Marital Satisfaction and Communication Patterns Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Couples

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

The way partners communicate is a strong indicator of the health of their relationship. Use of different pronouns (e.g., "we" vs. "you") is an easily observable way to measure communication, and pronoun use has been strongly linked with relationship satisfaction, such that more use of "I" and "we" is associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction, whereas more use of "you" is associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction. However, this body of research has focused on middle-class White couples, so little is known about how culture and language play a role in these associations. I sought to address this gap by examining rates of pronoun use in culturally and linguistically diverse groups, focusing on 1) how use of "I", "we", and "you" pronouns differ between Hispanic-English speaking, Hispanic-Spanish speaking, and non-Hispanic newlywed couples ($N = 398$), and 2) whether use of these pronouns is related to marital satisfaction in the same way for each ethnolinguistic group. Results indicate that groups significantly differed from each other on mean levels of "I", "you" and "we" use. Additionally, more use of "you" was significantly associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction for Hispanic-English and Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples, and more use of "we" was significantly associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction for husbands in Hispanic-English speaking couples. These results indicate that culture and language play a role in *amount* of pronoun use, and language plays a role in the association between pronoun use and relationship satisfaction. Overall, this study provides evidence that long-held beliefs about the ability of communication behaviors to indicate the health of the relationship may not be the same across different cultures and languages.

Keywords: culture, language, communication, pronouns, marital satisfaction

Marital Satisfaction and Communication Patterns Among Culturally and Linguistically

Diverse Couples

Communication is an important aspect of romantic relationships as it is influenced by marital satisfaction (Lavner et al., 2016). Pronouns have been extensively studied because they are easy to measure and show consistent associations with martial satisfaction. Higher rates of "I" and "we" and lower rates of "you" during couples' conversation are associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction (Seider et al., 2009; Simmons et al., 2005; Williams-Baucom et al., 2010). However, little is known about the cross-cultural use and association of pronouns with marital satisfaction. Inherent cultural differences between individualistic and collectivist cultures may influence differences in the use and associations of pronouns with marital satisfaction. Collectivistic cultures tend to value the group's need over individual needs, whereas individualistic cultures place more importance on individual pursuits (Wieling & Yumbul, 2013). The present study used three groups of couples: Non-Hispanic English-speaking, Spanish-speaking Hispanic, and English-speaking Hispanic couples to test for cultural differences in communication. If the couples use different rates of "I", "we", and "you" and these pronouns are differently associated with martial satisfaction, then culture plays a role in the expression of marital satisfaction. The current study aimed to examine communication from a cross-cultural perspective by investigating if collectivistic couples used different rates of the same pronouns and if these pronouns were associated with martial satisfaction in the same way as they were for as their individualistic counterparts.

Literature Review

Communication

Communication is a central part of romantic relationships. Couple communication is important for relationship outcomes because it is associated with relationship satisfaction (Lavner et al., 2016). Higher levels of positive communication and lower levels of negative communication are patterns observed in satisfied couples (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). Couples who display negative communication patterns tend to have lower marital adjustment and higher marital distress (Birditt et al., 2010; Markman et al., 2010). Higher rates of destructive behaviors like criticism and yelling produce higher rates of divorce (Markman et al., 2010). Because couples with higher levels of negative communication are more likely to experience distressful marriages, the ability to recognize these patterns early is important for intervention in preventing marital distress and divorce.

Some studies also suggest that communication varies between cultures. With, for example, White Americans rating some behaviors as "conflict behaviors" that Black Americans would not consider "conflict behaviors" (Birditt et al., 2010). However, conflict behaviors seem to have similar associations with divorce and marital dissatisfaction for both Black and White American couples (2010). Studying couple communication is important in order to expand on our knowledge of romantic relationships as well as learn to understand what shapes relationship outcomes. Overall, communication can reveal a lot about the inner workings of a relationship. In identifying early maladaptive communication we can identify couples with lower relationship satisfaction.

Pronouns

Assessing couples' pronoun use may be an effective way to understand their communication patterns because it may indicate the overall affect of the couples' conversation. Indeed, higher rates of "we" during couples' conversations are associated with higher levels of

marital satisfaction (Seider et al., 2009; Simmons et al., 2005; Slatcher et al., 2008; Williams-Baucom et al., 2010), while higher rates of "you" are associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction (Seider et al., 2009; Simmons et al., 2005; Slatcher et al., 2008; Williams-Baucom et al., 2010). It is less clear how "I" use is associated with marital satisfaction because it shows different associations for distressed and non-distressed couples. For distressed couples specifically, "I" indicates higher levels of vulnerability which allows spouses to feel more closeness. Presumably, when couples use "I" it is related to positive partner interactions as it represents self-disclosure, positive autonomy, intimacy, and closeness (Slatcher et al., 2008) However, when non-distressed couples used "I" it was negatively related to their marital satisfaction (Williams-Baucom et al., 2010). Which signifies that use of "I" pronouns for non-distressed couples potentially signifies higher independence rather than interdependence.

On the other hand, higher rates of "we" signal greater shared identity and interdependence between a couple (Seider et al., 2009). Non-distressed couples tend to use "we" more than distressed couples (Williams-Baucom et al., 2010). "We" is also related to higher levels of positive emotional behaviors (e.g. humor), lower levels of negative emotional behaviors (e.g. criticism), and even decreased cardiovascular arousal (Seider et al., 2009). Higher rates of "we" are associated with lower levels of marital dissolution (Simmons et al., 2005). "We" is often used at lower rates than "I" and "you" so many studies struggle to find a significant association between "we" use and marital satisfaction (Rentscher et al., 2013; Simmons et al., 2005; Slatcher et al., 2008).

Use of "you" is consistently found to be related to lower levels of marital satisfaction (Birditt et al., 2010; Seider et al., 2009; Simmons et al., 2005). Use of "you" is related to higher levels of negativity during problem discussions and higher levels of criticism and blaming

(Seider et al., 2009; Simmons et al., 2005; Georgiou et al., 2011; Williams-Baucom et al., 2010). And couples that use higher rates of "you" have more difficulty solving problems together. Birditt et al. (2010) found that husbands and wives who reported higher destructive behaviors (e.g., "I insulted my spouse and called him or her names") in their first year of marriage were more likely to divorce than husbands and wives who reported fewer destructive behaviors. High levels of you, like high levels of destructive behaviors, could have detrimental outcomes for couples. Finally, higher levels of "you" exist with higher levels of "I" use (Rentscher et al., 2013). This is consistent with the demand-withdraw theory in which "you" signifies demands and criticism while "I" is focused on withdrawal and defensiveness.

