

Emotion Regulation and Relationship Satisfaction in Clinical Couples

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationship between the multidimensional construct of emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction in couples seeking couple or family therapy at an outpatient mental health clinic. Recognizing the necessarily interdependent nature of dyadic data, study data were analyzed via path analysis consistent with the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). While overall emotion regulation was not found to be significantly related to relationship satisfaction, results indicated differential effects for the various dimensions of emotion regulation. Perceived access to emotion regulation strategies was significantly positively associated with relationship satisfaction for both men and women. Awareness of emotions was significantly negatively associated with satisfaction for men, with women displaying a trend toward significance, and acceptance of emotions was significantly negatively associated with satisfaction for women, with men displaying a trend toward significance. Women's acceptance of emotions was also significantly negatively associated with her partner's relationship satisfaction, while her ability to control her impulses was significantly positively associated with her partner's satisfaction. No partner effects were found for men's emotion regulation dimensions. Study limitations as well as research and clinical implications are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Problem and its Setting

Romantic relationships are among the most important relationships in a person's life. The quality of these relationships, defined in this study as between dating or married partners, has important implications for an individual's overall well-being (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007). Poor marital functioning can negatively impact physical as well as psychological health (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Whisman, 2007; Whisman, Uebelacker, & Bruce, 2006) and dissatisfaction in marriage puts couples at significant risk for divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 1992).

These negative outcomes are not limited to married couples. Barr and Simons (2014) found that the adverse effects of relationship strain on physical and mental health did not differ significantly between married and cohabiting dating couples. Additionally, the association between relationship satisfaction and personal well-being has been found even in populations of dating partners who do not cohabit (Gere & Schimmack, 2013). Finally, dyadic functioning appears to have effects that may reach beyond the bounds of the individual relationship to influence parenting (Holland & McElwain, 2013; Parent et al., 2014). Clearly relationship quality has the potential to influence many important outcomes, thus, an exploration of possible predictors of satisfaction in romantic relationships seems warranted.

Relationship satisfaction is probably one of the constructs that has received the most attention in couples' research. It has been studied in different cultures (Batool & Khalid, 2012; Cutrona, Russell, Burzette, Wesner, & Bryant, 2011), during various life stages (Adamsons, 2013; Clements & Swensen, 2003; Hardie & Lucas, 2010), and within numerous stressful contexts (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003; Knobloch & Theiss, 2011). Within this research, gender has

emerged as one important factor to consider, both for its main effect on relationship satisfaction, which indicates that women are less satisfied than men (Fowers, 1991; Schumm, Resnick, Bollman, & Jurich, 1998), and for its role as moderator in the association between relationship quality and other variables, including genetic influences (Spotts, Prescott, & Kendler, 2006) and negative interactions (Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). Relationship duration also appears to be importantly associated with relationship satisfaction, with many studies finding a curvilinear pattern such that satisfaction starts high, declines over the middle years, then recovers in later-life (e.g., Adelman, Chadwick, & Baerger, 1996).

Recently, researchers have also begun to explore the role of emotion regulation in social and romantic relationships (e.g., Lopes et al., 2004; Lopes et al., 2011). The field of emotion regulation has grown considerably over the past 20 years (Gross, 2013). During this period of growth, there has sometimes been a lack of consistency regarding what exactly is meant by the term (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Gratz and Roemer (2004), after a review of the relevant research, describe a definition that is ultimately grounded in the literature as follows:

Emotion regulation may be conceptualized as involving the (a) awareness and understanding of emotions, (b) acceptance of emotions, (c) ability to control impulsive behaviors and behave in accordance with desired goals when experiencing negative emotions, and (d) ability to use situationally appropriate emotion regulation strategies flexibly to modulate emotional responses as desired in order to meet individual goals and situational demands. (p. 42)

Emotion regulation is therefore not understood to be a singular concept, but rather one that includes these multiple dimensions. In order to assess problems with emotion regulation, Gratz and Roemer (2004) created the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), which is

composed of six subscales for each of the multiple dimensions as follows: awareness of emotions (awareness), clarity regarding emotions (clarity), acceptance of emotions (acceptance), impulse control during negative emotions (impulse), goal-directed behavior during negative emotions (goals), and access to and use of appropriate emotion regulation strategies (strategies).

The idea that emotion regulation may be important in couple relationships is suggested by some of the current literature. For example, emotion regulation has been found to influence the quality of social interactions between friends (Lopes et al., 2004; Lopes et al., 2011) and emotional intelligence as a whole (of which emotion regulation is one part) has been found to be related specifically to romantic relationship satisfaction (Brackett, Warner, & Bosco, 2005). Additionally, dysregulation of emotion is implicated in a variety of psychopathologies including anxiety and mood disorders (Barlow, Allen, & Choate, 2004; Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, & Hofmann, 2006). Psychopathology is also reliably associated with relationship discord (Whisman, 2013). In 2011, South, Krueger, and Iacono discovered that this relationship could be explained via internalizing and externalizing symptoms, rather than through specific psychological disorders. They state that their findings “support the hypothesis that marital distress may indeed be a function of the general inability to regulate emotions that is at the heart of internalizing psychopathology or the tendency to project distress outward that defines the externalizing spectrum” (South et al., 2011, p. 944).

A connection between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction is also implied in the work of Gottman and his colleagues. They have found that unhappy marriages are characterized by greater amounts of negative emotion and by greater amounts of reciprocity of negative emotion versus happy marriages (e.g., Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995; Gottman & Levenson, 1986). The concept of negative emotion reciprocity appears most

germane to this study. This is a process wherein one partner expresses negative emotion and the other responds in kind, setting off a negative cycle that is commonly seen in distressed couples (Gottman & Levenson, 1986). It might be expected that if one or both partners were better able to regulate their negative emotions, the couple may not be as prone to getting caught in this vicious cycle. Thus, emotion regulation may have important implications for relationship satisfaction.

Although the regulation of emotion in adults was once primarily thought to be a purely individual process, theorists and researchers have increasingly recognized that regulation does not happen in a vacuum. Efforts to regulate emotions often occur within and are influenced by social contexts (English, John, & Gross, 2013; Rimè, 2007). Indeed, one investigation found that the overwhelming majority of instances of emotion regulation were reported during interpersonal interactions (Gross, Richards, & John, 2006). Gross and his colleagues (2006) asked 91 participants to describe a recent situation in which they regulated their emotions. In 98% of the responses, the regulation occurred within a social context and the majority of these involved someone with whom the participant had a close relationship (e.g., friend, family member, or romantic partner). In close relationships, including couple relationships, the emotion regulation of one partner may have effects and consequences for the other partner (Levenson, Haase, Bloch, Holley, & Seider, 2014). For example, consider a man dealing with anger after a fight with his boss. He calls his wife looking for support and when she hears about what happened her overwhelming emotion is fear that he will be fired from his job. She expresses this fear to him and implores him to apologize to his boss. This was not the response the man was hoping for and now he must attempt to manage his disappointment. The wife's next response depends, at least in part, on how he accomplishes this. Thus, emotion regulation in relationships is a

recursive process which must take into account the emotions, strategies, and actions of both individuals as well as the effects each partner has on the other (Levenson et al., 2014).

Despite the role that emotion regulation may play in couples' relationship satisfaction that has been suggested in the literature, only two studies have examined that association. In the first study, involving a couples' group intervention to improve partners' emotion regulation, Kirby and Baucom (2007) found that improving the regulation abilities of one partner had a positive effect on the other partner's relationship satisfaction. Despite the value of the finding, the study had a small sample size of only 8 couples and focused on overall emotion regulation without attention to the association between each dimension of emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction. The second study, which was conducted by Bloch, Haase, and Levenson (2014), included a larger sample of 82 middle-aged and 74 older couples and found that emotion regulation was able to longitudinally predict marital satisfaction. Nevertheless, similar to Kirby and Baucom's study, this study also did not examine emotion regulation as the multi-dimensional construct described by Gratz and Roemer (2004). Therefore, it is unable to assess whether the various dimensions of emotion regulation vary in their ability to predict relationship satisfaction.

Although there is research suggesting a connection between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction within a couple context, this still appears to be an under researched area (Levenson et al., 2014) in which the multiple dimensions of emotion regulation have yet to be fully explored. Studies examining individuals have found utility in evaluating and comparing each dimension separately. Moriya and Takahashi (2013) found that only the clarity and strategies subscales of the DERS mediated the relationship between interpersonal stress and depression. Only the impulse subscale mediated the relationship between childhood physical or

emotional abuse and probable PTSD in a sample of substance abusers (Weiss, Tull, Lavender, & Gratz, 2013). Tull and Roemer (2007) found that more difficulties with acceptance and clarity of emotions were associated with the recent experience of uncued panic attacks. The various dimensions of emotion regulation have also been shown to differentially predict mental health and well-being, with clarity and strategies subscale scores emerging as the best predictors (Saxena, Dubey, & Pandey, 2011). Yet no study to date has explored the multiple dimensions of emotion regulation as they relate to the interpersonal context of romantic relationship satisfaction. Clearly there is a need for more research in this area.

Significance

Relationship satisfaction has been empirically tied to various important outcomes that contribute to overall quality of life (e.g., Proulx et al., 2007). At the same time, emotion regulation has been associated with how well people function in social relationships (Lopes et al., 2004). The larger concept of emotional intelligence has also been linked to romantic relationship satisfaction (Brackett et al., 2005), suggesting a role for emotion regulation in this process. Yet, a significant research base examining how emotion regulation affects relationship satisfaction does not yet exist (Levenson et al., 2014). Another unique contribution of the present study exploring the multiple dimensions of emotion regulation is the ability to determine not only, whether there exists a relationship between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction, but which aspects of emotion regulation may be the best predictors of this relationship. In addition to contributing to empirical knowledge as described, a study of emotion regulation in the couple relationship has the potential to be particularly useful in a clinical setting. Relationship problems are often cited as causes of mental suffering (Swindle, Heller, Pescosolido, & Kikuzawa, 2000) and Levenson and colleagues (2014) assert that couples seeking

relationship therapy often struggle with down-regulation of negative emotion, up-regulation of positive emotion, or both.

Many couple therapies incorporate emotion and regulation to some extent. For example, Johnson's (2004) Emotionally Focused Therapy for couples focuses on awareness of and successful communication about emotion. Gottman Method couple therapy incorporates regulation into discussions of how couples manage conflict and either escalate or deescalate emotional arousal (Navarra & Gottman, 2011). Even Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for couples now recognizes the importance of emotion in romantic relationships via each partner's expression of and behavioral responses to experienced emotion (Epstein & Baucom, 2002). A specific focus on emotion regulation has also been recommended in the treatment of both perpetrators (Dowd & Leisring, 2008) and victims (Siegel & Forero, 2012) of intimate partner violence.

Clearly emotion regulation is a construct of importance to the field of couple therapy. A study which examines the multiple dimensions of this construct as they relate to relationship satisfaction would be poised to offer clinicians specific and fruitful targets for intervention which are empirically supported. For example, if access to regulation strategies is found to be important for satisfaction while awareness of emotions is not, this finding would offer clinicians guidance about where to focus therapeutic efforts to maximize relationship benefits.

Theoretical Framework

Despite the gathering empirical evidence that suggests a link between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction, a review of the literature indicates that there does not yet exist a unified theory which fully articulates conceptually why and how these two constructs may be related. The following section will examine six assumptions that appear to underlie much of the

research on emotion regulation and explore how these assumptions point to a connection to relationship satisfaction.

Emotions can be regulated. This is the most basic foundation upon which any theory that incorporates emotion regulation must necessarily be built. We are not entirely at the mercy of any emotion that happens to arise; we possess various skills to help us alter or modulate our emotions. These skills may involve redirecting our attention, reappraising our situation, or suppressing our behavioral response (Gross, 1998). Emotion regulation may also incorporate strategies aimed at affecting the timing or intensity of our emotional experience (Thompson, 2011). Some theorists have taken this assumption so far as to suggest that all emotion is regulated and there is no such thing as pure emotion (e.g., Campos, Frankel, & Camras, 2004; Thompson, 2011), while others prefer a two-factor approach where first an emotion arises and it is then regulated through conscious or unconscious processes (e.g., Cole, Martin, & Dennis, 2004). Of importance to this study is the generally agreed upon view that emotions are amenable to regulation.

Emotion regulation is goal-oriented. This assumption arises from a functionalist perspective (Thompson, 1994). Regulation efforts do not occur entirely at random, but are directed toward a specific aim and perform a particular function. Earlier in the study of emotion regulation, it was commonly accepted that the goal of regulation efforts was generally to reduce negative emotional experiences (Campos et al., 2004). As the field progressed, however, many theorists have recognized that regulation goals can be more complex and nuanced than that narrow view (Levenson et al., 2014; Thompson, 2011). For example, consider a woman attending the funeral of a distant relative. She may want to maintain, or even heighten, feelings of sadness in service to her goal of displaying what she believes to be the appropriate responses

to such an environment. In this way her emotion regulation goal is not to reduce negative emotion, but to enhance it.

Emotion regulation efforts can be successful or unsuccessful. The fact that an individual has a particular emotion regulation goal does not guarantee that her efforts to achieve this goal will be effective. A woman attempting to manage her feelings of anxiety before giving a presentation at work may try to reappraise the situation, telling herself that her presentation is only one of many to be given and her coworkers will probably not be paying much attention anyway. This strategy could help lessen the pressure she feels and, thus, mitigate her anxiety. Another possibility is that this strategy does not work and the woman continues to feel nervous. Merely having an emotion regulation goal and employing strategies to achieve it does not ensure her success.

