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EXPRESSION AND REGULATION OF EMOTIONS IN ROMANTIC  
RELATIONSHIPS

By

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Expression and Regulation of Emotions in Romantic Relationships

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**Abstract:** Romantic relationships are extremely important in people's physical and mental well being. One of the important determinants of the quality of romantic relationships is the expression and regulation of emotions. This study hypothesized that 1) expression of positive emotions is good for any relationship, 2) expression of negative emotions is good for only communal relationships, 3) expression of positive emotions is necessary alongside of negative ones to maintain a communal relationship, 4) in case negative emotions are expressed, providing explanations would help maintain the relationship, 5) suppression of emotions does not benefit communal relationship, and 6) expression of emotions correlates with a) secure attachment, b) partner's receptiveness to expression, and c) communal approach to relationship.

The interactions predicted in this study were not found to be significant. The key study findings follow: 1) expression of positive and negative emotions, 2) communal orientation, 3) explanation of negative affect, 4) and general emotional expressivity correlate with higher relationship satisfaction. 5) Emotional suppression, 6) anxious attachment, and 7) higher year in school were related to lower satisfaction.

Other findings suggested that 1) communal approach, 2) partner's receptiveness, and 3) female gender were related to more emotional expressivity. 4) Communal orientation was related to more and 5) avoidant attachment was related to less positive expression. 6) Secure attachment was related to less emotional suppression.

Lastly, it was found that 1) secure attachment correlated with more partner's receptiveness. 2) Anxious attachment accompanied less explanations for negative affect., and, 3) older participants had more avoidant attachments.

The major limitation of this study was that only one member the couple was assessed and the impact of the respondent's style and behavior on the partner as well as the dyadic factors contributing to the relationship were largely unknown.

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## Introduction

Romantic relations are perhaps the most important relationships people develop in their adult lives. The quality of a romantic relationship has direct bearing on physical and psychological health and more broadly on the quality of life (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978; Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers 1976; Coyne & Downey, 1991; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Myers & Diener, 1995). Given the key role that emotions play in interpersonal relations (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Prager, 1995), the way emotions are experienced, regulated, and expressed is likely to affect the quality of romantic relations. This proposal will attempt to study the nature of emotional regulation and expression in the context of romantic relationships and investigate the possible correlation of expressiveness with relationship satisfaction.

### *Why Romantic Relationships Matter*

Relationships and romance have their roots in ancient human history. Creations of the human mind such as folk tales, literature, mythology, art, and religious texts around the world are embellished with romance and relationships. Even though romance in its present-day form is a relatively new phenomenon in the Western world (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001), judging by the space it occupies in the pop culture, it appears to have become a pandemic preoccupation.

In the United States, about 80-90% of the population marries at some point in their life; however, about half of all these marriages are expected to end in divorce (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Actual statistics for formation and disruption of romantic relationships are likely to be even higher: many people are involved in short- or long- term non-marital romantic relationships not included in the Census

Bureau report; romantic relationships between same sex partners are not in the aforementioned statistics; and finally, some married couples separate without divorcing. The real number of dissolved relationships therefore, is probably higher than the census survey (Castro Martin & Bumpass, 1989; Norton & Glick, 1979). People who step out of a relationship such as marriage usually embark on another one, which is even more likely to end (McCarthy, 1978). In short, virtually everybody is affected by presence, absence, and the quality of romantic relationships in one way or another.

Further, relationship satisfaction is an important determinant of quality of life (Argyle, 1987). In married couples, there is empirical evidence to support the folk theories that poor relationship quality leads to considering separation and divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 1992), which are known predictors of poor mental and physical health.

As it pertains to the goal of this paper, it is important to know that romantic relationships are usually the source of intense positive and negative affect for humans (Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2004; Prager, 1995). Emotions and their implications in relationships are discussed in more details later in this paper, but suffice it to say that in the context of relationships, creation of emotions depends to some extent on whether or not the expected outcome for a certain event takes place. For instance, if one partner expects the other to remember his birthday, forgetting this occasion violates an expectancy and can generate an emotion. In a romantic relationship, individuals interact with and depend on one another heavily and as such, the



relationship expectancies can be met or violated. Therefore, relationships are a rich breeding ground for various types of emotions.