The importance of studying pronouns lies in what their representation of the couples communication affect. "I" is thought to reflect self-disclosure and positive autonomy, "we" reflects a greater sense of shared identity, and "you" is related to blaming and criticism (Rentscher et al., 2013; Seider et al., 2009; Slatcher et al., 2008; Williams-Baucom et al., 2010). However, there is also evidence the that use of these pronouns exhibits variability. For example, non-distressed partners use different amounts of "I", "we", and "you" than distressed partners. This indicates that there are between couple effects that influence the amount of "I", "we", and "you" they use. In addition, there is also some variability in the associations of "I", "we", and "you" with marital satisfaction. Some studies did not find significant associations between "we" and marital satisfaction (Simmons et al., 2005; Slatcher et al., 2008) while others did (Seider et al., 2009; Williams-Baucom et al., 2010). Some studies found that "I" is associated with higher marital satisfaction for distressed partners but lower martial satisfaction for non-distressed partners. These variations in amount of "I", "we", and "you" use as well as their association with

marital satisfaction suggest that unique couple characteristics influence the use and associations of these pronouns.

Culture

Culture influences the way people think, act, and perceive the world. There is a small body of literature that focuses of cross-cultural couple communication and it points towards cultural differences in the expression and perception of communication (cite). Non-Western couples tend to engage in more negative communication patterns than Western couples (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007; Sadeghi et al., 2012; Williamson et al., 2012). Some studies suggest that negative communication patterns are more strongly associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction for non-Western couples (Williamson et al., 2012), while others show stronger associations for Western couples (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007). Western and non-western couples exhibit similar amounts of positive communication behaviors and are both associated with marital satisfaction (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007; Williamson et al., 2012). However, positive communication was more strongly associated with marital satisfaction for Western couples (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007; Williamson et al., 2012).

Although it seems to be the case that greater use of "I" and "we" and lower use of "you" is associated with higher marital satisfaction, past research has focused on White, middle-class, U.S. couples, which limits the generalizability of this pattern to other couples. One factor that may contribute to differences in pronoun use and the associations with marital satisfaction is culture. To date, the couples used for this research are primarily a part of an individualistic culture. Individualistic cultures emphasize independence and pursuit of individual interests over those of the group, so the benefit of positive autonomy reflected by use of "I" is fitting (Wieling & Yumbul, 2013). And while a greater sense of shared identity, reflected by use of "we", is more

common in non-distressed American couples, shared identity is seen as more important in collectivistic cultures (Wieling & Yumbul, 2013). Therefore, the use and associations of "we" could be more pronounced for collectivistic couples. Finally, negative associations of "you" with marital satisfaction could be even stronger for collectivistic couples who likely value the group's well-being over the individual needs. There has been significantly less research dedicated to studying the use and associations of pronouns with marital satisfaction for culturally diverse couples. The present study aimed to address this gap by exploring the influence of culture on the use and associations of pronouns with marital satisfaction by using White, Black, and Hispanic couples. The White and Black couples represented individualistic couples and the Hispanic couples represented collectivistic couples.

The small amount of research that has been done on cross-cultural communication indicates that communication differs significantly between cultures. Rehman et al., (2007) compared White American couples, Pakistani American couples, and immigrant Pakistani couples in Pakistan found that Pakistani American couples had similarities to both White Americans and Pakistani couples in Pakistan which suggests an acculturation effect. White and immigrant couples had significantly stronger association between marital satisfaction and negative communication behaviors than Pakistani couples. Immigrant and Pakistani couples had similar and weaker associations between marital satisfaction and positive communication than White American couples. The similarities of immigrant Pakistani couples to White American and Pakistani couples in Pakistan illustrates both acculturation into American culture and preservation of Pakistani culture.

Familism. One characteristic trait of Hispanic culture is familism (Campos & Kim, 2017). Familism is a specific aspect of collectivism that strongly applies to Hispanics. It is

characterized by close and supportive family relationships and people who are high in familism feel closeness and support from their family members (Campos et al., 2014). Latino familism also places an emphasis on interdependence, which in pronouns is reflected through "we" use (Campos et al., 2016). Closeness and interdependence are both traits that are believed to be associated with higher marital satisfaction in addition to higher "we" use (Seider et al., 2009). For U.S. Latinos, higher levels of familism are associated with higher levels of relationship quality (Campos et al., 2016). While higher levels of familism for European and East Asian couples are not related to higher relationship quality. Suggesting that the importance of closeness and interdependence are more valuable for Latinos. Familism finds many of its values rooted in strong familial support, care, and warmth. It values strong family relationships and prioritizes family over self. These are all indicators that Hispanic couples would use higher levels of "we" pronouns than individualistic couples.

  Language. Acculturation within Hispanic groups could also play a role in the amount of "we" used. Language is considered a "carrier of cultural meanings" (Lau et al., 2004). Kang et al., (2006) found that Asian American college students with higher levels of linguistic acculturation had better psychosocial adjustment than those with lower levels. Most of the participants' day to day interactions were in English and those who spoke English more comfortably were better able to maintain interpersonal relationships which lead to higher psychosocial adjustment. They concluded that English competence was the most salient characteristic of acculturation for Asian Americans in the U.S. In a similar way, Hispanics who speak English may have higher levels of acculturation than those who speak Spanish. Therefore, Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples may have the higher levels of "we" than Hispanic-English

speaking couples. This would reflect the higher importance they place on interdependence as a result of lower levels of acculturation to U.S. culture than Hispanic-English speaking couples.

Conclusion

Higher rates of "I" and "we" and lower rates of "you" are associated with marital satisfaction and non-distressed couples use higher rates of "we" and lower rates of "you" than distressed couples. Some studies suggest that there are variations in the use and associations of communication patterns cross-culturally. However, none, to my knowledge, have explored the differences in the use of pronouns and their associations with martial satisfaction. In the present study I used video transcriptions and self-reported martial satisfaction data from Non-Hispanic, Hispanic-English speaking, and Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples to elucidate cultural differences in the use and association of pronouns with martial satisfaction.

Hispanics have a collectivistic culture which is more inclined towards meeting group needs. While our sample of non-Hispanics have an individualistic culture, which is more inclined towards meeting individual needs. Hispanics also have higher levels of familism which parallels some of the same values that are reflected in couples with high rates of "we" use, like interdependence. Use of "I" reflects positive autonomy for individualistic couples but may instead mark a separation for collectivistic couples. "You" is associated with criticism, blame, and lower levels of martial satisfaction for couples of both collectivistic and individualistic cultures. The three ethnolinguistic groups of couples were recruited from the United States. The preference of some Hispanic couples to speak English over Spanish suggests a higher level of acculturation. Therefore, in their use of "I", "we", and "you" and their association with marital satisfaction I anticipated an "acculturation" order. Meaning that Hispanic-English speaking couples would always fall in between non-Hispanics and Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples. As

with Rehman et al.'s study, I expected Hispanic-English speaking couples to show this pattern as a result of their similarities to both Non-Hispanic and Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples.