A corollary to this assumption is that emotion regulation efforts can sometimes have unintended consequences, whether the efforts themselves are successful or not. This becomes especially important when considering the potential that regulation has to affect relationship satisfaction. A husband who begins to feel anxious and afraid when his wife wants to discuss a source of conflict in their relationship may choose to suppress his emotional experience in an effort to avoid an argument. Although his regulation efforts may be successful, they could also lead to both spouses feeling distant from each other – an unintended consequence. If this strategy of emotion regulation becomes routine, the resulting pattern could have serious implications for the couple's sense of closeness and, thus, for their overall satisfaction in their relationship.

Emotion regulation is necessarily situated within a social context. As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of emotion regulation occurs in response to or in the presence of other

people (Gross et al., 2006). But even regulation efforts that transpire entirely within one individual when he is completely alone are influenced by his social context. This is because, on a broad scale, his society and culture teach him what emotions and regulation strategies are appropriate. On a smaller scale, the rules he learns in his family and close relationships similarly shape his regulation efforts. Additionally, strategies which may be effective for use at home with his wife, for example, may not be appropriate for use in a work setting. Thus, an individual's emotion regulation is inevitably influenced by his social context.

A corollary of this assumption is that no emotion regulation strategy is inherently adaptive or maladaptive, but can only be evaluated within its specific context (Cole et al., 2004; Thompson, 2011). Consider again the woman attending the funeral of a distant relative. She may choose to dwell on the sad memory of her beloved dog passing away in order to heighten her experience of sadness. This strategy may be seen as confusing if not considered within the context of her specific emotion regulation goal and current social environment.

Both negative and positive emotions are regulated. Although the image of emotion regulation which immediately springs to mind may be one of reducing a negative emotion such as anger, positive emotions like joy are also regulated. Related to this is the assumption that emotions may be regulated in either direction, that is, they may be down-regulated or up-regulated. As seen in the previous section, either may be adaptive depending on the context. A husband may want to down-regulate his amusement at his wife's mistake, while a wife may want to up-regulate her disappointment at the result of a football game so she can empathize with her husband.

The regulation of both positive and negative emotions can be especially important in romantic relationships. For example, sharing of positive emotions in close relationships helps to

regulate emotion by heightening an individual's own positive experience (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Rimè, 2007) and, when the partner responds to this sharing with enthusiasm, results in greater relationship satisfaction (Gable et al., 2004). Sharing of emotion, both positive and negative, can be regulatory for an individual, but can also enhance feelings of closeness and intimacy in the relationship (Rimè, 2007). Additionally, Levenson and colleagues (2014) point out that for many couples entering therapy, at least one partner wishes the other to up-regulate emotional expression. In this way the up- and down-regulation of both positive and negative emotions have the potential to affect relationship satisfaction.

Emotion regulation leads to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that affect the social environment. This is the assumption that seems most applicable to a potential connection between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction. The effects of an individual's regulation efforts are not limited to that individual alone, but may have consequences for others who come in contact with him. Whether a husband attempts to regulate his anger at his wife by punching the wall or by counting to ten before responding would most likely result in very different experiences for his wife. In this way, regulation efforts can affect the subjective experience of both partners. It makes sense that this would be especially important in romantic relationships because these relationships are potent emotional contexts which are simultaneously potential sources of emotion regulation support and causes of emotion regulation needs (Thompson, 1994).

The emotion regulation process within romantic relationships is both dynamic and iterative. As Levenson and colleagues (2014) point out: "both individuals have to react to their own *and* their partner's emotional state, the impact of each partner's regulatory attempts (some well-chosen, others misguided), and the unfolding sequence of action and reaction" (p. 269) that

constitutes the couple's attempt at coregulation. An individual's emotional regulation may be evaluated in a relatively straightforward manner. Couples, however, exist in a coregulatory context in which the overall objective is to maintain a state of optimal emotional arousal for both partners (Levenson et al., 2014). This can get especially complicated when the partners do not share the same emotion regulation goals. Consider again the husband who withdraws from conflict discussions with his wife with the goal of down-regulating negative emotion. This has unintended consequences as discussed above, but it also affects his wife and her emotion regulation. She becomes frustrated with the distance she feels from him and, as a result, pushes even harder to talk about their present source of conflict. Her goal may be to up-regulate feelings of distress in order to get him to recognize the need to address the problem. This is an example of the pursue-withdraw pattern so commonly seen in distressed couples (Christensen, 1987; Wile, 2013). When couples feel that they are pursuing conflicting goals, the subjective relationship quality of both partners suffers (Gere & Schimmack, 2013).

Summary. The six main assumptions outlined here and their related corollaries appear to underlie much of the existing research on emotion regulation (e.g., Cole et al., 2004; Levenson et al., 2014; Thompson, 2011). Each assumption may be related to an individual's satisfaction in his or her relationship in some way, so it may be helpful to more closely examine some potential examples. These examples are meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Relationship cohesion may be positively influenced through the sharing of emotions between partners (e.g., Rimè, 2007) or negatively influenced through the unintended consequences of some regulation strategies (e.g., emotional withdrawal). With these feelings of closeness comes an increased sense of intimacy, pointing the way toward satisfying expressions of affection. Indeed, expressions of affection themselves, such as kissing or sexual intercourse,

may represent strategies to up-regulate the feelings of passionate love between partners. Relationship discord may be maintained if maladaptive emotion regulation strategies continue to be a source of conflict for couples and prevent them from exploring potential productive resolutions. Finally, relationship satisfaction may be especially impacted by the emotional experiences that arise for both partners during the dynamic and iterative emotion regulation processes in couples. In this way, the theoretical foundation for the impact of emotion regulation on relationship satisfaction is established.

Rationale

This study employed a quantitative design to examine the relation of each dimension of emotion regulation with the construct of relationship satisfaction. Data from both partners were analyzed within the same model, consistent with the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Because the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of one partner can affect the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the other partner, dyadic data is necessarily interdependent. Utilizing APIM analysis allows for the controlling of this interdependence. This model also provides an opportunity to explore both actor and partner effects of study variables. For example, a wife's emotion regulation ability may impact her own relationship satisfaction (an actor effect), but it may also impact her husband's relationship satisfaction (a partner effect) and vice versa. Exploring both actor and partner effects allows for a fuller, richer understanding of the relationship between study variables.

Within this quantitative study design, existing self-report data collected from couples seeking couple or family therapy from an outpatient mental health clinic was used. Self-report measures were chosen at original data collection for the relative ease and speed with which they could be implemented in an outpatient setting. The rationale for using a clinical sample is

twofold. First, in couples and families seeking therapy, one or both partners may be expected to struggle with emotion regulation, relationship satisfaction, or both. Thus, there exists some level of variation in the study variables, allowing for meaningful statistical analysis. Second, examining a clinical sample also enhances this study's applicability in clinical contexts.

Research Aims

The purpose of the present study is to examine the influence of overall emotion regulation and each of its specific dimensions on relationship satisfaction for both actors and partners. The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between each partner's overall emotion regulation abilities and his or her own relationship satisfaction? (actor effects)
2. What is the relationship between each partner's overall emotion regulation abilities and his or her partner's relationship satisfaction? (partner effects)
3. What is the relationship between each dimension of each partner's emotion regulation abilities and his or her own relationship satisfaction? (actor effects)
4. What is the relationship between each dimension of each partner's emotion regulation abilities and his or her partner's relationship satisfaction? (partner effects)
5. Which dimensions of emotion regulation are better predictors of actor and partner relationship satisfaction?
6. Are there any gender differences in the relationship between overall emotion regulation and each of its dimensions and relationship satisfaction?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will separately examine the current research on the constructs of relationship satisfaction and emotion regulation. It will also review the limited body of research investigating the intersection of these two concepts. Finally, it will explore the connections between relationship satisfaction and the various dimensions of emotion regulation as described by Gratz and Roemer (2004).

Conceptualizing Relationship Satisfaction

The construct of relationship satisfaction, though of considerable interest to researchers and extensively studied (Weiss, 2005), has not always been clearly defined in the literature. For example, the terms happiness, quality, and satisfaction are regularly used interchangeably (e.g., Feeney, Noller, & Ward, 1997). Although some have tried to rectify this by advocating for one term over another (e.g., Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Spanier & Cole, 1976), definitions have not achieved widespread consensus. Thus the terms cannot always be conceptually differentiated within the literature (Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994) and studies purporting to examine relationship quality may indeed be referring to the same concept as studies measuring relationship satisfaction. Consistency of definition cannot even be expected between studies by the same author. For example, in their 1987 review, Fincham and Bradbury referred to the construct of interest as marital quality. However, in a 2000 review of this same construct, Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach consistently name it marital satisfaction.

In light of this definitional quagmire, it is vital that researchers are explicit about the way they define and conceptualize their variables of interest. To that end, this study defines relationship satisfaction as the subjective assessment of the amount of happiness an individual feels in his or her relationship. The subjective nature of this construct is of particular

importance. It lends itself nicely to assessment via self-report methods. Indeed, who else could most accurately report on an individual's relationship satisfaction but that person himself (Weiss, 2005)?

The evaluative component of relationship satisfaction is also central to its conceptualization. Researchers have focused on global evaluations of the relationship (e.g., "Overall, I am happy in my marriage") as indicators of relationship satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Lawrence et al., 2011; Weiss & Heyman, 1997). While there appears to be general consensus that satisfaction must include evaluations of this nature, some have argued for a second "performance-based, adjustment or skills-based component" (Weiss & Heyman, 1997, p. 15) to be incorporated as well. This includes particular behaviors and interactional processes such as specific expressions of affection or conflict pattern responses. Although this view has its supporters (Weiss & Heyman, 1997), many have pointed out the dangers of combining global evaluations with behaviors and interactions between couples (Bradbury et al., 2000; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Norton, 1983).

Despite the fact that definitions of relationship satisfaction are not always concrete or consistent across the literature, it remains one of the most widely studied variables in couple research (Weiss, 2005). This perhaps stems from the influence that relationship satisfaction has been found to exert on a number of important outcomes. In 2007, Proulx and colleagues performed a meta-analysis of 93 studies examining marital quality and personal well-being. Although they chose the term quality, they acknowledge that satisfaction is often used in the literature and that these terms refer to conceptually similar constructs. Greater relationship satisfaction was thus found to positively influence well-being through greater life satisfaction, physical health, happiness, self-esteem, and fewer depressive symptoms (Proulx et al., 2007).

Focusing on physical health, Kiecolt-Glaser and Newton in their 2001 review found that poorer marital functioning was predictive of poorer health outcomes. Robles and Kiecolt-Glaser built on this in their 2003 review of how the negative marital interactions so indicative of dissatisfied marriages directly and indirectly affect health through the cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune systems. Although relationship satisfaction has emerged as an important correlate of mental health as well (Whisman, 2007), the relationship is most likely bidirectional (Bodenmann & Randall, 2013). Still, longitudinal studies have found evidence of a role for relationship satisfaction in the etiology of some disorders, including depression (Whisman & Bruce, 1999) and alcohol use disorders (Whisman et al., 2006).

Given the influence of relationship satisfaction on these important outcomes, many researchers have sought to identify possible predictors of satisfaction. Both relationship-level and individual-level variables have been found (Bradbury et al., 2000; Bradbury & Karney, 2004). Exploring the associations between these variables and relationship satisfaction is consistent with many theories of romantic relationships (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Lewis & Spanier, 1979).

Relationship variables have emerged as the strongest predictors of relationship dissolution (Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010), underscoring their importance. With specific regard to relationship satisfaction, relationship duration has been found to predict a u-shaped response in satisfaction such that satisfaction starts high, declines over the middle years, then recovers in later-life (Adelmann et al., 1996). One proposed explanation for this pattern is the well-documented reduction in satisfaction experienced during parenthood (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003), then the decline in discord and negative behavior experienced by those who have been together longer (Adelmann et al., 1996). The dissolution of unsatisfying

relationships, especially once children are raised, may also contribute to the higher satisfaction observed in the romantic relationships of those who have stayed together for many years (Lloyd & Zick, 1986).

Bradbury and colleagues (2000), in their review of the literature, identify violence, social support, and interactional patterns as additional important relationship-level variables to consider when examining relationship satisfaction. Correlational studies have consistently found a relationship between satisfaction and intimate partner violence (IPV; Stith, Green, Smith, & Ward, 2008). In their meta-analytic review, Stith and colleagues (2008) found an overall effect size of $-.27$ such that greater relationship satisfaction was associated with less IPV. Regarding social support, Logan and Cobb (2013) found that perceiving support from partners predicted increased relationship satisfaction among a mixed sample of dating, cohabiting, and married couples. In studies of couples where one partner is dealing with a health problem, greater past social support from a partner predicts greater relationship satisfaction, even if the current levels of support are low (Hagedoorn et al., 2011; Schokker et al., 2010), thus illustrating the lasting effects of support on satisfaction. Finally, Bradbury and colleagues (2000) identify a pursue-withdraw pattern of interaction as especially salient when considering relationship satisfaction. This pattern operates in a cyclical manner in which the pursuing attempts of one partner lead to the other partner's withdrawal, and that withdrawal leads the original partner to pursue with renewed persistence, leading to further withdrawal, and so on. Eldridge and Christensen, in their 2002 review of the literature, found strong support for the cross-sectional association of this pattern with decreased relationship satisfaction. Although results from longitudinal studies are less consistent, many studies support the assertion that wife pursuit and husband withdrawal

leads to dissatisfaction in the relationship, especially if this pattern occurs in the context of conflict interactions (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002).

