaved normally. It was hypothesized that couples in the nonverbal condition would report more satisfaction at the end of week two because greater self-disclosure would lead to increased intimacy. If this hypothesis is supported, it would suggest that couples should focus on awareness of nonverbal communication and whether or not it is supportive, as it can affect their intimacy level, and in the long run possibly the satisfaction and stability of the marriage.