It is also known that situations that are one way or another significant to the individual can create emotional responses. Once again, romantic relationships are the birthplace of emotions since most events taking place in this context are personally relevant and significant and thus, can cause emotional reactions (Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2004). Dysfunctional relationships produce a wide range of negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression (Bloom, Asher, & White, 1978; Coyne & Downey, 1991; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). On the other hand, functional relationships can buffer and protect people against various life stressors and create positive affective states (Waltz, Badura, Pfaff, & Schott, 1988). It has been shown that a fulfilling romantic relationship is the strongest predictor of happiness and life satisfaction (Myers & Diener, 1995). Other studies confirm that family life and a meaningful relationship are the most important predictors of quality of life (Argyle, 1987; Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976). In summary, this large array of evidence suggests that relationships matter: Good relationships are vitally important to happiness and dysfunctional relationships are a major source of unhappiness. Furthermore, emotions are an integral part of any romantic relationship.

### Emotions in Relationships

The relation between emotionality and romantic relationships is bi-directional: Emotion is a central theme in romantic relationships and conversely, relationships are a prime source of emotions. As previously mentioned, people experience many of their emotions, positive or negative, in their give and take with their partners

(Guerrero & Andersen, 2000). Extremes of pleasant and unpleasant emotions arise when people establish, develop, or dissolve relationships (Bowlby, 1979). Given the considerable interdependence of romantic partners on one another and the numerous occasions that a relationship provides to provoke various kinds of affect, it is reasonable to expect strong emotions in relationships. Even the emotions that are created outside of the dyadic boundaries (e.g., subsequent to a disagreement with coworkers) are often brought into the romantic relationship and are capable of affecting the nature of the emotional interaction between partners (Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2004). In a study of emotions, romantic relationships, and attachment, Feeney (1999) demonstrated a strong correlation between expression of emotions and relationship satisfaction, even when other variables were taken out of the equation. Considering the importance of emotional responses and its relevance to the purpose of this proposal, the following section presents a general overview of emotions.

What are emotions and how are they created? “Emotion” and “emotionality” are loosely defined terms, subject to personal and cultural interpretations (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001). Part of the reason for the definitional vagueness is that emotions are multifaceted and complex phenomena; based in biological hardwiring, they are at the same time socially constructed and interpreted (Gross, 1999; McLean, 1955; 1977). Certain situations are more likely to generate emotional responses. A situation must be relevant to the individual and significant in some way (Gross, 1999). Significance of a situation may be because of its relation to personal goals (Parkinson, 1996). For instance, if one needs a favor from a romantic partner, his/her

reactions become significant and can cause emotions. Social demands can bring significance to a situation (Parkinson, 1996), e.g. if an attempt to look good in front of a romantic partner fails, the situation is significant and a potential source of emotions. Seeking personal gratification can lend significance to a situation, such as being able to establish physical intimacy with a romantic partner (Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2000). Cultural influences may create significance in a situation (Parkinson, 1996). For example, if mate guarding is an attribute that varies across cultures, one would expect the significance of spouse protection and subsequent emotions to vary from one culture to another.

It is clear at this point that emotions are both definable and important in relationships. But why do we have them at all? What functions do they serve? Let's turn to this question next.

### Functions of Emotions at the Individual Level

Given the prevalence and significance of emotions in human experiences, there is reason to believe that they play important roles in life. What functions do they serve? Based on evidence such as close connection between the emotional and cognitive systems, Clore and Schwarz propose the "affect-as-information" theory stating that the main function of emotions is providing knowledge (Clore, 1994; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). The subjective feeling of an emotion informs the individuals about their internal state and expression of emotions informs others about the same thing. For instance, if members of a couple have negative feelings about the romantic relationship, they can use this information as an indication of the function

and well-being of the relationship. Outward expression of these feelings signals other people about the individuals' internal conditions.