Many researchers have also explored the potential of individual-level variables to predict relationship satisfaction. An exploration of gender differences in relationship satisfaction has long been of interest to researchers (e.g., Fowers, 1991; Schumm et al., 1998) and there is a widespread belief that women experience less satisfaction than men in romantic relationships despite the presence of conflicting evidence (Jackson, Miller, Oka, & Henry, 2014). In response to this, Jackson and colleagues (2014) performed a recent meta-analysis with 101,110 total participants that found a significant, albeit very small, gender effect such that women were 7% less likely to be satisfied in their relationships than men. Interestingly, this effect decreased to 0 when clinical samples were removed from analysis. For couples in therapy, women were 51% less likely to be satisfied (Jackson et al., 2014), indicating the importance of considering gender when examining relationship satisfaction in clinical samples.

A recent meta-analysis from Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, Bhullar, & Rooke (2010) examined relationships between the five dimensions of personality and satisfaction in intimate relationships. Analyzing a combined sample of 3848 participants, they found that low neuroticism, high agreeableness, high conscientiousness, and high extraversion were all significantly correlated with partner's level of relationship satisfaction. Of these, neuroticism had the largest effect size at $r = -.22$. Since neuroticism is aligned with negative affectivity, Renshaw, Blais, and Smith (2010) studied the differential effects of the depression, anxiety, and angry hostility facets on the relationship satisfaction of individuals and their partners. They found that only higher angry hostility scores were associated with lower satisfaction for both

actors and partners. Additionally, depression scores equally predicted an individual's own satisfaction score, but not his or her partner's (Renshaw et al., 2010).

Emotional intelligence is another individual-level variable examined in relation to relationship satisfaction. In 2014, Malouff, Schutte, and Thorsteinsson performed a meta-analysis of 6 studies with 603 total participants. They found an overall effect size of $r = .32$ for the association between the individual trait of emotional intelligence and relationship satisfaction. It is worth noting that many of the individual-level variable studies reviewed here contain emotional components, thus offering support to the idea that emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction may be importantly related.

Conceptualizing Emotion Regulation

In order to adequately define emotion regulation, we must first understand what is meant by emotion. Although there is certainly empirical and theoretical debate about a precise definition (Thompson, 1994), most conceptualizations of emotion appear to share three common aspects (English et al., 2013; Gross, 1998; Gross & Thompson, 2007). First, it is when an individual turns his attention to a situation he deems pertinent to his goals that emotion develops (Gross & Thompson, 2007). That is, emotion will not arise in a situation he appraises as irrelevant or unimportant. Second, although common usage often equates the term *emotion* with *feeling*, emotions invoke responses across the realms of behavior and physiology, as well as subjective experience (Mauss, Levenson, McCarter, Wilhelm, & Gross, 2005). Thus, if a person is angry, not only will he *feel* angry, but he may also experience his heart-rate increasing and he may yell or slam a door. Finally, emotions are amenable to change and a person may modulate them in any number of ways (Gross et al., 2006). It is this third facet of emotion that is clearly most germane to the conceptualization of emotion regulation. The combination of these three

facets has been termed the ‘modal model’ of emotion (Gross, 1998), which can be summarized as follows: (1) the individual encounters a situation, (2) he attends to the situation, (3) he appraises the situation, (4) he responds to the situation. It is important to note the recursive nature of emotion, in that the individual’s response may and often does alter his situation, thus creating a new situation to restart the process (Gross & Thompson, 2007).

Gross (1998), building on this modal model, defines emotion regulation as “the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (p. 275). Regulation may happen at any of the four points in the generative process in the following manner: (1) the individual may select his own situation, (2) he may alter a situation he finds himself in, (3) he may decide which facet of the situation to attend to, (4) he may change his thinking about the situation to alter the meaning he makes from it, (5) he may modulate the way he responds to the situation experientially, behaviorally, or physiologically (Gross, 1998). There has been some debate about whether there truly exists a distinction between the processes of emotion generation and emotion regulation (Gross, Sheppes, & Urry, 2011). Although they often co-occur and may not always be observably distinguishable from one another, Gross and colleagues (2011) find conceptual and empirical utility in viewing them as separate processes.

The model espoused by Gross and his colleagues (English et al., 2013; Gross, 1998; Gross & Thompson, 2007) is beneficial in that it offers the research community a straightforward process-oriented approach to conceptualizing emotion and emotion regulation, but it is not without criticism (e.g., Campos, Walle, Dahl, & Main, 2011). In order to get a more complete picture of emotion regulation, then, this study will now examine how Gratz and Roemer’s (2004) multidimensional conceptualization described earlier might best be integrated with Gross’s

(1998) model. Having an awareness and understanding of our emotions, as well as accepting rather than rejecting them, may be seen to be helpful at all five of Gross's (1998) potential regulation points. For example, if a man's goal is relationship security, being clear that he is angry with his partner may help him decide not to confront her until cooling down – an example of situation selection. Controlling impulses and behaviors appears to clearly align with the concept of response modulation.

It is Gratz and Roemer's (2004) final dimension--which describes the ability to access and utilize situationally appropriate emotion regulation strategies in service of desired goals--that seems especially important. Gross's (1998) entire model may be seen to be described in this definition. Indeed, his conceptualization of emotion regulation is one composed of strategies employed at various points in the emotion generation process (Gross, 1998). To that end, Gratz and Roemer (2004) describe a construct that accounts for more dimensions of emotion regulation, without discarding the important work done by Gross and his colleagues (English et al., 2013; Gross, 1998; Gross & Thompson, 2007). It is their conceptualization that guides this study.

Emotion Regulation and Relationship Satisfaction

With emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction thus defined, this manuscript now turns to an investigation of the limited literature which examines their relationship to each other. As this relationship is not yet well studied (Levenson et al., 2014), an examination of some of the related surrounding literature will be helpful. The research on emotional intelligence appears to hold considerable relevance as it relates to relationship satisfaction (Casey, Garrett, Brackett, & Rivers, 2008). Mayer and Salovey (1997) define emotional intelligence using a four part model composed of the ability to: (1) recognize emotions in self and others, (2) utilize emotion to guide

beneficial behavior and thought, (3) understand emotions clearly, (4) manage emotions in self and others. Thus, emotion regulation may be thought of as merely one part of the larger concept of emotional intelligence.

In 2001, Schutte and colleagues conducted a series of seven studies which found support for the association between the concept of emotional intelligence as a whole and interpersonal relationships. Higher emotional intelligence was related to better relationships, including close relationships and marital satisfaction, specifically. Additionally, participants expected greater satisfaction from relationships with partners who were described as adept at recognizing and managing emotions in self and others (Schutte et al., 2001). In 2005, Brackett and colleagues found a tendency to report lower relationship quality and satisfaction among couples in which both partners scored low on emotional intelligence versus couples which contained at least one highly emotionally intelligent member. These studies explored romantic relationships, but they measured the larger concept of emotional intelligence. Although emotion regulation may be considered one part of overall emotional intelligence (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), these two constructs are not identical. Therefore, further study specific to emotion regulation is warranted.

Lopes and colleagues (2004) specifically studied the emotion management, or emotion regulation, component of emotional intelligence in interpersonal relationships. They found that a participant's emotion regulation influenced the quality of social interactions for both the participant and his or her friends. This study also found that regulation of emotion was positively associated with the participant's qualitative evaluation of interactions with members of the opposite sex. In a more recent series of studies conducted in Germany, Spain, and the United States, members of this research group found that better strategic emotion regulation ability was associated with better friendships (Lopes et al., 2011). This relationship was especially strong

when considering conflict, such that participants reporting higher regulation ability were less likely to experience antagonistic and conflictual social interactions. Thus, there is support for a relationship between emotion regulation and social relationships, but these studies examined relationships between friends, not romantic partners.

Other studies have investigated specific emotion regulation strategies as they relate to relationship satisfaction. Two strategies that have received considerable research attention are suppression and reappraisal (English et al., 2013). Suppression is understood as the inhibition of emotional indicators (Gross, 1998), such as when we hold in our laughter at another's mistake. Reappraisal involves altering the meaning of a situation to change its emotional effect (Gross, 1998), such as when a husband reframes his wife's criticism as her desire to help. In 2003, Gross and John found that individuals who more often employ reappraisal were rated by their peers as being more likeable and being more likely to have close relationships with others as compared to individuals using suppression. Reappraisers were also significantly more likely to rate their own interactions with others more positively than suppressors (Gross & John, 2003).

Richards, Butler, and Gross (2003) investigated the effects of these strategies on memory during conflict discussions between dating partners. Reappraisal was found to increase the individual's memory for the content of discussions, while suppression had the opposite effect. Suppression did, however, increase memory for emotional reactions during these conflicts (Richards et al, 2003). These results suggest important implications for relationship functioning. If suppression heightens negative emotions through increased memory of conflict emotions, couples in which one or both members habitually employ suppression may be at increased risk for dissatisfaction (Gottman & Levenson, 1986). Indeed, if an individual perceives his or her partner to be suppressing emotions during a relationship sacrifice, the individual's relationship

quality suffers, an association that has been shown to hold over time (Impett, Le, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2014). This provides support for an earlier finding among married and dating couples that the regulation efforts of one partner could have repercussions for the emotions of the other partner (Ben-Naim, Hirschberger, Ein-Dor, & Mikulincer, 2013). Specifically, Ben-Naim and colleagues (2013) found evidence that suppression increased and reappraisal decreased negative emotions in both individuals and their partners. These studies demonstrate the ability of specific emotion regulation strategies to affect the couple relationship, but they do not take into account the larger, multidimensional concept of emotional regulation as a whole.

In 2014, Bloch, Haase, and Levenson conducted one of the only studies to date that directly explores the concepts of emotion regulation and marital satisfaction. Using a longitudinal experimental design, they found support for the idea that emotion regulation predicts marital satisfaction (Bloch et al., 2014). Specifically, when wives better regulated their negative emotions, the researchers found both wives and husbands reported higher levels of satisfaction. Interestingly, the same results were not found for husbands' regulation (Bloch et al., 2014). This study measured levels of emotional experience, behavior, and physiology and operationalized emotion regulation as down-regulation of negative emotion. That did not allow for a complete examination of the multiple dimensions of emotion regulation (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Additionally, the researchers only studied middle-aged (mean age of 43.95) and older (mean age of 62.12) couples. Since both emotion regulation (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014) and relationship satisfaction (Adelmann, Chadwick, & Baerger, 1996) have been found to vary over the life-course, further investigation including younger couples is necessary.

In summary, research examining emotional intelligence, as well as specific emotion regulation strategies points to a link between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction

(Impett et al, 2014; Lopes et al., 2004; Schutte, et al., 2001). Preliminary research appears to support this link (Bloch et al., 2014). However, the relationship between these two concepts is not yet well understood (Levenson et al., 2014). An investigation which takes into account the multiple dimensions of emotion regulation (Gratz & Roemer, 2004) and studies a diverse sample appears warranted.

Connections Between Relationship Satisfaction and Dimensions of Emotion Regulation

No study has yet combined an investigation of the multidimensional construct of emotion regulation and the construct of relationship satisfaction as defined above. However, there is empirical support for separately relating individual aspects of these constructs. A review of the literature supporting connections between the multiple dimensions of emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction seems necessary.

Studies from the self-regulation literature may help us understand how Gratz and Roemer's (2004) concept of difficulties engaging in goal-directed behavior influences satisfaction with romantic relationships. Halford, Sanders, and Behrens (1994) describe self-regulation in couple relationships as a process of appraisal, goal setting, and implementation. This process focuses the individual on his own behaviors and what he can do to achieve his goals in the relationship. Wilson, Charker, Lizzio, Halford, and Kimlin (2005) found a positive relationship between self-regulation and relationship satisfaction in both newlywed and long-married couples. In 2007, Halford, Lizzio, Wilson, and Occhipinti confirmed this concurrent association and also found it to be true prospectively. Their study supports a causal link from better self-regulation abilities to better relationship satisfaction, as the longitudinal relationship was not bidirectional (Halford et al., 2007). Thus, the ability to set relationship-oriented goals and act in ways consistent with their achievement can be seen to have a positive effect on

satisfaction for both partners (Wilson et al., 2005; Halford et al., 2007). These results were observed for both men and women.

Cordova, Gee, and Warren (2005), studying the concept of emotional skills, found that participants who struggled to identify their emotions reported lower marital satisfaction, as did their partners, a result that did not vary by gender. Using a subscale from the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20; Bagby, Taylor, & Parker, 1994), this study measured difficulty identifying emotions with questions such as *I am often confused about what emotion I am feeling*. These are quite similar to the questions Gratz and Roemer (2004) use to assess clarity or understanding of emotions, e.g., *I am confused about how I feel*. The TAS-20 was also used by Foran, O’Leary, and Williams (2012), who found significant associations between the total TAS-20 score and scores on global relationship satisfaction distress and the subscale measuring satisfaction with time spent together. For both men and women, TAS-20 scores were related to own scores on global distress and time together. There were observed gender differences in the way these scores were related to the partner’s scores. For men, TAS-20 scores were related only to partner’s global distress, while for women the same score was only related to partner’s satisfaction with time spent together. Simply put, a relationship may be seen between clarity of emotions and satisfaction in relationships and there may be gender differences in this relationship (Cordova et al., 2005; Foran et al., 2012).

