Violated Expectations Matter Beyond Support Behaviour in Predicting Newlyweds’ Support Discussion Satisfaction

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Introduction
- Support is an essential feature of satisfying relationships (Bradbury & Karney, 2004), but not all support interactions are satisfying or live up to expectations.
- Violated expectations may play an important role in support discussion satisfaction, beyond how individuals behave during support discussions.
- I examined whether spouses’ positively and negatively violated expectations (whether the discussions were better or worse than expected) predicted support discussion satisfaction, independently of observed positive and negative support behaviour.

Measures
- Violated expectations were calculated as a difference score (perceptions – expectations).
  - **Positive violations** represented the degree to which the discussions were more positive and less negative than expected.
  - **Negative violations** represented the degree to which the discussions were more negative and less positive than expected.
- Social Support Interaction Coding System (SSICS; Pasch, Harris, Sullivan, & Bradbury, 2004).
  - **Positive behaviour**: analyzing the problem, accepting help, providing suggestions, encouragement, or reassurance.
  - **Negative behaviour**: criticizing the partner, making demands, being disengaged, and giving unhelpful advice.

Results
- Negative behaviour negatively predicted wives’, but not husbands’, discussion satisfaction. Positive behaviour did not predict discussion satisfaction.
- Positively violated expectations did not predict discussion satisfaction, perhaps because some spouses may be pleasantly surprised when they have a better discussion than expected and thus feel satisfied, but others may distrust the unexpected positivity, and attribute it to the lab and research context, and thus feel dissatisfied.
- Negatively violated expectations were negatively associated with discussion satisfaction for husbands and wives independently of support behaviour. Negatively violated expectations may lead spouses to feel misunderstood and less close to their partners.

Conclusion
- When couples get what they expect from their discussions, they are relatively satisfied, but when their discussions fail to live up to their expectations, they feel dissatisfied with the discussion.
- Negative violations predicted dissatisfaction with discussions even when controlling for spouses’ and partners’ support behaviour, marital satisfaction, and neuroticism.
- This suggests that spouses’ discussion satisfaction is based on the degree to which they do not get what they expect from their discussions, not on how they or their partner behaves in the discussions.