I first hypothesized that Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples would use the highest rates of "we" and that Non-Hispanic couples would use the lowest. As well as that Non-Hispanic couples would use the highest rates of "I" and "you" and Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples would use the lowest rates of "I" and "you". My second hypothesis consisted of the varying associations of "I", "we", and "you" with marital satisfaction for the three different ethnolinguistic groups. First, that higher rates of "we" would be most positively associated with marital satisfaction for Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples and less strongly positively associated with marital satisfaction for non-Hispanic couples. Second, that high rates of "I" would be positively associated with marital satisfaction for Non-Hispanics but negatively associated with martial satisfaction for Hispanics. Third, I hypothesized that higher rates of "you" would be most negatively associated with marital satisfaction for all groups such that Hispanics-Spanish speaking couples would have the strongest negative associations while non-Hispanic couples would have the weakest negative associations.

Method

Study Design Overview

To test the use of pronouns and their association with marital satisfaction I used video transcriptions of couples discussing a relationship problem as well as self-reported marital satisfaction ratings. I conducted an ANOVA to reveal significant differences in the use of "I", "we", and "you" between the three ethnolinguistic groups. Where ethnolinguistic group-membership was the independent variable and rate of pronoun use was the dependent variable. I hypothesized that Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples would use "we" significantly more than non-Hispanic couples. And that non-Hispanic couples would use "I" and "you" significantly more than both Hispanic couple groups with Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples using the significantly lowest rates of "I" and "you". I then conducted a series of regressions to examine the associations between rate of pronoun use with marital satisfaction. Where pronoun use was the independent variable and marital satisfaction was the dependent variable. I hypothesized that (a) high rates of "we" would be most positively associated with marital satisfaction for Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples (b) that high rates of "I" would be positively associated with marital satisfaction for Non-Hispanics but negatively associated with martial satisfaction for Hispanics and (c) that high rates of "you" would be most negatively associated with marital satisfaction for all groups such that Hispanics-Spanish speaking couples would have the strongest negative associations while non-Hispanic couples would have the weakest negative associations.

Participants

Participants for the current study were newlywed couples ($N = 431$) living in Los Angeles County. At the initial assessment, couples had been married for an average of 4.8 months (SD = 2.5 months). Husbands had a mean age of 27.9 (SD = 5.8 years) and a mean income of $34,153

(SD = $27,094). Wives had a mean age of 26.3 (SD = 5.0 years) and a mean income of $28,672

(SD = $24,549). In terms of race and ethnicity, 327 couples were Hispanic (76%), 52 were

African American (12%), and 52 were Caucasian (12%). During the wave one problem-solving

discussion (discussed below), 219 Hispanic couples spoke English and 108 Hispanic couples

spoke Spanish, while all African American and Caucasian couples spoke English. Data for 33 of

the couples were not included in this study because either they declined to be recorded (n = 10),

the equipment malfunctioned (n = 7), or the files were corrupted (n = 16), resulting in 398

couples for the current study. See Table 1 for details.

Measures

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction was assessed using an eight-item questionnaire in which the

highest possible score was 37 and the lowest was 8. The scale consisted of five items (e.g. "How

satisfied are you with the amount of time you spend together?") that were rated on a 5-point

scale (*1 = Very Dissatisfied, 3 = Neutral, 5 = Very Satisfied*), and three items (e.g. "How much

do you trust [spouse]?") that were rated on a 4-point scale (from *1 = Not at all* to *4 =

Completely*). The relationship satisfaction score for each spouse was the sum of their responses,

with a higher score representing a higher level of satisfaction.

Pronouns

Pronouns were measured as the proportion of "I", "we", and "you" words used in relation

to the total words spoken in the problem solving discussion. To calculate this proportion, the

video transcripts were analyzed using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) software

created by Tausczik and Pennebaker (2010). LIWC contains categories, which are groupings of

words that are related to one another. For example the "we" category includes words such as

"our", "us", and "ourselves". Proportion of words used is determined by comparing the amount of words used in a category to the total amount of words spoken during the problem-solving conversation.

For English-speaking couples, I used the categories "I", "we", and "you" from the 2007 English LIWC dictionary. For Spanish-speaking couples, I used the 2007 Spanish LIWC dictionary and the equivalent categories; "I" was measured with the sum of "Yo" and "verbYO", "we" was measured with the sum of "Nosotro" and "verbNOS", and "you" was measured with the sum of "TuUtd" and "verbTU" . Each couple received a numerical score that represents the proportion of total words spoken that fell into that category, with a possible range of 0-100.

Ethnolinguistic Groups

Couples were sorted into three groups based on their ethnicity and language spoken during their conversation. Hispanic couples were either placed into the Hispanic-English speaking condition ($n = 208$) or into the Hispanic-Spanish speaking condition ($n = 96$). African American and Caucasian couples were placed into the Non-Hispanic condition ($n = 94$).

Procedure

To recruit participants into the study, the names and addresses of couples were collected using marriage license applications from Los Angeles County. The couples were cross-referenced with census data to identify those living in low-income communities and those whose last names had a high probability of belonging to Hispanic, Caucasian, or African American racial/ethnic groups. Couples were then contacted by phone to confirm that they had been married for less than one year, that neither spouse had been previously married, and that both spouses were of the same racial/ethnic group. Couples that met all the above criteria were invited to participate, of which 431 completed the study (Williamson et al., 2013).

Couples were visited at their homes by two interviewers who separated the couple to speak to the spouses individually. The interviewers explained the study to each of them and obtained their consent to participate. After each spouse completed a marital satisfaction questionnaire, the couple was reunited for the next phase. The couples completed three 8-minute discussions, which took place without either interviewer in the room. The couples discussed one problem solving topic, one husband social support topic, and one wife social support topic. For the problem-solving topic, the couples discussed a relationship problem of their choice, such as financial problems, career decisions, or spending time together. For the social support topics, each spouse selected a topic that they needed support from their partner on, such as weight loss, future goals, or time management. After finishing the three discussions the couples received a $75 compensation.

Videos were transcribed by a team of undergraduate researchers at the University of Texas at Austin. All video transcripts were revised by second undergraduate research assistant to ensure accuracy. Each couple had a total of three transcripts one for problem solving, one for husband social support, and one for wife social support; the current study used the problem-solving transcripts.

Statistical Analyses

To assess whether ethnolinguistic groups differ on amount of pronoun use, the mean level use of "I", "we", and "you" was compared across couple groups. I used a one-way between groups Analysis on Variance (ANOVA) test to determine if use of each pronoun significantly differed across ethnolinguistic groups. If the ANOVA was significant, then the Tukey HSD test was performed to assess which groups significantly differed from one another on the amount of pronoun use.