Difficulties with controlling impulses have been consistently associated with the perpetration of various forms of intimate partner violence and relational aggression by both men and women (Schafer, Caetano, & Cunradi, 2004; Schumacher, Coffey, Leonard, O’Jile, & Landy, 2013; Shorey, Brasfield, Febres, & Stuart, 2011b). Gratz and Roemer (2004), during the initial validation of the DERS, found that the impulse subscale was associated with abuse

perpetration. More recently, Shorey, Brasfield, Febres, and Stuart (2011a) used the DERS to study psychological, physical, and sexual aggression within dating couples. The impulse subscale was associated with perpetration of psychological and sexual aggression in men and with psychological and physical aggression in women. Further, intimate partner violence and relational aggression have been shown to decrease subjective relationship quality (Testa & Leonard, 2001) as well as marital satisfaction (Williams & Frieze, 2005) and this effect persists over time (Lawrence & Bradbury, 2007). Thus, control of impulses appears to be associated with relationship satisfaction.

The previous section reviewed the differential effects of suppression and reappraisal on relationship satisfaction (Impett et al., 2014; Richards et al., 2003). Feeney (1999) also found that hiding positive emotions predicted lower marital satisfaction in self, while hiding negative emotions predicted lower marital satisfaction in partners. This relates to Gratz and Roemer's (2004) dimension of access to and use of appropriate emotion regulation strategies. If individuals habitually rely on suppression over other strategies for regulation, both they and their partners are at risk for diminished satisfaction.

Feeney's (1999) study also suggests a relation to Gratz and Roemer's (2004) emotional awareness dimension. Participants were most satisfied in their relationships when they expressed their positive emotions and their partners expressed their negative emotions (Feeney, 1999). Since this emotional regulation was measured via self-report, it implies a level of cognitive awareness regarding the emotional content assessed. Thus, awareness of emotion appears to be an important factor in this process.

Rellini, Vujanovic, Gilbert, and Zvolensky (2012) used the DERS to investigate the associations between emotion regulation and sexual and relationship satisfaction among young

adult women who had experienced abuse and/or neglect in childhood. They assessed sexual satisfaction, intimacy, and affection. Participants who struggled with both awareness and clarity of emotions reported significantly lower scores on all three of these measures (Rellini et al., 2012). Lower sexual satisfaction was additionally associated with more difficulties accepting emotional responses, finding appropriate regulation strategies, and controlling impulses (Rellini et al., 2012). Since sexual satisfaction and sexual expression have both been shown to predict relationship satisfaction (Sprecher & Cate, 2004), this connection offers at least tentative support for an association with almost every dimension of emotion regulation. It is important to note, however, that Rellini and her colleagues (2012) only studied women.

After reviewing the literature, there appears to be at least some empirical support for all dimensions of emotion regulation to be associated with relationship satisfaction. This support comes from a wide variety of literatures and the ability to compare findings across studies is necessarily limited by differences in construct definitions as well as methodological and measurement issues. This study extends the current literature by not only clarifying the relationships discussed here, but also by facilitating comparisons between variables. This paints a more complete picture of the relationships between overall emotion regulation, its six dimensions, and relationship satisfaction.

Study Hypotheses

Based on this review of the literature, this study examines the following hypotheses which are illustrated in Figure 1:

Hypothesis 1: A partner's own overall emotion regulation and each dimension of emotion regulation (clarity of emotions, awareness of emotions, acceptance of emotional responses,

impulse control, emotion regulation strategies, goal-directed behavior) will be positively related to his or her own relationship satisfaction (actor effects).

Hypothesis 2: A partner's own overall emotion regulation and each dimension of emotion regulation (clarity of emotions, awareness of emotions, acceptance of emotional responses, impulse control, emotion regulation strategies, goal-directed behavior) will be positively related to the other partner's relationship satisfaction (partner effects).

The study will also explore if there are significant gender differences in the associations between each dimension of emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction.

Given that both partners' relationship satisfaction tend to be positively associated (e.g., Cann, Zapata, & Davis, 2011; Furler, Gomez, & Grob, 2014; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), a positive association is also included in the model.

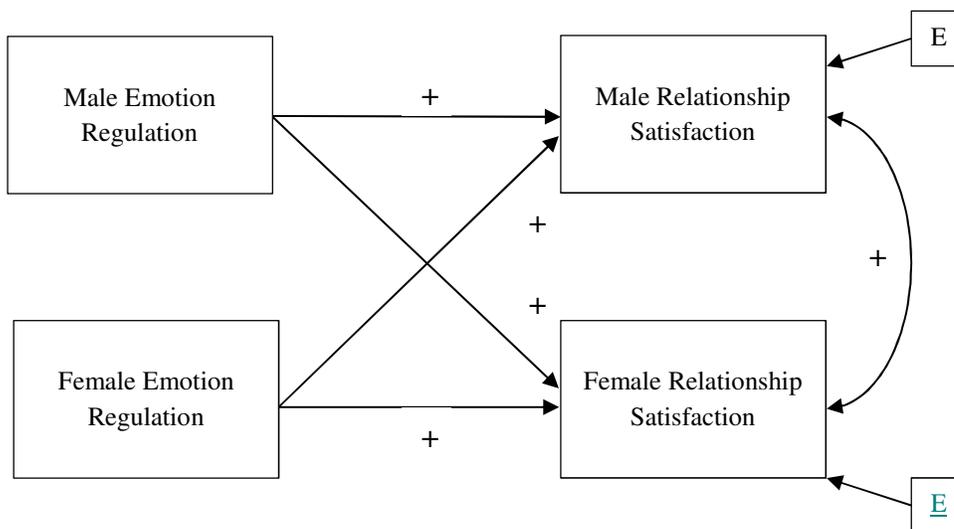


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Design of the Study

The present study analyzed secondary data that were originally collected at the Center for Family Services (CFS) at Virginia Tech as part of the assessment process that all couples seeking couple and/or family therapy are invited to complete. The present study analyzed the data collected between 2009 and 2014 through self-report measures provided in the assessment package after the first initial session. CFS is an outpatient mental health clinic that provides therapy services to individuals, couples, and families residing in Northern Virginia. Therapy is provided by student interns completing their clinical training in the marriage and family therapy master's program.

Study Participants

The data analyzed in the present study were collected from couples that attended a first session for either couple or family therapy in an outpatient clinic in Northern Virginia and that voluntarily agreed to complete the clinic's assessment package in English. In order for couples to be included in the present study both partners had to be at least 18 years-old. Out of the 274 individuals that had completed the assessment questionnaires after the first therapy session, there were 104 couples (208 individuals) in which both partners had sufficiently completed the questionnaires. As a result the data used in this study comes from 104 couples.

Procedure

Data collection for the larger research initiative was previously approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Virginia Tech and approval for this is renewed annually. This study obtained IRB approval for the specific use of a subsection of these data.

Potential participants contacted CFS and scheduled a first appointment for couple or family therapy. During the first session, trained student therapist interns explained study procedures and obtained informed consent from all participants. Each member of the participant couples then completed questionnaire assessments following their initial therapy session. Partners completed assessments while in the same room using either individual computers or traditional pen-and-paper methods. Before each set of assessments, participants are asked again if they consent to having their data used for research purposes. Participants were only included in this study if they answered this question affirmatively, or, in the case of respondents who left this question blank, if they had signed the informed consent form during their therapy session.

All computer-completed assessments are entered directly into the Survey Monkey program by participants. Student therapist interns manually entered all pen-and-paper assessments into this same program. This study exported data for all initial assessments completed by couples who had given research consent from Survey Monkey into an Excel spreadsheet. Text answers were then coded to reflect numerical values, appropriate items were reverse-coded as instructed by instrument developers, and measure scores were calculated.

Instruments

In addition to the two self-report measures described below, this study considered collected demographic information on age, race, marital status, education, religion, and household income.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale. This study used the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004) to assess emotion regulation functioning. As the DERS measures difficulties in emotion regulation, scores were reversed so that higher scores represent better emotion regulation abilities. Each dimension of emotion regulation was

measured with one of the six subscales of the DERS. The acceptance subscale measures acceptance of emotional responses with 6 items such as *When I'm upset, I become angry with myself for feeling that way* (reverse scored). The goals subscale measures ability to engage in goal-directed behavior during periods of distress with 5 items such as *When I'm upset, I can still get things done*. The impulse subscale measures ability to control impulses during periods of distress with 6 items such as *When I'm upset, I feel like I can remain in control of my behavior*. The awareness subscale measures emotional awareness with 6 items such as *I pay attention to how I feel*. The strategies subscale measures the participants' perceived access to appropriate regulation strategies with 8 items such as *When I'm upset, I know that I can find a way to eventually feel better*. Finally, the clarity subscale measures clarity regarding emotions with 5 items such as *I know exactly how I am feeling*. Participants are thus presented with a total of 36 statements and are asked to rate each statement based on how often they feel it describes their experience. Possible responses lie on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 is *Almost never (0-10%)* and 5 is *Almost always (91-100%)*. Total scores are computed by summing all responses. Total DERS potential scores range from 36-180 and any necessary items are reverse-coded such that higher DERS scores indicate greater emotion regulation abilities. The DERS has demonstrated both reliability and validity among different age groups (Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Staples & Mohlman, 2012) and different cultures (Giromini, Velotti, de Campora, Bonalume, & Zavattini, 2012; Mitsopoulou, Kafetsios, Karademas, Papastefanakis, & Simos, 2013). Gratz and Roemer (2004) reported a Cronbach's α of .93 for the total score and a range of .80 to .89 for all six subscales, as well as adequate construct and predictive validity.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale – Satisfaction Subscale. This study used the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) to assess each

partner's satisfaction within the couple relationship. This measure allows for the study of both married and dating couples. The decision was made to use only the satisfaction subscale rather than the total DAS score, which also includes subscales for consensus, cohesion, and affectional expression. Past research asserts that the total DAS tends to confound the measurement of relationship satisfaction with the elements which determine satisfaction (Kurdek, 1992) and Spanier (1976) himself states that the total instrument is largely a measure of "perceptions of the relationship's functioning" (pg. 22). Although these concepts are undoubtedly related, subjective relationship satisfaction, as defined previously in this study, appears best measured by only the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale. The satisfaction subscale is a 10-item measure composed of questions assessing a respondent's global evaluation of his relationship (e.g., *In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?*) and questions assessing specific thoughts and behaviors regarding the relationship (e.g., *How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?*). All questions are answered using a Likert-type scale and total scores are calculated by summing all responses. Scores can range from 0-50, with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction. The satisfaction subscale has demonstrated reliability and validity levels ranging from acceptable to excellent across varied populations (Graham, Liu, & Jeziorski, 2006; South, Krueger, & Iacono, 2009; Spanier, 1976). Spanier (1976) reported a Cronbach's α of .94 for the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale score

Analytic Strategy

This study used couple data exported from Survey Monkey as described above. Once the data were cleaned within the Excel spreadsheet, the file was imported into a database within the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Control variables. To identify potential control variables, bivariate correlations will be calculated between the demographic variables described above (age, race, marital status, education, religion, and household income) and relationship satisfaction and the total and subscale variables for emotion regulation. The need for control variables will be indicated if these calculations show that any demographic variable is correlated with at least one emotion regulation variable *and* the relationship satisfaction variable. If this process indicates the need to control for only one demographic variable, that variable will be included in the path model analysis. Sample size limitations will preclude the use of this strategy if the results of the bivariate correlations require that two or more demographic variables be controlled for, however. If that is the case, the identified demographic variables will be partialled out from the main variables before conducting subsequent analysis. This will be accomplished by regressing each of the main variables on each of the required control variables to acquire unstandardized residuals. These unstandardized residuals will then become the data for the main variables in the path analysis. This approach to controlling for multiple variables has been used successfully in previous studies (e.g., Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Newcomb & Bentler, 1988).

Main variables. Means and standard deviations were calculated for emotion regulation and its six dimensions as well as for relationship satisfaction. Gender differences for emotion regulation and each of its dimensions and relationship satisfaction were evaluated via *t*-tests for paired samples. Bivariate correlations among all variables were calculated and reported.

Multivariate analysis. The conceptual model of interest was analyzed through modern path analysis using EQS (version 6.1) and the maximum likelihood estimation method. Two models were analyzed: Model 1 included each partner's overall emotion regulation and each

partner's relationship satisfaction and Model 2 included the six dimensions of emotion regulation for each partner and each partner's relationship satisfaction.

Model fit was assessed using a chi-square test in addition to the following three fit indices endorsed by Hu and Bentler (1999): the Comparative Fit Index (CFI >.96), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR <.08), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA <.06) with its 90% confidence interval. A statistically significant chi-square value means that the sample distribution differs significantly from the distribution expected from the model proposed in this study and consequently, the model should be rejected. In case the multivariate distribution of the data is not normal, robust statistics will be used. EQS will be used to calculate robust CFI and RMSEA as well as the Yuan-Bentler scaled chi-square (χ_{YB}^2), an adjusted chi-square statistic used with non-normal data (Yuan & Bentler, 2000). Results from the Lagrange Multiplier test were conceptually examined to determine model respecifications. Sobel tests included in EQS were used to examine indirect effects. Significant differences between path coefficients were assessed through comparison of chi-square results of models with constrained paths. Testing and comparing models with constraints allows for the examination of gender differences between paths (e.g., gender differences in the path from emotion regulation to relationship satisfaction).