The “affect as information” theory runs contrary to the general belief that considers emotions as an impediment for wise and rational decision making. This theory posits that emotions should be weighed heavily in decision-making processes because of their informational value (Fletcher, 2002). Many cognitive functions such as problem solving, decision making, attributional processes, memory, and judgment are affected by emotions (Clore, 1994). Emotional systems work so closely with the cognitive systems that they can disrupt current cognitive or behavioral processes and reorganize them for issues of higher priority (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Clore (1994) adds that emotions are so influential as to mold our cognitive view of the world. An emotional state can determine what one attends to, how one perceives the world, and how one reacts to current life events. In summary, an emotional state can influence the cognitive system by rearranging one's priorities, focusing attention, and by shifting the budgeting of resources.

In a complementary perspective, Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure (1989) state that the primary function of emotions is mobilizing and organizing actions. Emotional responses provide us with information necessary for goal-oriented behavior and thus modify our relation to the social and physical environment (Frijda, 1994). When one achieves important goals such as establishing or strengthening a romantic relationship, positive emotions follow naturally. If goals are not attained, negative emotions provide motivation for change.

In summary, whether focusing on their value as sources of information or as an impetus for goal-oriented behavior, emotions lend meaning and flavor to our lives. They direct our actions, provide us with communicative tools, organize our cognition, and harmonize our social interactions (Clore, 1994; Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure 1989; Gross & John, 2002; Planalp, 1999; Schwarz & Clore, 1983).

### Interpersonal Functions of Emotions

As the preceding section illustrates, emotions are essential in many individual level processes such as decision-making. At an *intrapersonal* level, emotional reactions notify the individual of pressing needs that should be met and of goals and priorities that demand the person's attention (Clore, Schwartz, & Conway, 1994). That said, people do not exist in a vacuum and emotions also serve as broader communication tools in relationships. *Interpersonally*, expression of emotions is a way for a person to communicate internal states to and elicit responses from others.

Emotional responses and emotion regulation frequently take place in social situations (Gross & John, 2002; Gross, Richards, & John, in press; Richards & Gross, 2000; Scherer, Summerfield, & Wallbott, 1983), are often defined by the social context (Frijda, 1988), are reciprocated by and transmitted to the social partners (Parkinson, 1996), and therefore, affect the quality of one's relationships with others. Emotional reactions of other people affect us and we respond to them by appropriate emotions in turn. Even the imagined presence of others affects the course and expression of an emotional response (Parkinson, 1996). It is shown that people who are able to adjust the experience and expression of emotions depending on the situation and control emotional over- or under-arousal, they will be more likely to

enjoy smooth social interactions and be more adept at social situations (Campos, Campos, & Barrett, 1989; Eisenberg et al., 1997; Gross, 1999; 1998; Hart et al., 1997; Walden & Smith, 1997).

Further elaborating on the interpersonal functions of emotions, Keltner and Kring (1998) suggest that emotions have an organizing effect on interpersonal functions. They posit that (1) emotions provide information regarding the individual to the social partners (e.g. an angry face is a warning signal for others not to approach the person). (2) Emotions can provide information about situations. If a situation is unclear, people resort to other people's emotional responses to make a decision. (3) Emotional expressions provide information about the nature of social relationship. If one expresses distress to a romantic partner and receives an empathic response, a certain degree of commitment in the relationship can be inferred. (4) Emotions elicit matching responses from the individual's social partners. A faux pas on a first date may evoke embarrassment in the individual, which in turn can elicit a state like amusement in the partner. (5) Lastly, emotions are capable of reinforcing certain behaviors in the context of social exchange. When one member of a couple laughs at a humorous comment made by the other, he/she reinforces the amusing behavior (Keltner & Kring, 1998).

From a neuropsychological standpoint, interpersonal situations create emotions with the mediation of the cognitive system. It is believed that the human mind is developed to predict forthcoming events and attempts to foresee the future to be able to plan and act accordingly. This function applies to the interpersonal situations as well with the cognitive system trying to predict the reactions and

behaviors of another person based on the past knowledge. As mentioned earlier in this paper, if these anticipations (also known as *cognitive expectancies*) do not materialize, an emotional response usually follows (Berscheid & Ammazalorso, 2004). According to this theory, the perceptual systems scan the environment and report any discrepancies from the existing expectancies. If one is found, it can be transmitted to the brain with or without the individual's awareness. Therefore, emotions can sometimes happen without the individual being able to render a reason for them. Whether the emotions are created consciously or otherwise, they fulfill their function by encouraging the person to restore the expectancies. For instance if a person thinks she is mistreated by a romantic partner, emotional states such as sadness or anger may incite the actions necessary to correct the situation.