To assess whether the amount of pronoun use was related to relationship satisfaction, I performed six linear regressions to test the association between "I", "we", and "you" use and husband and wife marital satisfaction with ethnolinguistic group as the moderator to test the interaction between pronoun use and group membership. Regressions that result in a significant interaction effect indicated that there was a significant difference between the ethnolinguistic groups on the association between pronoun use and marital satisfaction. Following a significant interaction term, a simple slopes analysis was conducted to determine exactly *which* groups significantly differed from one another in their association of pronoun use and marital satisfaction.

Results

Comparison of Mean Levels of "I", "We", and "You" Use

Three one-way between subjects Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted to compare the effect of ethnolinguistic group on pronoun use (see Table 2 and Figure 1).

"I" Use

There was a significant effect of group on the amount of "I" use, $F(2, 395) = 136.16$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .41$, meaning that at least two of the groups significantly differed in their amount of "I" use from one another. The Tukey HSD post hoc test indicated that all three groups significantly differed in their amount of "I" use, such that Hispanic-English speaking couples used "I" the most ($M = 8.12$, $SD = 2.10$), followed by Non-Hispanic couples ($M = 7.46$, $SD = 1.78$), followed by Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.97$).

"You" Use

There was a significant effect of group on the amount of "you" use, $F(2, 395) = 38.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$. The Tukey HSD post hoc tests indicated that all the groups significantly differed from one another in mean levels of "you" use, such that Hispanic-English speaking couples used "you" the most ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.96$), followed by Non-Hispanic couples ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 2.04$), followed by Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.79$).

"We" Use

There was a significant effect of group on the amount of "we" use, $F(2, 395) = 62.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$. The Tukey HSD post hoc test indicated that Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples ($M = .44$, $SD = .59$) significantly differed from Hispanic-English speaking couples and non-Hispanic couples. However, Hispanic-English speaking couples ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 1.54$) and non-

Hispanic couples (M = 1.97, SD = 1.22) did not significantly differ from one another but they both has significantly higher levels of "we" use than Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples.

Association Between Pronoun Use and Relationship Satisfaction

I performed six linear regression analyses to examine if the association between pronoun use ("I", "we", and "you") and relationship satisfaction is moderated by group membership (see Table 3).

"I" and Marital Satisfaction

The interaction between amount of "I" use and ethnolinguistic group was not significant for husband relationship satisfaction, $F(5, 392) = .96$, $p = .44$, $R^2 = .01$, or for wife relationship satisfaction, $F(5, 392) = 1.52$, $p = .18$, $R^2 = .02$, indicating that this association does not differ by group. Therefore, the group membership interaction term was dropped from the analysis and the main effect of "I" use on relationship satisfaction was examined. Results indicate that more use of "I" is significantly associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction for husbands, $\beta = .20$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 2), and lower satisfaction for wives, $\beta = -.15$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 3).

"We" and Marital Satisfaction

The interaction between amount of "we" use and ethnolinguistic group was not significant for wife relationship satisfaction, $F(5,392) = 1.78$, $p = .12$, $R^2 = .01$, and the main effects analysis indicates that more use of "we" is significantly associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .08$, $p < .001$) in all three groups (see Figure 4). The interaction between amount of "we" use and cultural-linguistic group was significant for husband relationship satisfaction, $F(5,392) = 2.35$, $p = .04$, $R^2 = .03$. Because there was a significant interaction between amount of "we" use and group membership for husband relationship satisfaction, we proceeded to perform a simple slopes analysis which indicated that the

association between "we" use and relationship satisfaction was significant only for Hispanic-English speaking couples, $\beta = .65$, t(392) = 2.32, $p = .02$, such that higher use of "we" was related to higher relationship satisfaction (see Figure 5). For Hispanic-Spanish speaking and Non-Hispanic English-speaking husbands, use of "we" was not associated with relationship satisfaction.

"You" and Marital Satisfaction

Proportion of "you" use and group membership, was significant for wife relationship satisfaction, $F(5,392) = 3.45$, $p = .00$, $R^2 = .02$, and husband relationship satisfaction, $F(5,392) = 3.03$, $p = .01$, $R^2 = .02$. Simple slopes analyses indicated that the association between "you" use and relationship satisfaction was significant for Hispanic-English speaking wives, $\beta = -0.44$, t(392) = -2.11, $p = .04$, Hispanic-English speaking husbands, $\beta = -.60$, t(392) = -3.19, p = .00, and Hispanic-Spanish speaking husbands, $\beta = -.61$, t(392) = -2.60, p = .01, such that higher use of "you" was related with lower relationship satisfaction, (see Figures 6 and 7). In Hispanic-Spanish speaking wives, the association between "you" use and relationship satisfaction was not significant.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore cultural differences in (a) the use of pronouns and (b) their associations with marital satisfaction between Non-Hispanic (i.e. White and Black) and Hispanic couples. Contrary to my first hypothesis, rates of pronouns use did not follow an acculturation order, meaning that the rates of pronoun use of Hispanic-English speaking couples did not fall in-between the rates of pronoun use of Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples and non-Hispanic couples. Rather, Hispanic-English speaking couples had the highest use rates for all the pronouns and Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples had the lowest rates of use for all the pronouns. Contrary to my second hypothesis, not all the groups had a positive association between "we" and marital satisfaction and a negative association between "you" and marital satisfaction. As well as, the ethnolinguistic groups did not show a distinction in their associations of "I" with marital satisfaction. Rather, husbands did not show any association of "I" with marital satisfaction and wives only showed a marginally negative association of "I" with marital satisfaction. However, the ethnolinguistic groups showed differences in the use of pronouns and their associations of "we" and "you" with marital satisfaction. Which suggest cultural differences in the use of pronouns and their associations with marital satisfaction.

All three ethnolinguistic groups significantly differed in their use of "I" and "you" such that Hispanic-English speaking couples used them the most and Hispanic-Spanish speaking used them the least. For "we", Hispanic-English speaking and non-Hispanic couples used similar rates but they both used "we" significantly more than Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples. These results suggest that for use of "I" and "you" there are cultural differences between Hispanic-English speaking couples and non-Hispanic couples. And that collectivistic culture differences are not reflected when Hispanic couples speak Spanish because the rates of use for "I", "we",

and "you" are significantly lower for Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples. Yet, when Hispanic couples speak English, their use of "I" and "you" significantly differs from non-Hispanic couples. Suggesting that cultural differences are overshadowed by linguistic differences in the use of pronouns.

The three ethnolinguistic groups used significantly different rates of "I" from each other such that Hispanic English-speaking couples used the most and Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples used the least. I suspected non-Hispanics would use the highest rates of "I" since they are individualistic, but, surprisingly, Hispanic-English speaking couples had significantly higher rates of "I" use than the other two ethnolinguistic groups. I thought that high collectivistic values would have influenced both Hispanic groups to use low rates of "I". However, this was only true for Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples. All three ethnolinguistic groups used "I" more than "you" and "we". This contradicts the idea that low-income people have high pro-social inclinations (Piff et al., 2010) that would lead them to high interdependence which is reflected through "we" use. A possible explanation for this is that the couples engaged in demand/withdraw patterns of communication which elicit high rates of "you" and "I". Where "you" represents demandingness and "I" represents defensiveness and withdrawing (Ross et al., 2019). Demand/withdraw patterns of communication are adaptive for low-income couples because they encourage problem resolution. Whereas middle and high-income people who have more resources to solve problems, demand and withdrawal becomes unnecessary.