CHAPTER 4: MANUSCRIPT

Abstract

This study explored the relationship between the multidimensional construct of emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction in couples seeking couple or family therapy at an outpatient mental health clinic. Recognizing the necessarily interdependent nature of dyadic data, study data were analyzed via path analysis consistent with the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). While overall emotion regulation was not found to be significantly related to relationship satisfaction, results indicated differential effects for the various dimensions of emotion regulation. Perceived access to emotion regulation strategies was significantly positively associated with relationship satisfaction for both men and women. Awareness of emotions was significantly negatively associated with satisfaction for men, with women displaying a trend toward significance, and acceptance of emotions was significantly negatively associated with satisfaction for women, with men displaying a trend toward significance. Women's acceptance of emotions was also significantly negatively associated with her partner's relationship satisfaction, while her ability to control her impulses was significantly positively associated with her partner's satisfaction. No partner effects were found for men's emotion regulation dimensions. Study limitations as well as research and clinical implications are discussed.

Emotion Regulation and Relationship Satisfaction in Clinical Couples

Research has shown that romantic relationships have important implications for an individual's overall well-being (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007). Poor marital functioning can negatively impact physical as well as psychological health (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Whisman, 2007; Whisman, Uebelacker, & Bruce, 2006) and dissatisfaction in marriage puts couples at significant risk for divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). These negative outcomes are not limited to married couples, they also include cohabiting couples (Barr & Simons, 2014) and non-cohabiting dating couples (Gere & Schimmack, 2013). Clearly relationship quality has the potential to influence many important outcomes, which explains researchers' interest in identifying predictors of relationship satisfaction.

Bradbury and colleagues (2000), in their review of the literature, identify violence, social support, and interactional patterns as important variables to consider when examining relationship satisfaction. Correlational studies have consistently found an inverse relationship between satisfaction and intimate partner violence and relational aggression (Stith, Green, Smith, & Ward, 2008). Regarding social support, Logan and Cobb (2013) found that perceiving support from partners predicted increased relationship satisfaction among a mixed sample of dating, cohabiting, and married couples. Finally, Bradbury and colleagues (2000) identify a pursue-withdraw pattern of interaction as especially salient when considering relationship satisfaction. This pattern operates in a cyclical manner in which the pursuing attempts of one partner lead to the other partner's withdrawal, and that withdrawal leads the original partner to pursue with renewed persistence, leading to further withdrawal, and so on. Eldridge and Christensen, in their 2002 review of the literature, found strong support for the association of this pattern with decreased relationship satisfaction, especially if it occurs in the context of conflict interactions.

Recently, researchers have begun to explore the role of emotion regulation, or the ability to successfully alter or modulate emotions, in social and romantic relationships (e.g., Lopes et al., 2011; Brackett, Warner, & Bosco, 2005). For example, emotion regulation has been found to influence the quality of social interactions between friends (Lopes et al., 2011) and emotional intelligence as a whole (of which emotion regulation is one part) has been found to be related specifically to romantic relationship satisfaction (Brackett et al., 2005). Additionally, dysregulation of emotion is implicated in a variety of psychopathologies including anxiety and mood disorders (Barlow, Allen, & Choate, 2004; Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, & Hofmann, 2006). Psychopathology is also reliably associated with relationship discord (Whisman, 2013). In 2011, South, Krueger, and Iacono discovered that this relationship could be explained via internalizing and externalizing symptoms, rather than through specific psychological disorders. They state that their findings “support the hypothesis that marital distress may indeed be a function of the general inability to regulate emotions that is at the heart of internalizing psychopathology or the tendency to project distress outward that defines the externalizing spectrum” (South et al., 2011, p. 944). Despite this suggestion, the link between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction is not yet well-understood (Levenson, Haase, Bloch, Holley, & Seider, 2014).

To fill this gap, this study seeks to examine the relationship between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction in couples. First, we describe the definition of emotion regulation which guides this study. Next, we explore the theoretical foundations underlying a connection between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction. Finally, we describe the empirical knowledge gained thus far about the relationship between these two constructs before moving into a discussion of the details of this study.

Definition

This study employs the multidimensional definition of emotion regulation developed by Gratz and Roemer (2004). These researchers, in their effort to measure and understand emotion regulation, undertook an extensive review of the relevant research. Their resulting definition centers around six separate dimensions as follows: acceptance of emotions (acceptance), ability to engage in goal-directed behavior during negative emotions (goals), impulse control during negative emotions (impulse), awareness of emotions (awareness), access to and use of emotion regulation strategies (strategies), and clarity regarding emotions (clarity).

It is worth noting that other definitions of emotion regulation exist. Perhaps the most widely known is Gross's 1998 model. However, his conceptualization of emotion regulation is one composed entirely of strategies employed at various points in the emotion generation process, while Gratz and Roemer's (2004) definition expands to include not only strategies, but also five other dimensions of emotion regulation. It is thus able to paint a more detailed picture of the relationship between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction.

Theoretical Foundation

Despite the gathering empirical evidence that suggests a link between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction, a review of the literature indicates that there does not yet exist a unified theory which fully articulates conceptually why and how these two constructs may be related. The following section will examine six assumptions that appear to underlie much of the research on emotion regulation and explore how these assumptions point to a connection to relationship satisfaction.

Emotions can be regulated. We are not entirely at the mercy of any emotion that happens to arise; we possess various skills to help us alter or modulate our emotions.

Emotion regulation is goal-oriented. This assumption arises from a functionalist perspective (Thompson, 1994). Regulation efforts do not occur entirely at random, but are directed toward a specific aim and perform a particular function.

Emotion regulation efforts can be successful or unsuccessful. The fact that an individual has a particular emotion regulation goal does not guarantee that his efforts to achieve this goal will be effective. A corollary to this assumption is that emotion regulation efforts can sometimes have unintended consequences, whether the efforts themselves are successful or not.

Emotion regulation is necessarily situated within a social context. The vast majority of emotion regulation occurs in response to or in the presence of other people (Gross, Richards, & John, 2006). A corollary of this assumption is that no emotion regulation strategy is inherently adaptive or maladaptive, but can only be evaluated within its specific context (Thompson, 2011).

Both negative and positive emotions are regulated. Although the image of emotion regulation which immediately springs to mind may be one of reducing a negative emotion such as anger, positive emotions like joy are also regulated (Rimè, 2007). Related to this is the assumption that emotions may be down-regulated or up-regulated.

Emotion regulation leads to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that affect the social environment. The effects of an individual's regulation efforts are not limited to that individual alone, but may have consequences for others who come in contact with him. The emotion regulation process within romantic relationships is both dynamic and iterative. As Levenson and colleagues (2014) point out: "both individuals have to react to their own *and* their partner's emotional state, the impact of each partner's regulatory attempts (some well-chosen, other misguided), and the unfolding sequence of action and reaction" (p. 269) that constitutes the

couple's attempt at coregulation. This can get especially complicated when the partners do not share the same emotion regulation goals.

Each of these six assumptions may be related to an individual's satisfaction in his or her relationship in some way, so it may be helpful to more closely examine some potential examples. Relationship cohesion may be positively influenced through the sharing of emotions between partners (e.g., Rimè, 2007) or negatively influenced through the unintended consequences of some regulation strategies (e.g., emotional withdrawal). Relationship discord may be maintained if maladaptive emotion regulation strategies continue to be a source of conflict for couples and prevent them from exploring potential productive resolutions. Finally, relationship satisfaction may be especially impacted by the emotional experiences that arise for both partners during the dynamic and iterative coregulation processes in couples. In this way, the theoretical foundation for the impact of emotion regulation on relationship satisfaction is established.

Empirical Knowledge

There appears to be empirical as well as theoretical support for the relationship between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction. As this relationship is not yet well studied (Levenson et al., 2014), an examination of some of the related surrounding literature is necessary. The research on emotional intelligence appears to hold considerable relevance as it relates to relationship satisfaction (Casey, Garrett, Brackett, & Rivers, 2008). Mayer and Salovey (1997) define emotional intelligence using a four part model composed of the ability to: (1) recognize emotions in self and others, (2) utilize emotion to guide beneficial behavior and thought, (3) understand emotions clearly, (4) manage emotions in self and others. Thus, emotion regulation may be thought of as merely one part of the larger concept of emotional intelligence.

In 2001, Schutte and colleagues conducted a series of seven studies which found that higher emotional intelligence was related to better relationships, including marital satisfaction specifically. In 2005, Brackett and colleagues found a tendency to report lower relationship quality and satisfaction among couples in which both partners scored low on emotional intelligence versus couples which contained at least one highly emotionally intelligent member. These studies explored romantic relationships, but they measured the larger concept of emotional intelligence. Therefore, further study specific to emotion regulation is warranted. Lopes and colleagues (2011) specifically studied the emotion management, or emotion regulation, component of emotional intelligence in interpersonal relationships. They found that a participant's emotion regulation influenced the quality of social interactions for both the participant and his or her friends, such that better strategic emotion regulation ability was associated with better friendships (Lopes et al., 2011). Thus, there is support for a relationship between emotion regulation and social relationships, but these studies examined relationships between friends, not romantic partners.

Other studies have investigated specific emotion regulation strategies as they relate to relationship satisfaction. Two strategies that have received considerable research attention are suppression and reappraisal (English, John, & Gross, 2013). Suppression is understood as the inhibition of emotional indicators, while reappraisal involves altering the meaning of a situation to change its emotional effect (Gross, 1998). Richards, Butler, and Gross (2003) found that reappraisal increased an individual's memory for the content of conflict discussions with a romantic partner, while suppression had the opposite effect. Suppression did, however, increase memory for emotional reactions during these conflicts (Richards et al., 2003). If suppression heightens negative emotions through increased memory of conflict emotions, couples in which

one or both members habitually employ suppression may be at increased risk for dissatisfaction (Gottman & Levenson, 1986). This demonstrates the ability of specific emotion regulation strategies to affect the couple relationship, but it does not take into account the larger, multidimensional concept of emotional regulation as a whole.

Despite the role that emotion regulation may play in couples' relationship satisfaction suggested in the literature, only two studies have examined this association. In the first study, involving a couples' group intervention to improve partners' emotion regulation, Kirby and Baucom (2007) found that improving the regulation abilities of one partner had a positive effect on the other partner's relationship satisfaction. Despite the value of this finding, the study had a small sample size of only 8 couples and focused on overall emotion regulation without attention to the association between each dimension of emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction. Bloch, Haase, and Levenson (2014), using a longitudinal experimental design, found support for the idea that emotion regulation predicts marital satisfaction. Specifically, when wives better regulated their negative emotions, the researchers found both wives and husbands reported higher levels of satisfaction. Like Kirby and Baucom (2007), this study did not assess the multiple dimensions of emotion regulation. Additionally, the researchers only studied middle-aged (mean age of 43.95) and older (mean age of 62.12) couples. Since both emotion regulation (Zimmermann & Iwanski, 2014) and relationship satisfaction (Adelmann, Chadwick, & Baerger, 1996) have been found to vary over the life-course, further investigation including younger couples is necessary.

Connections Between Relationship Satisfaction and Dimensions of Emotion Regulation

No study has yet combined an investigation of the multidimensional construct of emotion regulation and the construct of relationship satisfaction as defined above. However, empirical

evidence appears to suggest that individual aspects of these constructs may be related. The ability to set relationship-oriented goals and act in ways consistent with their achievement has been shown to have a positive effect on satisfaction for both partners (Halford, Lizzio, Wilson, & Occhipinti, 2007; Wilson, Charker, Lizzio, Halford, & Kimlin, 2005). These results were observed for both men and women. Clarity about emotions has been associated with relationship satisfaction (Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005) and there may be gender differences in this relationship such that women's global relationship satisfaction may be predicted by her partner's clarity, while it is men's satisfaction specifically with time spent together which appears most affected by his partner's clarity (Foran, O'Leary, & Williams, 2012). Difficulties with controlling impulses have been consistently associated with the perpetration of various forms of intimate partner violence and relational aggression by both men and women (Schafer, Caetano, & Cunradi, 2004; Schumacher, Coffey, Leonard, O'Jile, & Landy, 2013; Shorey, Brasfield, Febres, & Stuart, 2011b). Further, this violence has been shown to decrease subjective relationship quality (Testa & Leonard, 2001) as well as marital satisfaction (Williams & Frieze, 2005) and this effect persists over time (Lawrence & Bradbury, 2007). Thus, control of impulses appears to be associated with relationship satisfaction.

The previous section reviewed the potential effects of suppression and reappraisal on relationship satisfaction (Richards et al., 2003). Feeney (1999) also found that hiding positive emotions predicted lower marital satisfaction in self, while hiding negative emotions predicted lower marital satisfaction in partners. Thus, if individuals habitually rely on suppression over other strategies for regulation, both they and their partners are at risk for diminished satisfaction. Feeney's (1999) study also hints at the importance of awareness of emotion. Since emotional regulation was measured via self-report, it implies a level of cognitive awareness regarding the

emotional content assessed. Finally, Rellini, Vujanovic, Gilbert, and Zvolensky (2012) found that lower sexual satisfaction was associated with more difficulties accepting emotional responses, finding appropriate regulation strategies, and controlling impulses as well as difficulties with awareness and clarity of emotions. Since sexual satisfaction has been shown to predict relationship satisfaction (Sprecher & Cate, 2004), this connection offers at least tentative support for an association with almost every dimension of emotion regulation. It is important to note, however, that Rellini and her colleagues (2012) only studied women.