In an attempt to elicit the interpersonal consequences of emotional expression (or lack thereof), Butler et al. (2003) conducted a study in which they found that suppression of emotion-expressive behavior could be especially harmful to social interactions. They asked participants to voluntarily suppress their emotions and interact with a partner assigned to them. This social interaction produced an uncomfortable state of arousal in the suppressor's partner. This state of arousal may make the partner unwilling to engage in further interactions with the suppressor. Partners who conversed with suppressors reported less rapport compared to the control group, presumably mediated by lack of responsiveness (Butler et al., 2003). It therefore becomes evident that effective management of emotions and timely emotional expression is indeed vital in interpersonal situations such as romantic relationships, a breeding ground for powerful emotions where tactful emotion

regulation is essential. Next we pursue the importance of such expression and regulation of emotions in greater detail.

### Expression and Regulation of Emotions

As the preceding discussion implies, emotions are not merely felt; they are frequently communicated to others. Indeed, expression is an inherent quality of emotions and one that serves as a communicative purpose (Guerrero, Andersen, & Trost, 1998). Perhaps because of the importance of emotional expression, there are different verbal and non verbal channels for expression of emotions. The abundance of emotion words in various languages points to the significance of verbal communication of emotions. Emotions are also expressed through nonverbal means such as facial expressions, body language, and vocal inflections (Gross, 1999; Planalp, 1998).

Emotional expression can be beneficial not only by communicating one's needs and desires to others, but also by providing structure and clarity to the individual's internal experience. For example, it may be through the verbalization of an unpleasant affective state that one understands what exactly is wrong with a romantic relationship. On the other hand, the expression of such emotions as anger can be detrimental to the individuals and their interpersonal relationships. Thus, in spite of their adaptive functions, expression of emotions must be monitored and regulated in order to fulfill the individual's goals (Gross, 2002). Different components of an emotional response (i.e., subjective feeling, physiological changes in the body, and behavioral responses) as well as emotional manifestations are all subject to regulation (Gross, 1999; Watson & Clark, 1994). Regulation of emotions



is a strategic act that takes place in response to personal and environmental exigencies (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001). It is a set of diverse mechanisms that people both inherit and skills that they learn in their early environments (Gross, 1998; Linehan, 1993). It is speculated that emotion regulation has an optimal range, that is, both under- or over-control of emotions may be detrimental at the individual and interpersonal level (Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2000).

How does emotion regulation work? A useful approach to the mechanics of emotion regulation is temporal sequencing of the emotion regulatory events. In the process model of emotion regulation (Gross, 1999), regulatory strategies initiated early in the emotion generative process are collectively called “antecedent-focused” strategies. Instances of antecedent-focused regulation strategies are: (1) situation selection, i.e. approaching or avoiding situations based on their predicted emotional impact; (2) situation modification, i.e. attempts to change the situation in order to alter its emotional bearing; (3) allocation of attentional resources, i.e. selective attention to emotionally desirable stimuli; and (4) cognitive reappraisal, i.e. mentally reframing the emotional event. “Response-focused” strategies are typically launched later in the process when the emotional reaction is already engendered (Gross, 1999). An example of response-focused emotion regulation is suppression of observable emotional behavior. One study found that three types of the abovementioned strategies are more commonly used: allocation of attentional resources, cognitive reappraisal, and response modulation such as suppression of emotional behavior (Gross, Richards, & John, in press). It is also known that most individuals have preferred emotion regulation strategies that they use more often than others. For

instance, there are people who use emotional suppression habitually and almost on a regular basis (John & Gross, 2004). Because of its relevance to the purposes of this paper, we shortly return to suppression of emotions in relationships in more detail.