Hispanic-English speaking and non-Hispanic couples significantly differed from Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples in their use of "we" but did not differ significantly from each other. This resembles previous studies which indicated that levels of positivity do not differ cross-culturally (Williamson et al., 2012). Alternatively, they suggest some level of acculturation

for Hispanic-English speaking couples, as they were more similar to non-Hispanics than to Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples in their use of "we". However, I was not expecting Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples to have the significantly lowest rates of "we" since they hold the highest levels of collectivistic values. Suggesting that pronouns do not reflect cultural values when collectivistic couples speak Spanish.

Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples had the significantly lowest rates of "you" use. These results are perplexing given that past research indicated that collectivistic couples would have higher rates of negative communication (i.e. "you") compared to individualistic couples (Sadeghi et al., 2012; Williamson et al., 2012). One possible explanation for this contradictory finding is that previous studies observed behaviors rather than language markers. However, in line with previous studies, I found that Hispanic-English speaking couples had the significantly highest rates of "you". Indicating that the reflection of marital satisfaction through use of pronouns is language specific; when collectivistic couples speak English, they are significantly more negative than non-Hispanic couples.

The association between use of "you" with marital satisfaction varied by group for husbands and wives. Higher rates of "you" were associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction only for Hispanic-English speaking wives and husbands. These results are consistent with previous findings that higher rates of "you" are associated with lower marital satisfaction for collectivistic couples than for individualistic couples (Seider et al., 2009; Simmons et al., 2005; Slatcher et al., 2008; Williams-Baucom et al., 2010). Unexpectedly, Hispanic-Spanish speaking and non-Hispanic husbands showed higher levels of marital satisfaction with higher use of "you". Again, this points to demand/withdraw patterns being adaptive for low-income couples. Perhaps it did not apply to Hispanic-English speaking couples because their rates of

"you" were much higher than those of the other two ethnolinguistic groups. Which might have

crossed into other connotations of "you" such as blaming.

The association between use of "I" and marital satisfaction did not vary by group for

husbands or wives. For wives, higher rates of "I" had a marginally negative association with

martial satisfaction and for husbands, use of "I" had no effect on marital satisfaction. These

results do not completely replicate previous findings that higher rates of "I" use are associated

with higher levels of marital satisfaction (Simmons et al., 2005; Slatcher et al., 2008). And that

higher rates of "I" are adaptive for low-income couples as part of demand/withdraw

communication patterns (Ross et al., 2019). From these findings I can only conclude that "I" use

for low-income couples has a different association with marital satisfaction than it has for middle

and high-income couples. Suggesting that there are socioeconomic differences in the expression

of marital satisfaction.

Overall, the results for the associations of "I" and "you" with marital satisfaction do not

replicate those that had been found for on middle and high-income couples. Previous work

indicated that "adaptive" communication would vary for couples of different socioeconomic

statuses (Piff et al., 2010; Ross et al., 2019). Such that demand-withdrawal patterns in

relationships would be adaptive for lower income couples (Ross et al., 2019). The current sample

was comprised of low-income couples, so it is possible that the lack of an association of "I" with

marital satisfaction and the positive associations of "you" with marital satisfaction are due to

differences in communication for couples of different socioeconomic statuses.

Finally, the association between use of "we" and marital satisfaction did not vary by

group for wives. Higher rates of "we" were consistently related to higher levels of martial

satisfaction. For husbands, there was a significant main effect in the association of "we" use and

marital satisfaction. Higher use of "we" was associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction for Hispanic-English and Spanish speaking couples. However, higher use of "we" was associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction for non-Hispanic couples. These results are, for the most part, consistent with previous findings that use of "we" is related to marital satisfaction for wives and husbands. However, the negative relationship between use of "we" and husband satisfaction for non-Hispanic husbands indicates a cultural difference between Hispanic and non-Hispanic husbands. In a study done by Lin et al., (2016) they suggested that when men used "we" it did not really mean "we", but rather it was used in a domineering way to mean "only you". If non - Hispanic husbands' "we" actually meant a domineering "you" then these results are consistent with Lin et al., (2016) findings. Suggesting that non-Hispanic husbands' you was used in a maladaptive demanding or blaming manner. Alternatively, non-Hispanic husbands' use of "we" is consistent with the idea that the non-Hispanic couples are individualistic. Leading them to value independence (i.e. "I" and "you") over interdependence (i.e. "we").

One large limitation within this study is that collectivistic or individualistic inclinations were not measured in each couple. Rather, I made the assumptions that some couples were individualistic and others collectivistic based on their ethnicity. Future studies should measure level of identification with individualism and collectivism for couples before testing the relationships between culture and pronoun use. Another limitation of the study is that I did not re-test the Spanish transcripts in English to control for the possible language differences. The results of this study indicate that differences between the Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples and the other two groups are likely due to differences in language. Perhaps if the transcripts were translated, I would be able to control for the language differences. The couples from this study were all recruited from the U.S. therefore they may exhibit larger rates of acculturation than

couples recruited directly from collectivistic countries would. I used language to identify

acculturation but, again, this is something that would be more reliably representative of the

couples' actual acculturation if they had been assessed for level of acculturation.

Conclusion

Overall, this study provides greater clarity about the use and association of pronouns for

couples of different cultures and who speak different languages. Hispanic couples who spoke

English tended to use higher rates of "I", "we", and "you" than non-Hispanic and Hispanic-

Spanish speaking couples. Suggesting that both culture and language are two factors at play in

the use of pronouns. The associations between pronouns and marital satisfaction varied by group

in half of the regressions, indicating that there are cultural differences and similarities in the

expression of marital satisfaction.

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Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	*n*	*M*	SD	%
Marriage length in months	-	4.8	2.5	-
Age in years	-			
Husbands	-	27.9	5.8	-
Wives	-	26.3	5.0	-
Income				
Husbands	-	$34,153	$27,094	-
Wives	-	$28,672	$24,549	-
Ethnic/Racial group				
Hispanic	327	-	-	76%
African American	52	-	-	12%
Caucasian	52	-	-	12%
Language spoken during interaction				
Hispanic couples	327	-	-	100%
English	219	-	-	67%
Spanish	108	-	-	33%

Note. All African American and Caucasian couples spoke English during their interaction.