The Present Study

The empirical and conceptual literature appears to suggest that each dimension of emotion regulation may be associated with relationship satisfaction. Support for this comes from a wide variety of literatures and the ability to compare findings across studies is necessarily limited by differences in construct definitions as well as methodological and measurement issues. This study extends the current literature by not only clarifying the relationships discussed here, but also by analyzing data from both partners within the same model, consistent with the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Because the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of one partner can affect the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the other partner, dyadic data is necessarily interdependent. Utilizing APIM analysis allows for the controlling of this interdependence. This model also provides an opportunity to explore both actor and partner effects of study variables. For example, a wife's emotion regulation ability may impact her own relationship satisfaction (an actor effect), but it may also impact her husband's relationship satisfaction (a partner effect) and vice versa. Exploring both actor and partner effects allows for a fuller, richer understanding of the relationship between study variables.

In addition to contributing to empirical knowledge as described, a study of emotion regulation in the couple relationship has the potential to be particularly useful in a clinical setting. Relationship problems are often cited as causes of mental suffering (Swindle, Heller, Pescosolido, & Kikuzawa, 2000) and Levenson and colleagues (2014) assert that couples seeking relationship therapy often struggle with down-regulation of negative emotion, up-regulation of positive emotion, or both. In order to maximize the therapeutic applicability of study results, this study examines a clinical sample.

Study Hypotheses

Based on this review of the literature, this study examines the following hypotheses which are illustrated in Figure 1:

Hypothesis 1: A partner's own overall emotion regulation and each dimension of emotion regulation (acceptance, goals, impulse, awareness, strategies, clarity) will be positively related to his or her own relationship satisfaction (actor effects).

Hypothesis 2: A partner's own overall emotion regulation and each dimension of emotion regulation (acceptance, goals, impulse, awareness, strategies, clarity) will be positively related to the other partner's relationship satisfaction (partner effects).

The study will also explore if there are significant gender differences in the associations between each dimension of emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction.

Given that both partners' relationship satisfaction tend to be positively associated (e.g., Cann, Zapata, & Davis, 2011; Furler, Gomez, & Grob, 2014; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), a positive association is also included in the model.

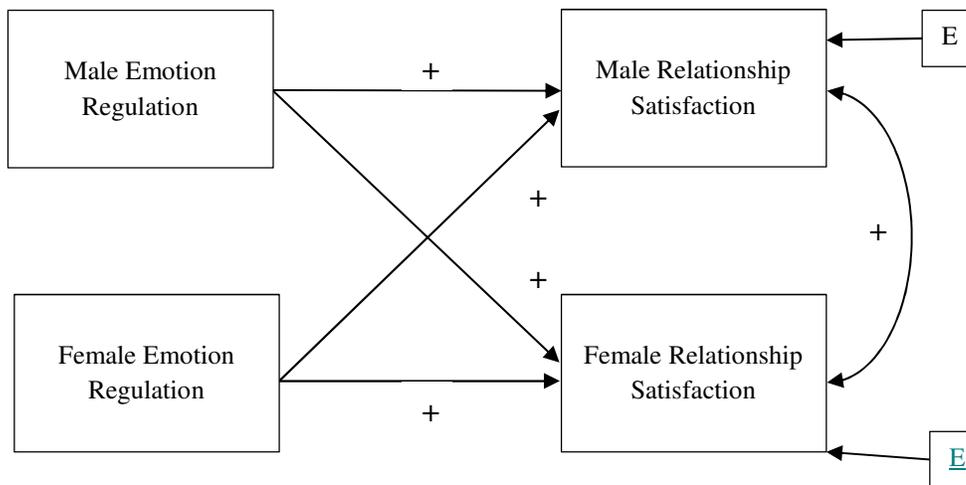


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Methods

Participants

Data for this study were taken from a larger pool of data collected at an outpatient clinic in Northern Virginia between 2009 and 2014. Participants were 104 heterosexual couples who attended a first session for couple or family therapy and voluntarily agreed to complete the clinic’s assessment package in English. To be included in the present study, both partners had to be at least 18 years-old and have consented to have their data used for future research.

Male participants ranged in age from 19 to 68 years ($M = 39.07$, $SD = 11.99$), while the age range for female participants was 19 to 65 years ($M = 37.08$, $SD = 11.80$). Both men and women primarily identified as Caucasian (56.7% and 59.2%, respectively). Additionally, 14.4% of men identified as African or African American, 10.6% as Hispanic, 7.7% as Asian or Asian American, 6.7% as Other, 2.9% as Middle Eastern, and 1% as Native American. For women, 13.6% identified as Hispanic, 9.7% as Other, 8.7% as Asian or Asian American, 7.8% as African or African American, and 1% as Middle Eastern. Seventy-one couples were married (68.3%), while thirty-three (31.7%) were not.

The participants varied in their highest level of education, which ranged from some high school (4.8% men, 2.9% women), through completion of high school (19.2% men, 15.5% women), technical school certificate (3.8% men, 1% women), some community college (14.4% men, 21.4% women), Bachelor's degree (27.9% men, 35% women), Master's degree (24% men, 20.4% women), to completion of Doctoral degree (5.8% men, 3.9% women). Total household income also varied across the sample, with 12.5% of couples making less than \$19,999 per year, 8.7% making between \$20,000 and \$39,999, 22.1% at \$40,000 to \$59,999, 15.4% at \$60,000 to \$79,999, 9.6% at \$80,000 to \$99,999, and 31.7% of couples making at least \$100,000 per year. The largest proportion of men reported no religious affiliation (28.8%), with 24% identifying as Catholic, 18.3% as Protestant, 13.5% as Other, 5.8% as Jewish, 4.8% as Muslim, 2.9% as Buddhist, and 1.9% reporting as Hindu. The largest proportion of women identified as Catholic (27.2%), with 25.2% identifying as Protestant, 18.4% with no religious affiliation, 15.5% as Other, 5.8% as Jewish, 3.9% as Buddhist, 1.9% as Muslim, and 1 individual each reporting as Hindu and Evangelical.

Procedures

Potential participants contacted the outpatient mental health clinic and scheduled a first appointment for couple or family therapy. During the first session and after participants had signed the clinic's counseling agreement, trained student therapist interns explained that clients of the clinic are required to complete various assessments throughout their therapy and that the data from these assessments are important for clinical and research purposes. Signed informed consent was obtained from all clients who agreed to allow their data to be used anonymously for future research purposes. Each member of the participant couples then completed a battery of standardized assessment instruments following their initial therapy session as well as

demographic information including race, religion, household income, level of education, role in household, and date of birth, which was used to determine age. Partners completed assessments while in the same room using either individual computers or traditional pen-and-paper methods and were instructed not to consult each other regarding their answers. Completion of all measures took approximately 30 minutes and participants were monitored via a one-way mirror. Although, various assessments are completed after the first, fifth, and tenth therapy sessions, as well as after every subsequent ten sessions until therapy is terminated, only data obtained after the initial session are included in this study.

All computer-completed assessments were entered by participants directly into the Survey Monkey computer program. Student therapist interns manually entered all pen-and-paper assessments into this same program. Data was then exported from Survey Monkey into an Excel database. Since marital status was not directly obtained via demographic questionnaire, the clinic staff who maintain this database entered this information, which is taken from client files, before removing identifying information from the final database. This study used a de-identified database of relevant demographic and assessment data for all couples who had provided research consent. Of the 109 eligible couples where both partners gave signed research consent, 5 couples were eliminated due to one partner having over 25% missing data on a single variable. This left a final sample of 104 couples with 4.27% missing data. All study procedures were approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Board.

Instruments

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale. The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004) is used to assess emotion regulation functioning. As the DERS measures difficulties in emotion regulation, scores were reversed so that higher scores represent

better emotion regulation abilities. Each dimension of emotion regulation was measured with one of the six subscales of the DERS. The acceptance subscale measures acceptance of emotional responses with 6 items such as *When I'm upset, I become angry with myself for feeling that way* (reverse scored). The goals subscale measures ability to engage in goal-directed behavior during periods of distress with 5 items such as *When I'm upset, I can still get things done*. The impulse subscale measures ability to control impulses during periods of distress with 6 items such as *When I'm upset, I feel like I can remain in control of my behavior*. The awareness subscale measures emotional awareness with 6 items such as *I pay attention to how I feel*. The strategies subscale measures the participants' perceived access to appropriate regulation strategies with 8 items such as *When I'm upset, I know that I can find a way to eventually feel better*. Finally, the clarity subscale measures clarity regarding emotions with 5 items such as *I know exactly how I am feeling*. Participants are thus presented with a total of 36 statements and are asked to rate each statement based on how often they feel it describes their experience. Possible responses lie on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 is *Almost never (0-10%)* and 5 is *Almost always (91-100%)*. Total DERS potential scores range from 36-180 and any necessary items are reverse-coded such that higher DERS scores indicate greater emotion regulation abilities. The DERS has demonstrated both reliability and validity among different age groups (Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Staples & Mohlman, 2012) and different cultures (Giromini, Velotti, de Campora, Bonalume, & Zavattini, 2012; Mitsopoulou, Kafetsios, Karademas, Papastefanakis, & Simos, 2013). Gratz and Roemer (2004) reported a Cronbach's α of .93 for the total score and a range of .80 to .89 for all six subscales, as well as adequate construct and predictive validity. In the present study, internal consistency for the total score was .94 for men

and .92 for women. For subscales, internal consistencies ranged from .81 to .91 for men and .78 to .89 for women.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale – Satisfaction Subscale. The Dyadic Satisfaction subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) is used to assess each partner's satisfaction within the couple relationship. This measure allows for the study of both married and dating couples. The decision was made to use only the satisfaction subscale rather than the total DAS score, which also includes subscales for consensus, cohesion, and affectional expression. Past research asserts that the total DAS tends to confound the measurement of relationship satisfaction with the elements which determine satisfaction (Kurdek, 1992) and Spanier (1976) himself states that the total instrument is largely a measure of "perceptions of the relationship's functioning" (pg. 22). Although these concepts are undoubtedly related, subjective relationship satisfaction, as defined previously in this study, appears best measured by only the Dyadic Satisfaction subscale. This subscale is a 10-item measure composed of questions assessing a respondent's global evaluation of his relationship (e.g., *In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?*) and questions assessing specific thoughts and behaviors regarding the relationship (e.g., *How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?*). All questions are answered using a Likert-type scale and total scores are calculated by summing all responses. Scores can range from 0-50, with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction. The satisfaction subscale has demonstrated reliability and validity levels ranging from acceptable to excellent across varied populations (Graham, Liu, & Jeziorski, 2006; South, Krueger, & Iacono, 2009; Spanier, 1976). Spanier (1976) reported a Cronbach's α of .94 for the Dyadic Satisfaction

subscale score. Internal consistency for this measure in the current study was .88 for men and .89 for women.

Analytic Strategy

In addition to the multivariate analysis described below, gender differences for emotion regulation and each of its dimensions and relationship satisfaction were assessed via *t*-tests for paired samples. Bivariate correlations among all main variables were calculated for men and women.

Multivariate analysis. The conceptual model was analyzed through modern path analysis using EQS (version 6.1) and the maximum likelihood estimation method. Due to sample size limitations, two models were analyzed: Model 1 included each partner's overall emotion regulation and each partner's relationship satisfaction and Model 2 included the six dimensions of emotion regulation for each partner and each partner's relationship satisfaction. In Model 2, all dimensions of emotion regulation for one partner were allowed to covary among themselves. All covariances were significant with the exception of men's awareness and acceptance of emotions, and both men's and women's awareness of emotion and ability to engage in goal-directed behavior during negative emotion. Significant covariance coefficients ranged from .17 to .78. Both relationship satisfaction and the same dimension of emotion regulation were allowed to covary between partners. The only significant covariance coefficients were for relationship satisfaction (.70) and clarity about emotions (.12).

As the multivariate distribution of the data was not normal (Yuan, Lambert, and Fouladi's normalized coefficient = -1.71 for Model 1 and 4.45 for Model 2), model fit was assessed via robust statistics and the Yuan-Bentler scaled chi-square (χ_{YB}^2), an adjusted chi-square statistic used with non-normal data (Yuan & Bentler, 2000). The following three fit

indices, endorsed by Hu and Bentler (1999), were used: the robust Comparative Fit Index (CFI >.96), the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR <.08), and the robust Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA <.06) with its 90% confidence interval. Results from the Lagrange Multiplier test were conceptually examined to determine model respecifications when model fit was not optimal.

A series of Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to assess the effect of each demographic variable (age, marital status, race, education, religion, income level) on each of the main variables of interest. Results from the ANOVAs indicated that, except for marital status, none of the demographic variables was significantly associated with total emotion regulation, each dimension of emotion regulation, or relationship satisfaction in either partner. Marital status had two categories, either married or unmarried, and was significantly positively associated with relationship satisfaction for both men and women ($F(1, 95) = 4.71, p = .03$ for men and $F(1, 96) = 7.19, p = .01$ for women). As a result, the study only controlled for marital status, adding it as an exogenous variable affecting relationship satisfaction. Given the small sample size, multi-group comparisons could not be made.