### Emotion Regulation in Relationships

These general sketches of emotion regulation are clearly relevant to relationships. As stated before, relationships generate a vast array of emotions, making emotion regulation an important necessity in romantic relationships (Ryan, Gottman, Murray, Carrère, & Swanson, 2000). Instances of emotion regulation in relationships abound: instead of seeking revenge during conflict situations, well-adjusted couples are more likely to accommodate; they regulate their negative emotions and respond with positivity. Poorly regulated individuals with emotional instability and impulsivity are considered undesirable partners, while emotionally open and appropriately expressive individuals are coveted and have happier relationships (Fitness, 2001). It is thus clear that emotion regulation is an important determinant of relationship quality. One particular emotion regulation strategy may be especially relevant to relationship satisfaction: suppression.

### *Emotional Suppression*

People often suppress emotional behavior that is not sanctioned by social norms. Children learn from an early age to suppress emotional displays not approved by the culture and society. At an age as early as three to four, children have been found to be capable of suppressing the facial expressions of emotions (Miles & Gross, 1999). Even though suppression leads to alterations in emotion-related behavior, the subjective experience of negative emotions does not change as a result of

suppression. Participants who are instructed to suppress certain emotions report experiencing emotions comparable to the ones who do not have such instructions (Gross, 1998; 2002). For instance, people who try to suppress positive feelings for an “old flame,” show greater unwanted affection for that person than non-suppressors (Wegner, 1995).

Suppression of emotions is a costly process for the cognitive system because of the added workload of monitoring and keeping emotional behavior under control. Richards, Butler, and Gross (2003) recruited participants who had been in a dating relationship for at least 6 months and randomly assigned them to engage in cognitive reappraisal or suppression during naturalistic dialogues. Participants who engaged in the reappraisal of the situation had a more accurate memory of the content of conversations than the ones who suppressed. Gross (1998) observed that suppression resulted in the reduction of emotion-related behavior along with physiological changes such as increased activity in the sympathetic nervous system, presumably because of the extra work required to keep emotions under control. Suppression involves constant self-monitoring along with corrective action, which consumes and detracts from the available cognitive resources (Gross & John, 2002). Other studies corroborated this finding and stated that suppression requires the individuals to monitor and adjust their emotional response on an ongoing basis, taking away from the finite cognitive resources at their disposal. This in turn leads to impairment of both recall and recognition functions of memory and possibly other cognitive functions (Richards & Gross, 1999; Gross, 2001). More specifically, the process of real-time comparison between the emotional experience, emotional display, and what

is desired in a situation affects the language centers in the brain, which in turn deters the verbal encoding of information (Richards & Gross, 2000). The conclusion is that suppression of negative emotions is associated with poorer auditory and visual memory for emotion-eliciting stimuli. The memory impairment was shown to be for information that required verbal encoding, which is exactly what is needed in social interactions (Richards & Gross, 2000).

How is suppression-related memory impairment manifest itself in a relational context? In married couples, conversation recall is related to the level of communication and understanding of partner attitudes (Sillars, Weisberg, Burggraf, & Zietlow, 1990). Therefore, in emotional interactions, members of a couple need to remember the contents of the discussion and the emotional tone of the interaction for effective communication and conflict resolution. If one or both members of a couple engage in emotional suppression, they will have a reduced chance of remembering their partners' beliefs and attitudes as well as the details of contentious issues and will likely have inadequate understanding of the partner and important dyadic incidents.

The untoward effects of suppression in interpersonal situations are not limited to memory impairment. Minimal requirements of smooth social functioning are expression of positivity (Gross, 1999), responsiveness or the formation of situation-appropriate responses to a social partner, and self-disclosure (Berg, 1987; Butler et al., 2003; Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). Presence of positive emotional expressions and indications of attention signal the listener's receptivity to the communicated information (Pasupathi, Carstensen, Levenson, & Gottman, 1999). If individuals are not responsive to others around them in suitable ways, formation of

emotionally intimate relationships will be unlikely. Suppression leads to distraction and lack of responsiveness, which in turn results in a general paucity of expressive behaviors (Gross, 1999; Butler et al., 2003), and consequently ineffective social interaction. Disclosure of emotional information is known to enhance intimacy and the prospect of future development in a relationship (Prager, 2000). In contrast, frequent use of suppression is associated with reduced availability of social support and positive relations with others (Gross, 2002; Gross, Richards, & John, in press). This finding should not come as a surprise given that individuals who score high in suppression report having poorer memory for the content of the discourse and events in which they had to regulate their emotions (Richards & Gross, 2000).