N = 431.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations on Use of "I", "We", and "You"

	"I" use		"We" use		"You" use		$F(3, 395)$	η^2
Ethnolinguistic Group	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	SD		
Non-Hispanic [a]	7.46	1.78	1.97	1.22	4.55	2.04	136.16***	.41
Hispanic-English Speaking [b]	8.12	2.10	2.19	1.54	5.30	1.96	62.41***	.24
Hispanic-Spanish Speaking [c]	4.10	1.97	0.44	0.59	3.21	1.79	38.35***	.16

Note. N = 398.

[a] *n* = 94. [b] *n* = 208. [c] *n* = 96.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 3

Regression Results for the Associations Between Pronoun Use and Marital Satisfaction With

Ethnolinguistic Group as a Moderator

	"I" use		"We" use		"You" use	
	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife
Constant	32.76***	34.47***	34.88***	33.53***	32.63***	33.50***
Pronoun use	.20	-.15	-.32	.08	.35*	-.03
Hispanic English-speaking	1.88	.43	-1.91**	-1.42	2.35*	1.83
Hispanic Spanish-speaking	1.38	-1.38	-1.21	-.25	2.19*	-.40
Pronoun use X Hispanic English-speaking	-.32	-.10	.65*	.44	-.60**	-.43*
Pronoun use X Hispanic Spanish-speaking	-.23	.21	1.04	.21	-.61*	-.11

Note. $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

Figure 1

Proportion of Pronouns Used for Different Ethnolinguistic Groups
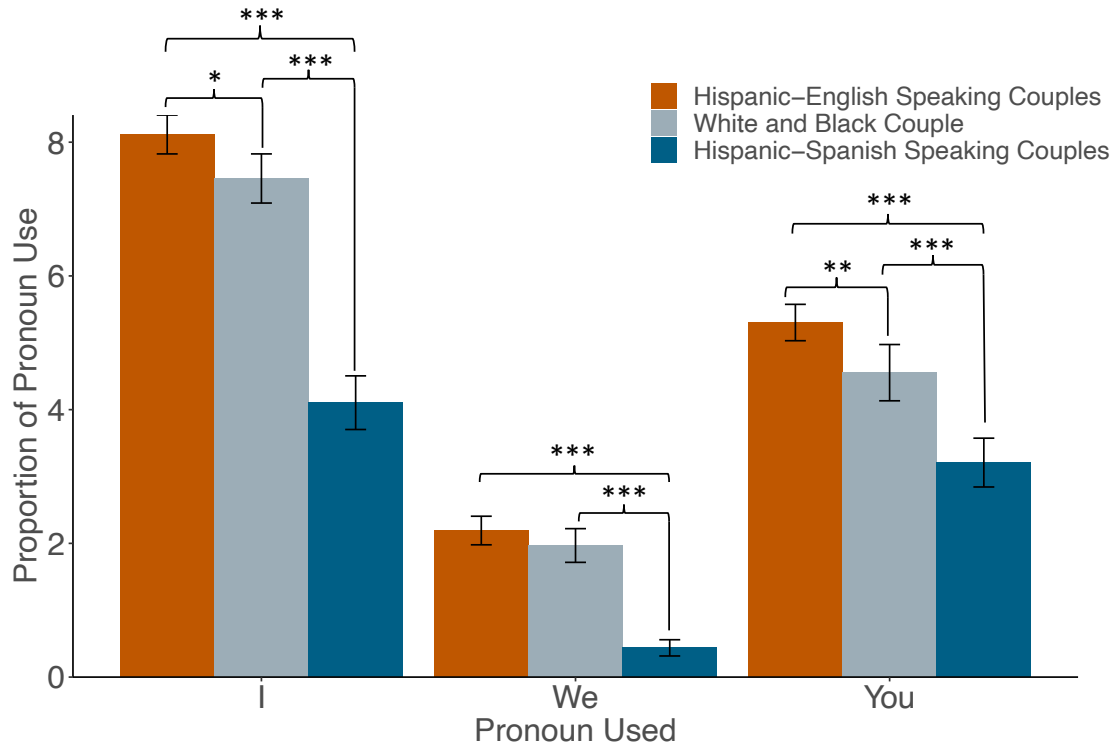
Note. Proportion of "I", "we", and "you" pronoun use during an 8-minute problem-solving conversation for Hispanic-English speaking, Non-Hispanic, and Hispanic-Spanish speaking couples.
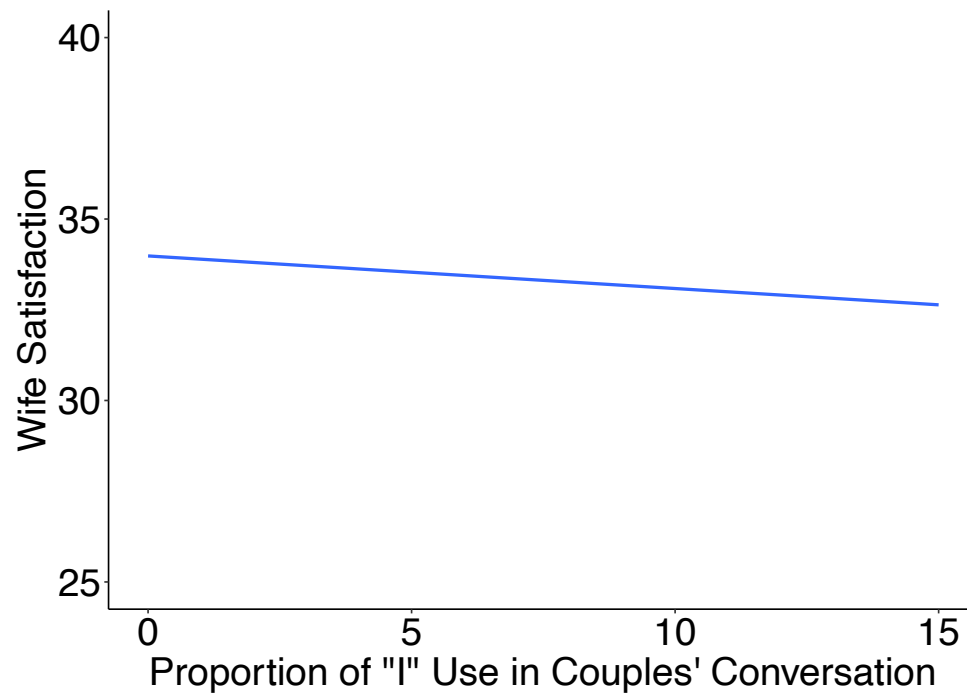
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.*