Results

Variable Characteristics

Means, standard deviations, and *t*-test results are reported in Table 1 along with the range of possible scores for each measure. *T*-tests for paired samples revealed that partners differed significantly in reported relationship satisfaction such that men were more satisfied than women (men $M = 29.51, SD = 8.41$; women $M = 27.56, SD = 8.96$; *M Difference*: 1.95, $t = 2.77(90), p = .007$). Although partners reported comparable levels of emotion regulation ability (men $M = 136.97, SD = 22.07$; women $M = 137.46, SD = 20.52$), their scores on the goals and awareness

subscales differed significantly. Men reported a significantly better ability to engage in goal-directed behavior during periods of negative emotion (men $M = 17.00$, $SD = 4.43$; women $M = 15.45$, $SD = 4.46$; M Difference: 1.55, $t = 2.26(92)$, $p = .026$), while women reported significantly higher emotional awareness (men $M = 20.34$, $SD = 5.21$; women $M = 22.48$, $SD = 4.14$; M Difference: -2.14, $t = -3.18(96)$, $p = .002$). Their scores did not differ significantly on the acceptance (men $M = 23.95$, $SD = 5.35$; women $M = 23.87$, $SD = 5.01$), impulse (men $M = 24.28$, $SD = 5.38$; women $M = 23.86$, $SD = 4.64$), strategies (men $M = 32.37$, $SD = 6.61$; women $M = 31.51$, $SD = 5.71$), or clarity (men $M = 18.96$, $SD = 3.94$; women $M = 19.62$, $SD = 3.68$) subscales of the DERS.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and T-tests

Variables	Men (SD)	Women (SD)	Scale Range	Mean Difference	t	p
Overall Emotion Regulation	136.97 (22.073)	137.46 (20.524)	36-180	-.493	-.133	.894
Acceptance	23.95 (5.352)	23.87 (5.014)	6-30	.081	.116	.908
Goals	17.00 (4.428)	15.45 (4.456)	5-25	1.548	2.256	.026
Impulse	24.28 (5.378)	23.86 (4.642)	6-30	.417	.569	.571
Awareness	20.34 (5.208)	22.48 (4.136)	6-30	-2.144	-3.179	.002
Strategies	32.37 (6.607)	31.51 (5.706)	8-40	.868	.982	.329
Clarity	18.96 (3.940)	19.62 (3.682)	5-25	-.663	-1.291	.200
Relationship Satisfaction	29.51 (8.412)	27.56 (8.962)	0-50	1.945	2.766	.007

Note. N = 104 men and 104 women

Results indicated positive kurtosis for the dimensions of acceptance (men: .08, women: 2.60), impulse (men: 2.38, women: 1.69), and strategies (men: .71, women: 1.11) and negative kurtosis for the dimensions of goals (men: -.38, women: -.34), awareness (men: -.39, women: -.23), and clarity (men: -.75, women: -.58). Kurtosis for relationship satisfaction was also negative for both genders (men: -.70, women: -.72). Results of bivariate correlations among all main variables are reported in Table 2. Significant correlation coefficients among DERS subscales ranged from .21 to .79 for men and from .21 to .63 for women.

Table 2
Correlations Among Emotion Regulation and its Dimensions and Relationship Satisfaction

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Overall ER	-	.73**	.62**	.69**	.50**	.86**	.71**	.07
2. Acceptance	.70**	-	.31**	.38**	.28**	.59**	.50**	-.11
3. Goals	.75**	.50**	-	.39**	.00	.56**	.21*	.12
4. Impulse	.84**	.60**	.63**	-	.16	.60**	.32**	.10
5. Awareness	.49**	.05	.07	.20	-	.22*	.63**	-.18
6. Strategies	.89**	.61**	.74**	.79**	.25*	-	.49**	.14
7. Clarity	.65**	.21*	.26**	.40**	.67**	.43**	-	-.07
8. Relationship Satisfaction	.18	.04	.11	.15	.01	.23*	.16	-

Note: N = 104 men and 104 women, Results for men are reported below the diagonal, with women's results above the diagonal, ER= Emotion Regulation, *p < 0.05 (two-tailed). **p < 0.01 (two-tailed)

Results for Multivariate Analysis – Model 1

Results of the path analysis for the overall emotion regulation model are illustrated in Figure 2. These results indicated an adequate fit of the model to the data ($\chi^2_{YB}(2) = 3.00, p = .22$; robust CFI = .99; SRMR = .07; robust RMSEA = .05 (.00, .21). Nevertheless, Hypothesis 1 was not supported by the data for overall emotion regulation as neither partner's overall emotion regulation was significantly related to his or her own relationship satisfaction (men: .13; women: .12). Hypothesis 2 was not supported by the data for overall emotion regulation either as neither partner's overall regulation was significantly related to the other partner's relationship

satisfaction (men’s overall emotion regulation–women’s relationship satisfaction: .02; women’s overall emotion regulation–men’s relationship satisfaction: -.04). Model 1 accounted for 6.4% of the variation in men’s relationship satisfaction and 8.4% of the variation in women’s relationship satisfaction. Results from the Lagrange Multiplier test did not suggest the addition of any paths that could improve model fit.

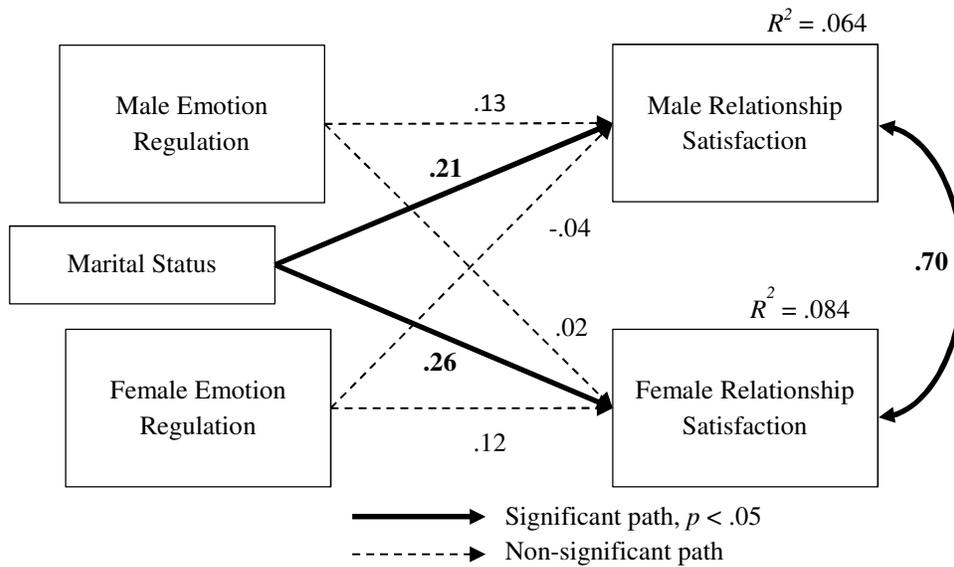


Figure 2. Structural Model 1: Standardized Results

Results for Multivariate Analysis – Model 2

Results of the path analysis for the model including the six dimensions of emotion regulation are illustrated in Figure 3. These results indicated an adequate fit of the model to the data ($\chi_{YB}^2(42) = 23.56, p = .99$; robust CFI = 1.00; SRMR = .05; robust RMSEA = .000, no computation of boundary of confidence interval). Model 2 accounted for 18.5% of the variation in men’s relationship satisfaction and 15.1% of the variation in women’s relationship satisfaction. Results from the Lagrange Multiplier test did not suggest any respecification of the model that could improve model fit.

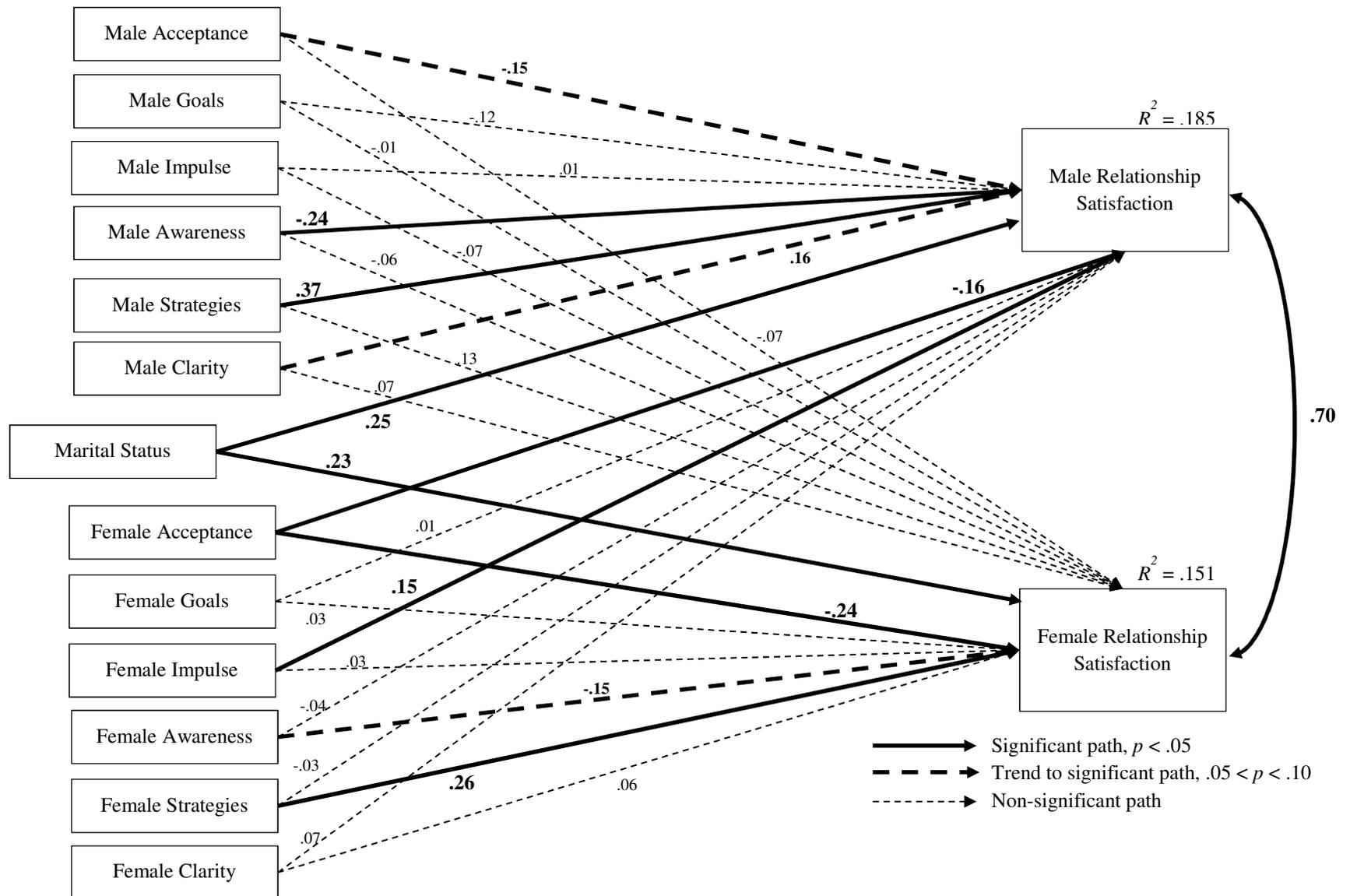


Figure 3. Structural model 2: Standardized Results. For the purpose of clarity, bivariate correlations between emotion regulation dimensions are not included.

Hypothesis 1 was only supported by the data for the access to regulation strategies dimension for both men and women. Men's access to regulation strategies was significantly and positively associated with his own relationship satisfaction (.37). Women's access to regulation strategies was also significantly and positively associated with her own relationship satisfaction (.26). Contrary to Hypothesis 1, men's awareness of emotions was significantly but negatively associated with his own relationship satisfaction (-.24) and women's acceptance of emotions was significantly but negatively associated with her own relationship satisfaction (-.24). All other dimensions of emotion regulation did not reach significance at $p < .05$ for actor effects on relationship satisfaction for men (acceptance: -.15, goals: -.12, impulse: .01, clarity: .16) or for women (goals: .03, impulse: .03, awareness: -.15, clarity: .06). However, acceptance and clarity showed a trend toward a significant ($.05 < p < .10$) effect on relationship satisfaction for men in different directions (acceptance: -.15, clarity: .16). Similarly, the effect of awareness of emotions on relationship satisfaction indicated a trend toward statistical significance ($.05 < p < .10$) for women (-.15). In addition, tests of models with path constraints did not show any statistically significant difference between men and women in the paths from any of the emotion regulation dimensions toward relationship satisfaction.