Given the undesirable consequences of suppression, why do we even engage in emotional suppression? The answer is intuitive: in interpersonal settings suppression is often done intending to promote social interactions. When individuals find their emotional reactions inappropriate or if they are concerned about the possibility of rejection, they may resort to emotional suppression (John & Gross, 2004). However, suppression may not always serve this purpose. Individuals who suppress their emotional responses on a regular basis may have a lurking feeling that they are not being truthful and genuine with themselves and others, leaving them with a chronic feeling of discontentment with themselves and their social partners. Their social companions may also sense some lack of genuineness, which could make them less interested in engaging the habitual suppressors (John & Gross, 2004). In one study, the social partners of habitual suppressors were able to identify behavioral suppression and ranked the individual in terms of social desirability at a lower level,

perhaps because they did not know whether they could trust the visible behavior of the suppressor (Gross & John, 2003). Another drawback of suppression emanates from its cognitive costs, which in turn result in a decreased ability to process relevant information in social settings. Consequently, habitual suppressors are expected to fall back on mental shortcuts such as stereotyping, actor-observer bias, and other types of rather rough and inaccurate inferences in social situations (Richards & Gross, 1999). In summary, habitual use of suppression seems to be associated with poorer social functioning and inadequate social support in both emotional and instrumental arenas (Gross & John, 2002).

*To Express or Not to Express*

Having discussed the detriments of suppression as an emotion regulatory mechanism, it should also be noted that there are times when suppression is either the most effective or the only available emotion regulation option. For instance when a situation evolves too rapidly for cognitive mechanisms to be activated, suppression can neutralize the unwanted emotional behaviors and prevent conflict (Gross & John, 2002; Richards & Gross, 1999). Emotional suppression can curb the expression of emotions such as anger and aggression that if unleashed, usually have undesirable social and interpersonal consequences. In romantic relationships, suppression of destructive emotions such as extreme anger can deescalate the situation so that a more constructive solution to the problem can be found. In fact, reining negative reactions in and responding with positivity is part of the process of accommodation, which is known to enhance the quality of romantic relationships (Butler & Gross, 2004). Lastly, there are other factors in social situations such as social status, cultural norms,

and one's place in the developmental trajectory that may make suppression more desirable or more likely (Carstensen, Gross, & Fung, 1998).

With the information presented on suppression and expression of emotions, is it generally more useful to suppress or to express emotions? Various authorities agree that the benefits of emotional expression are conditional. Clark and Taraban (1991) indicate that the value of emotional expression is contingent upon the nature of the relationship between the expresser and the receiver of emotional expression. Basic behavioral principles would predict that if the partner on the receiving end of emotions demonstrates interest and receptivity, the expresser becomes more likely to disclose more emotions in future. Conversely, if the receiver of emotional expression does not support or appreciate the emotions, the expresser may be discouraged and in time give up emotional expression to the partner.

In regards to emotional expression, interpersonal relationships can be divided into "communal" versus "non-communal." In communal relationships, such as the one that usually exists between family members, close friends, and many romantic partners, individuals consider other people's well being and attempt to meet their needs, sometimes with a sense of obligation (Clark & Mills, 1979). In such a relationship, expression of emotions is necessary because of the informational value of emotions. The involved parties communicate with one another through emotional expression and therefore, expressiveness is necessary and encouraged. Even expression of negative emotions is acceptable in such relationships and does not seem to result in a drastic decline in liking for the expresser (Clark, Fitness, & Brissette, 2004). However, Clark and Taraban (1991) caution that emotional expression is

desired in a communal relationship as long as it is not attacking one's social partner. For instance, if one member of a couple in a communal relationship expresses discontentment about a person outside of the dyad, the emotional expression is appreciated and encouraged by the receiver. If the same emotion targets the receiver of the communication, it may not elicit empathy and support in the same way as the previous example.