Figure 2

Satisfaction and Use of "I" for Husbands
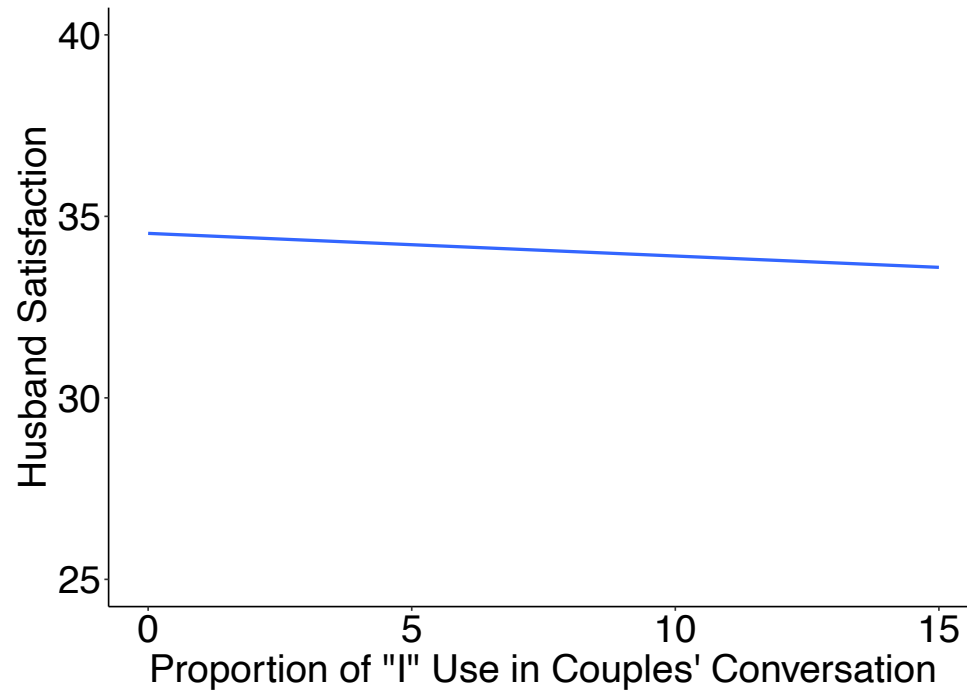
Note. The association between proportion of "I" use and husband satisfaction during the couples'

8-minute problem-solving conversation.

Figure 3

Satisfaction and Use of "I" for Wives

Note. The association between proportion of "I" use and wife satisfaction during the couples' 8-minute problem-solving conversation.
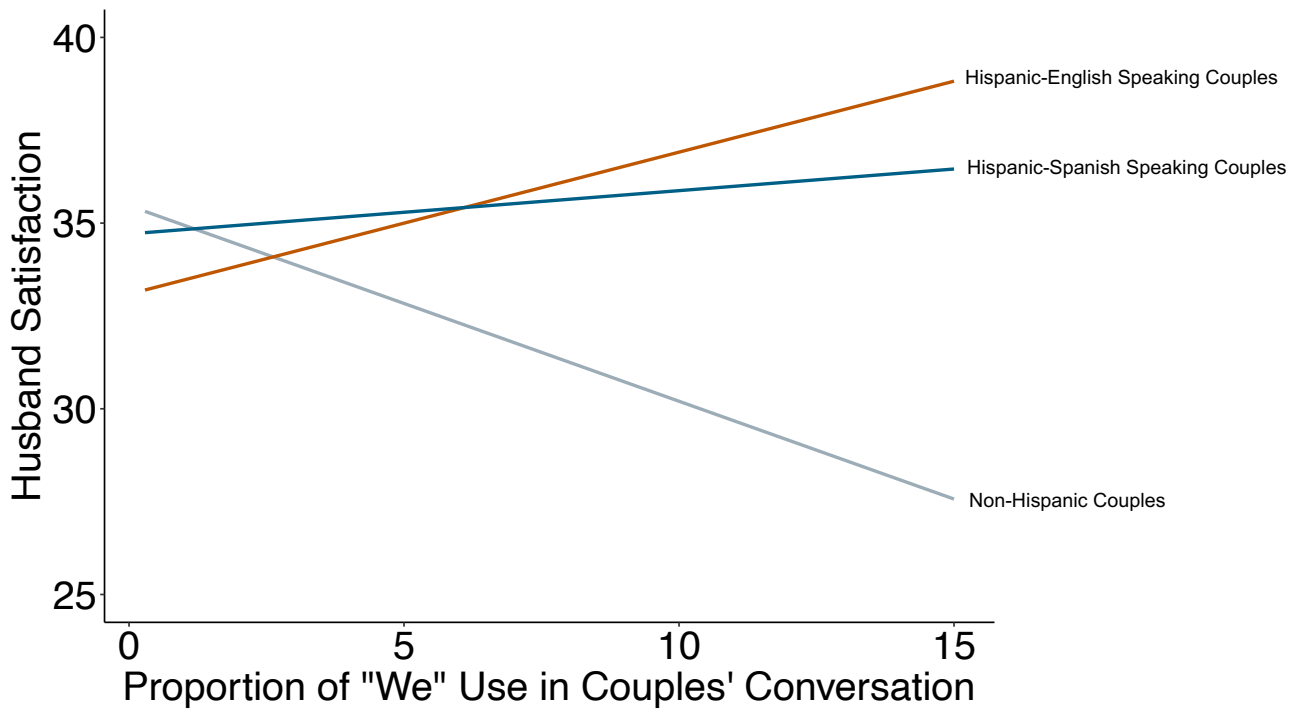
Figure 4

Satisfaction and Use of "We" for Wives
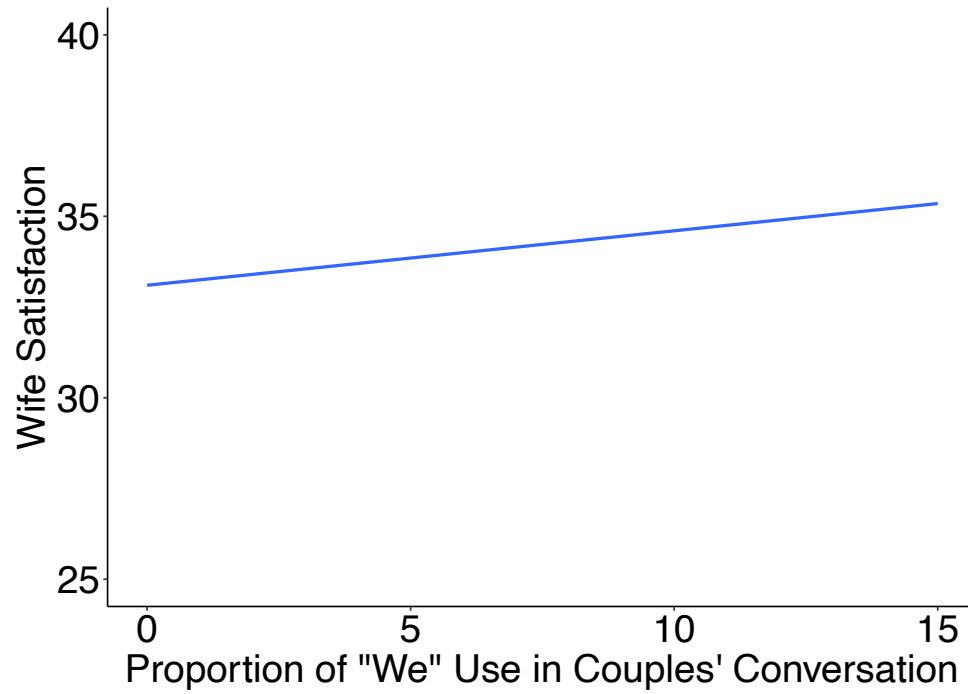
Note. The association between proportion of "we" use and wife satisfaction during the couples'

