
Can Spouses Provide Knowledge of Each Other’s Communication Patterns? A Study of Self-Reports, Spouses’ Reports, and Observational Coding

**ABSTRACT**

The purposes of this study were (1) to assess individuals’ self-reports of communication and their reports about their spouses’ communication in order to examine the congruence of spousal views and (2) to investigate whether each report provided unique information about observed marital interactions. These associations were evaluated in a sample of 119 longtime married couples. The Verbal Aggression and Cooperation subscales from the Conflicts and Problem-Solving Scales were used as measures of negative and positive aspects of communication. The findings indicated that self-reports of both verbal aggression and cooperation were strongly associated with the same individual’s report of his or her spouse’s verbal aggression and cooperation. Conversely, self-reports were only moderately associated with reports made by spouses (e.g., the husband’s report of his wife’s communication). Hence, within-reporter agreement was higher than between-reporter agreement about marital communication. When entered into regression models, reports made by spouses, but not self-reports, explained unique variance in observations of marital hostility and affection. There was one exception: Wife self-report of verbal aggression explained unique variance in coders’ ratings of wife hostility, controlling for husband report of wife verbal aggression. Findings indicate the importance of assessing partners’ views of one another’s communication for the most accurate portrayal of marital interactions. Implications for research and clinical work are discussed.