

Couples' Language Use and Vocal Pitch during Everyday Relationship Distress: Links with Dating Aggression

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The quality of our relationships is an important factor impacting our overall psychological health and well-being (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, and Schilling, 1989). The way we communicate with our romantic partners, including what we say and how we say it, could affect the quality of our relationships (Baucom et.al., 2012; Simmons, Gordon, and Chambless, 2005). The purpose of this study is to examine the association between vocal pitch, language use (negative emotion, anger words, swear words [NAS]), and relationship distress in romantic couples' everyday lives. We hypothesize that (1) moments of everyday relationship distress will be associated with heightened NAS and vocal pitch and (2) this association will be greater among couples with higher levels of dating aggression. Across an entire day, from 10:00am until bedtime, 111 young adult couples were given smartphones to complete surveys each hour to record their relationship distress level. Everyday relationship distress was measured by couples rating their annoyance levels toward his or her partner on a scale of 0 (*not at all*) to 100 (*extremely annoyed*) each hour using the smartphone. Phones also recorded 3 minutes of audio every 12 minutes. We manually transcribed the audio recordings to obtain the frequency of NAS used in each audio recording every hour of that day. To measure vocal pitch, we extracted the fundamental frequency of each person per hour. We will conduct multilevel regression analysis to test the association between language use, vocal pitch, everyday relationship distress, and dating aggression. Findings will inform whether aggressive couples show unique patterns of communication during relationship distress. Our findings are unique in that couples' behavior was captured in real life settings, rather than laboratory settings. These data will provide information that will aid in the design of interventions to improve couples' functioning.