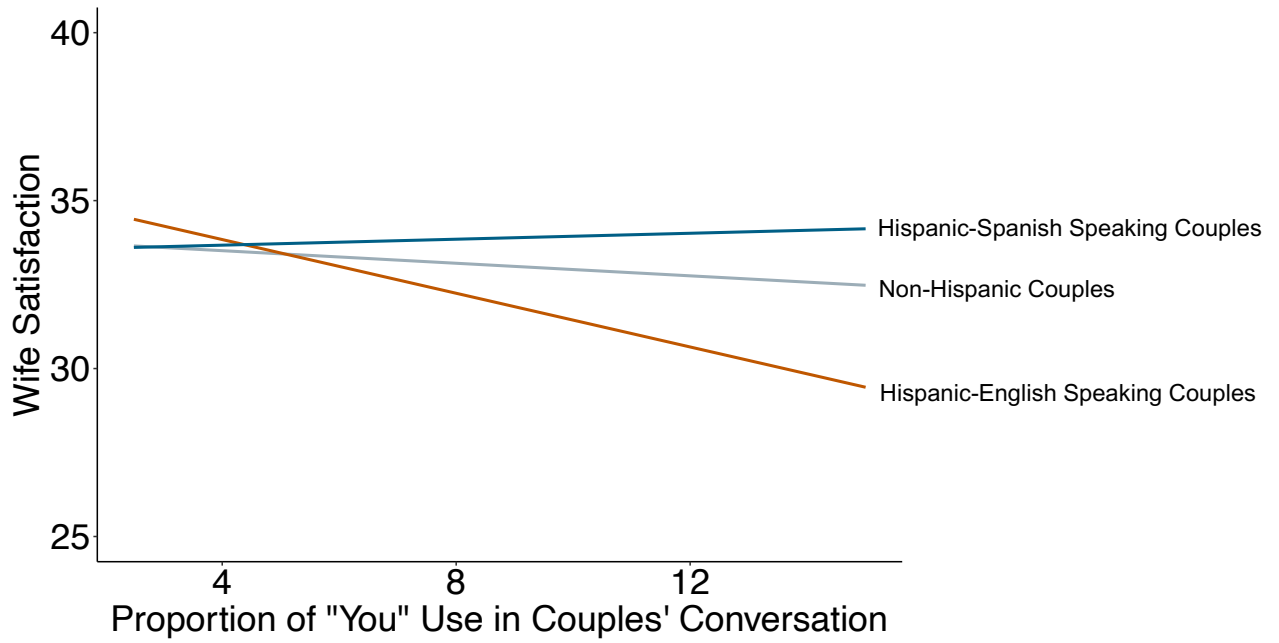8-minute problem-solving conversation.

Figure 5

Satisfaction and Use of "We" for Husbands

Note. The association between proportion of "we" use and husband satisfaction during the

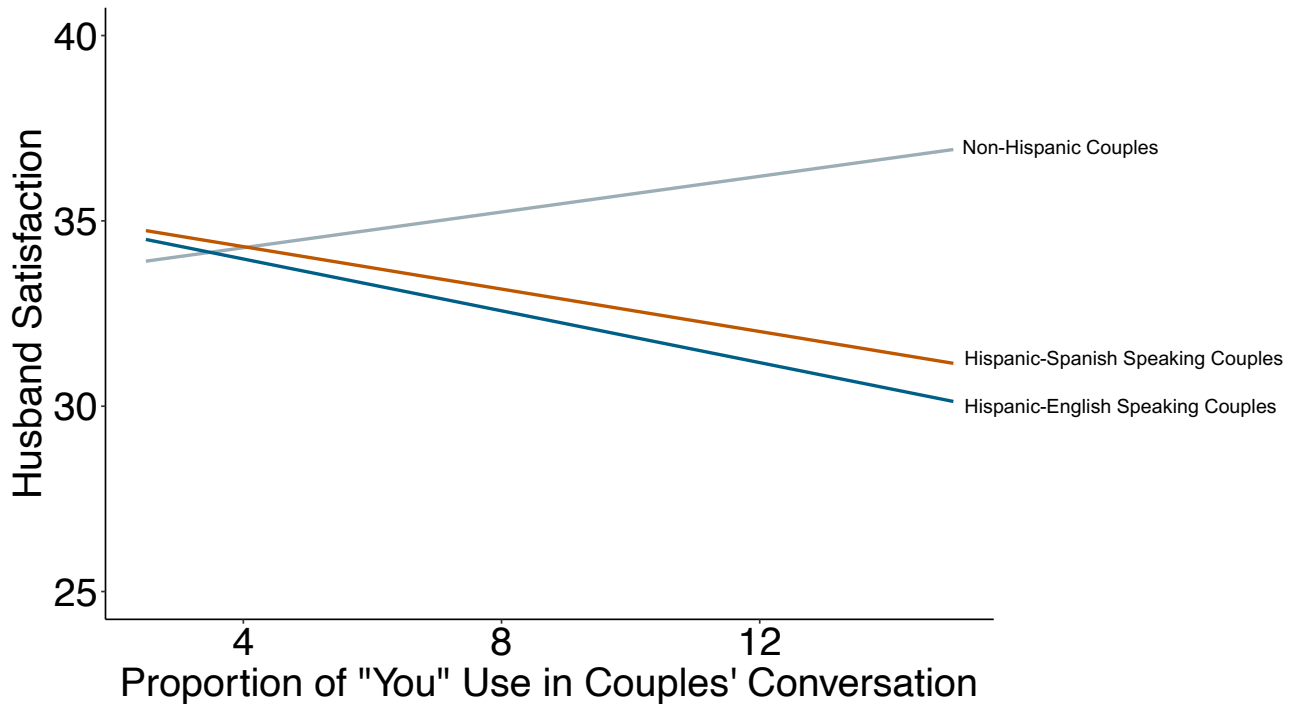couples' 8-minute problem-solving by ethnolinguistic group.

Figure 6

Satisfaction and Use of "You" for Wives

Note. The association between proportion of "you" use and wife satisfaction during the couples'

8-minute problem-solving conversation.

Figure 7

Satisfaction and Use of "You" for Husbands

Note. The association between proportion of "you" use and wife satisfaction during the couples'

8-minute problem-solving conversation.