Data only supported Hypothesis 2 for one dimension of emotion regulation for women and no dimensions for men. Women's impulse control was positively and significantly associated with men's relationship satisfaction (.15). Contrary to Hypothesis 2, women's acceptance of emotions was significantly associated with men's relationship satisfaction, but in a negative direction (-.16). None of women's other dimensions of emotion regulation was significantly associated with men's relationship satisfaction (goals: .01, awareness: -.04, strategies: -.03, clarity: .07). Hypothesis 2 was not supported for any partner effects of men's

dimensions of emotion regulation on women's relationship satisfaction (acceptance: -.07, goals: -.01, impulse: -.07, awareness: -.06, strategies: .13, clarity: .07).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship of partners' overall emotion regulation, as well its six dimensions, with their relationship satisfaction. This study is among the few (Bloch et al., 2014; Kirby & Baucom, 2007) to examine emotion regulation within a couple context and the first, to our knowledge, to examine the specific effects of each of the six dimensions of emotion regulation as described by Gratz and Roemer (2004). To assess these relationships, we analyzed data collected from couples seeking couple or family therapy at an outpatient mental health clinic between 2009 and 2014.

Before discussing the main findings from the present study, it is important to note some general characteristics of the sample regarding the main variables of interest. Couples in this study tended to report low levels of relationship satisfaction, which would be expected in clinical populations. Similarly, couples also reported low levels of emotional awareness, emotional clarity, and ability to engage in goal-directed behavior during periods of negative emotion, which would also be expected of a clinical population. In terms of gender differences, men reported significantly higher satisfaction than their female counterparts, a finding that is well-documented in the literature (e.g., Schumm, Resnick, Bollman, & Jurich, 1998) and that has been found to be especially true of couples in therapy (Jackson, Miller, Oka, & Henry, 2014). In addition and consistent with past research (e.g., Ciarrochi, Hynes, & Crittenden, 2005), women reported better awareness of their emotions than men did. Nonetheless, men reported greater ability to engage in goal-directed behavior while experiencing negative emotion. This is in line with Salsman and Linehan's (2012) study that also found that women had more difficulties in this area.

Contrary to our hypothesized model, neither partner's overall emotion regulation ability was associated with either partner's relationship satisfaction. This finding is somewhat surprising given the evidence provided by Kirby and Baucom's (2007) study, which also used the DERS to measure emotion regulation. While the lack of actor effects in our results is consistent with their study, they did find that improvements in one partner's overall emotion regulation longitudinally predicted improvements in the other partner's relationship satisfaction whereas we did not find similar results cross-sectionally. Although their small sample size of 8 couples invites caution in the interpretation of their findings, a closer examination of their sample characteristics may also help explain the discrepancy between their results and ours. Inclusion criteria for Kirby and Baucom's (2007) study prescribed that one member of the couple specifically struggle with emotion regulation, as evidenced by participation in Dialectical Behavior Therapy and skills groups, while our study included all couples seeking couple or family therapy. It may be that emotion regulation deficits must reach pathological levels before improvements in regulation may be seen to affect partner's relationship satisfaction and that, in our more generally clinical sample, not enough participants met this criteria for this relationship to achieve significance.

Despite the finding that overall emotion regulation was not significantly related to relationship satisfaction, a different picture emerged when we examined the individual dimensions of emotion regulation. As hypothesized, actor effects were found for three dimensions of emotion regulation on relationship satisfaction, though not always in the expected direction. For both men and women, their perceived access to regulation strategies was significantly positively associated with their own relationship satisfaction, above and beyond the effects of other emotion regulation dimensions on relationship satisfaction. This finding

suggests that if partners felt they possessed the tools needed to deal with their negative emotions, then they felt more satisfied in their relationships. This appears to mirror results found by Kirby and Baucom (2007), who reported that when the non-pathological member of the couple reported greater self-efficacy dealing with emotion, he also reported greater relationship satisfaction. Additionally, our finding is consistent with the research linking more effective emotion regulation strategies such as reappraisal to positive interpersonal outcomes (Gross & John, 2003; Richards et al., 2003). For example, Gross and John (2003) found that reappraisers were significantly more likely than suppressors to rate their own interactions with others more positively.

Nonetheless, contrary to our hypotheses, each partner's awareness and acceptance of emotions were negatively associated with their own relationship satisfaction. Although these relationships only reached significance for one gender (men's awareness to men's satisfaction and women's acceptance to women's satisfaction), trends toward significance were observed in the other gender in both cases. Both of these relationships were observed in an unexpected direction such that lower levels of awareness and acceptance of emotions were associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Although this may appear counterintuitive on the surface, the fact that this was a clinical sample may help explain these associations. All participants were seeking couple or family therapy and many, if not most, may be assumed to be relationally distressed. Indeed, on average, relationship satisfaction levels were lower in our sample than those reported among community samples (e.g., Altmann, Sierau, & Roth, 2013). Perhaps partners reduced awareness and acceptance of negative emotions about their relationship in an attempt to manage or mitigate their own current levels of distress. If these methods were successful, then their satisfaction levels may be higher than those participants who were more

aware and accepting of their negative emotions about their relationship. This proposal is in line with the theoretical corollary that regulation strategies must be understood within their specific contexts. Our results appear to support the idea that, although emotional awareness and acceptance may be positive for individuals, as they may help improve individual-level psychopathologies like depression (Boswell, Anderson, & Barlow, 2014) and Borderline Personality Disorder (Neacsiu, Lungu, Harned, Rizvi, & Linehan, 2014), they may also have different effects for relationship satisfaction.

This idea is further supported by the finding of a partner effect for women's acceptance. Results indicated that women's lower acceptance of emotion was associated with higher men's relationship satisfaction. Again, if we consider a relational rather than individual context, perhaps women's lower acceptance of negative emotions about their partner or their relationship is contributing to more satisfaction for that partner.

One additional partner effect was found such that women's higher impulse control was related to higher men's relationship satisfaction, as hypothesized. This is consistent with previous findings that impulsivity is positively associated with negative relationship outcomes such as relationship conflict (Crane, Testa, Derrick, & Leonard, 2014) and relational aggression (Shorey, Brasfield, Febres, & Stuart, 2011a). Perhaps women's impulsivity leads to actions that negatively influence their partner's evaluation of their relationship, an idea which supports the theoretical assumption that emotion regulation leads to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that affect the social environment. This finding also appears consistent with Bloch and colleagues' 2014 finding that men are more satisfied in their relationships when their partners successfully down regulate negative behaviors. Although the partner effects found in our study were

significant, it is important to remember that the effects were relatively small and should therefore be interpreted with caution.

Overall the findings of this study indicate that actor effects of individual emotion regulation dimensions do not appear to vary by gender. Perceived access to emotion regulation strategies increased the likelihood of a participant's own relationship satisfaction, while awareness and acceptance of emotions had the opposite effect. Partner effects were observed only for women. Women's impulse control was associated with increased satisfaction for her partner, though partner satisfaction also increased as women's emotional acceptance decreased. The overall picture that emerges appears to highlight the importance of separately examining the dimensions of emotion regulation, as well as considering the context in which emotion regulation occurs. Although our findings await replication by future studies, they support the idea that dimensions which may be beneficial for individuals, such as awareness and acceptance of emotions, could have different effects in the context of the couple relationship.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The results of this study should be interpreted in light of its limitations. First, the small sample size limited the power of statistical analyses to detect significant effects. Additionally, the limited size precluded analysis with full structural equation modeling allowing for control of measurement error. The use of a self-report method for measuring emotion regulation is a further limitation of this study in that it may have introduced a social desirability bias. Nevertheless, measuring emotion regulation through self-report may also provide a unique perspective: that of individuals' conscious perspective of their emotion regulation processes, which cannot be assessed through physiological or behavioral assessments of emotion regulation. Even though the DERS offers this advantage as a self-report instrument, it still has some

limitations as it does not allow participants to differentiate between emotion regulation contexts, so some participants may have answered with regard specifically to their relationship while others may not. As self-report methods were used to measure both the dependent and independent variables, this study is limited by the possibility that common method variance may have influenced our findings. Finally, the use of cross-sectional data limits the ability of this study to speak definitively regarding the causal relationships between study variables.

Future studies would benefit from the use of larger, more nationally representative samples and the use of multiple methods of construct measurement to reduce reliance on self-report measures. Additionally, measures of emotion regulation which specifically address the couple context would be helpful. Longitudinal study designs utilizing both clinical and community samples would also be valuable in addressing these limitations. The results of this study provide support for the value of measuring the separate dimensions of emotion regulation. Indeed, if only overall emotion regulation had been explored, many interesting and important results would have been obscured. Therefore, future studies concerned with emotion regulation would do well to incorporate its multiple dimensions in order to more completely understand its relationship to study variables.

Clinical Implications

Although more studies examining emotion regulation, its dimensions, and relationship satisfaction are required in order to clarify recommendations for clinicians, the results presented here appear to have important clinical implications. Our findings suggest that, when working with clinical couples, enhancing strategies to regulate emotions may help individuals improve their satisfaction with their relationship. Some therapy models which are traditionally practiced in individual or group therapy settings, such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy, already focus on

bolstering clients' regulation strategies (Neacsiu, Bohus, & Linehan, 2014). The findings of this study imply that couples' relationship satisfaction could benefit if clinicians apply these interventions in dyadic contexts. Additionally, clinicians practicing couple therapies such as Emotionally Focused Therapy, which highlight emotional processes (Johnson, 2004), may want to consider incorporating more work improving access to emotion regulation strategies in order to maximize benefits to relationship satisfaction. Our findings also highlight that, if awareness and acceptance of emotions are emphasized, clinicians should be prepared for the possibility that relationship satisfaction may suffer. Additionally, this study underlines for clinicians the importance of assessing each dimension of emotion regulation when working with couples. Potential targets for intervention may be missed if only overall measures are used.

Conclusions

This study is among the first to assess emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction and the first to examine how the six dimensions of emotion regulation may be differentially related to satisfaction. It emphasizes the value in separately examining these dimensions and also in considering couple versus individual contexts. Emotion regulation dimensions that have been shown to be related to individual outcomes may be related to very different outcomes when considering couples. This study also highlights gender as an important factor to consider when examining partner effects of emotion regulation on relationship satisfaction. Perhaps most importantly, this study identifies perceived access to emotion regulation strategies as significant for both men's and women's relationship satisfaction, thus providing clinicians with a likely target for intervention.

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Appendix: Instruments

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale

Directions: Indicate how often each item applies to you. Possible responses range from 1 (almost never) reflecting 0-10% of the time to 5 (almost always) reflecting 91-100% of the time.

Almost never (0-10%) 1	Sometimes (11-35%) 2	About half the time (33-65%) 3	Most of the time (66-90%) 4	Almost always (91-100%) 5
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1. I am clear about my feelings.
2. I pay attention to how I feel.
3. I experience my emotions as overwhelming and out of control.
4. I have no idea how I am feeling.
5. I have difficulty making sense out of my feelings.
6. I am attentive to my feelings.
7. I know exactly how I am feeling.
8. I care about what I am feeling.
9. I am confused about how I feel.
10. When I'm upset, I acknowledge my emotions.
11. When I'm upset, I become angry with myself for feeling that way.
12. When I'm upset, I become embarrassed for feeling that way.
13. When I'm upset, I have difficulty getting work done.
14. When I'm upset, I become out of control.
15. When I'm upset, I believe that I will remain that way for a long time.
16. When I'm upset, I believe that I'll end up feeling very depressed.
17. When I'm upset, I believe that my feelings are valid and important.
18. When I'm upset, I have difficulty focusing on other things.
19. When I'm upset, I feel out of control.
20. When I'm upset, I can still get things done.
21. When I'm upset, I feel ashamed with myself for feeling that way.
22. When I'm upset, I know that I can find a way to eventually feel better.
23. When I'm upset, I feel like I am weak.
24. When I'm upset, I feel like I can remain in control of my behaviors.
25. When I'm upset, I feel guilty for feeling that way.
26. When I'm upset, I have difficulty concentrating.
27. When I'm upset, I have difficulty controlling my behaviors.
28. When I'm upset, I believe that there is nothing I can do to make myself feel better.
29. When I'm upset, I become irritated with myself for feeling that way.
30. When I'm upset, I start to feel very bad about myself.
31. When I'm upset, I believe that wallowing in it is all I can do.
32. When I'm upset, I lose control over my behaviors.
33. When I'm upset, I have difficulty thinking about anything else.
34. When I'm upset, I take time to figure out what I'm really feeling.
35. When I'm upset, it takes me a long time to feel better.
36. When I'm upset, my emotions feel overwhelming.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale – Satisfaction Subscale

Directions: The following questions are about the relationship between you and your partner.

A. Please check the appropriate answer for you with a \checkmark

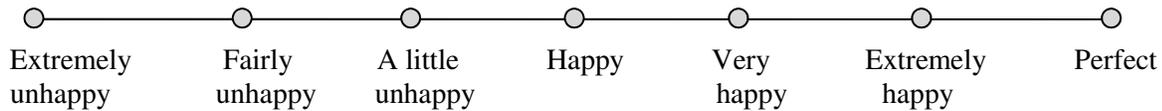
	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
1. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation or terminating your relationship?						
2. How often do you or your partner leave the house after a fight?						
3. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?						
4. Do you confide in your partner?						
5. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?						
6. How often do you or your partner quarrel?						
7. How often do you and your partner "get on each other's nerves"?						

B. Please circle your answer

8. Do you kiss your partner?

Every day Almost every day Occasionally Rarely Never

9. The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point "happy" represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.



10. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship? Check the statement that best applies to you.

___ 1. I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.

___ 2. I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do all I can to see that it does.

___ 3. I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do my fair share to see that it does.

___ 4. It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I can't do much more than I am doing now to help it succeed.

___ 5. It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.