

Enduring qualities of spouses shape behavioral interactions, predict relationship satisfaction

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A team of researchers from Florida State University, the University of Texas at Austin and the University of California, Los Angeles, has found that the enduring qualities of both spouses in a marriage shape behavioral interactions, which in turn predict changes in relationship satisfaction. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the group describes their analysis of 10 prior studies of married couples and what factors they found contribute to longer-lasting marriages.

Over the past several decades, researchers have noted that the number of divorces has been rising—current estimates suggest half of all married couples in the U.S. will wind up divorced. This trend has led researchers to study why modern marriages are failing at such a high rate. In this new effort, the researchers looked at relationship [satisfaction](#) as a [marriage](#) matures as a likely indicator of marriage success.

The work involved analyzing data from 10 prior [longitudinal studies](#) involving 1,104 couples using the Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation model as a way to measure couple satisfaction. Participants in the longitudinal studies were asked to rate their spouses in three main ways: degree of attachment avoidance, neuroticism and attachment anxiety. Each was also asked to rate their spouse regarding how they behaved during stressful times and how engaged they were during times when problem solving was required.

The researchers found one particular trait among those couples with the greatest satisfaction in their relationships and the most enduring marriages—how they both behaved during times of stress. They found that the way couples treat one another during times of stress was a major factor in how much satisfaction they felt in their relationship. It was one of the enduring qualities that the researchers found that could make or break a marriage. Another was the degree of neuroticism—which the researchers describe as exhibiting negative behaviors—by both people in a relationship. They found that such behaviors could lead to oppositional behavior during times of stress or [problem solving](#), and that often led to a reduction in relational satisfaction as time passed.

More information: James K. McNulty et al, How both partners' individual differences, stress, and behavior predict change in relationship satisfaction: Extending the VSA model, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2021). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2101402118](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2101402118)

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