

Couples who say 'we' do better at resolving conflicts

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People often complain about those seemingly smug married couples who constantly refer to themselves as "we." But a new study from the University of California, Berkeley, suggests that spouses who use "we-ness" language are better able to resolve conflicts than those who don't.

UC Berkeley researchers analyzed conversations between 154 middle-aged and older [couples](#) about points of disagreement in their marriages and found that those who used pronouns such as "we," "our" and "us" behaved more positively toward one another and showed less physiological stress.

In contrast, couples who emphasized their "separateness" by using pronouns such as "I," "me" and "you" were found to be less satisfied in their marriages. This was especially true for older couples. Their use of separateness pronouns was most strongly linked to unhappy marriages, according to the study.

Moreover, the study found that older couples identified more as "we" than did their middle-aged counterparts, suggesting that facing obstacles and overcoming challenges together over the long haul, including raising families, may give couples a greater sense of shared identity.

"Individuality is a deeply ingrained value in American society, but, at least in the realm of marriage, being part of a 'we' is well worth giving up a bit of 'me,'" said UC Berkeley psychology professor Robert Levenson, a co-author of the study published last semester in the journal

Psychology and Aging.

Previous studies have established that the use of "we-ness" or "separateness" language is a strong indicator of [marital satisfaction](#) in younger couples. These latest findings, however, take this several steps further by showing how powerful this correlation is in more established couples, linking it to the emotions and physiological responses that occur when spouses either team up or become polarized in the face of disagreements, researchers said.

"The use of 'we' language is a natural outgrowth of a sense of partnership, of being on the same team, and confidence in being able to face problems together," said study co-author Benjamin Seider, a graduate student in psychology at UC Berkeley.

More information: "We Can Work It Out: Age Differences in Relational Pronouns, Physiology and Behavior in Marital Conflict," *Psychology and Aging*.

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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