In non-communal relationships on the other hand, the welfare of the other party is not a major consideration in the relationship. In "exchange" relationships, such as the one that usually exists between most strangers, business partners, or some romantic relationships, people expect others to reciprocate their favors. The other person's needs do not constitute a priority or concern (Clark & Mills, 1979). It might be argued that romantic relationships are supposed to be communal with partners attending to each other's needs. An example to the contrary would be a new relationship that is high in romanticism but low in commitment and responsibility for the partner. The other example would be individuals who are emotionally disengaged but stay in a loveless marriage for a host of reasons. Therefore, it is entirely possible that not all relationships that are labeled "romantic" are necessarily communal.

In non-communal relationships, expression of emotions is neither desired nor functional (Clark, Fitness, & Brissette, 2004). On the end of the receivers of the emotional information, expressiveness (especially of negative emotions) is not welcome because they do not wish to be responsible for the expressers and their problems. On the expressers' end, disclosure of emotions such as fear and sadness can present them as vulnerable and reveal their weaknesses and therefore is not



desirable. To support this notion, there is evidence to show that people are likely to conceal their emotional reactions, especially negative ones, from strangers and others with whom they do not have a communal relationship. They do not view emotional expression as necessary or appropriate in these cases (Clark, Fitness, & Brissette, 2004). In fact, if one member in a non-communal relationship starts expressing emotions, the other may resist or ignore the emotional expression and may start disliking the expresser (Clark & Taraban, 1991). Thus, at a broad level, one important factor influencing the usefulness of expression is the type of relationship in which one is involved. There are other factors that affect the utility of emotional expression.

Kennedy-Moore and Watson (2001) have a different approach to when and how emotional expression might be helpful. They speculate that expression of negative emotions is useful only if it helps the person identify the source of the distress. They suggest three ways through which emotional expression might relieve stress. The first is acquiring insight into a problem. When people attempt to express emotions they have to sort through vague and veiled internal states and organize them in a coherent fashion to be communicated. This process involves creating a narrative for one's emotions that includes a cause and effect relationship, the milieu where events happened, and classification of instances that will ultimately make sense of the occurrences. As a result, emotions may become more available as a potential source of information to guide actions and thoughts. However, it is necessary to bring the emotional and cognitive processing together for the expression to be helpful as emotional release followed by a new cognitive construal is most likely to be

beneficial. Given the conditions required for expression of emotions to be of any help, it follows that certain forms of emotional expression are either unconstructive or even harmful. For instance, rumination constitutes a form of expression that serves to lengthen and strengthen a negative emotion without necessarily leading to increased insight (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001).

The second mechanism by which emotional expression may benefit the individual is the improvement of interpersonal relationships. Distressed individuals frequently blame themselves for their imagined shortcomings in dealing with problems. If they express their distress, their social partners may attempt to support and validate them and provide them with a frame of reference with regards to their distress. Furthermore, if the source of a negative emotion is in other people (such as a romantic partner) with whom the individual interacts, emotional expression may signal them to stop or modify their behavior. As a cautionary note, it should be mentioned that there are exceptions to this rule. For instance, if the expresser communicates distress to a person who does not care, the expression may be received with indifference, avoidance, rejection, or criticism, in which case the interpersonal relationship will not improve. In addition, if the negative emotions the expresser is communicating are targeting the listener, the recipient may react in self-defense rather than providing emotional support and validation (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001), which may not strengthen the relationship.

The third mechanism of action by which expression of emotions might be valuable is by decreasing distress about having the negative feelings. Severely distressed individuals may be afraid of the intensity of their own emotional states and

think they may break down under the heavy burden. Active and selective expression of emotions may help these individuals gain control of their emotions and make them realize their distress is unpleasant but tolerable (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001).

Last but not least, it has been shown that expression of negative emotions could be an entirely different ballgame than positive emotions (Strzyzewski Aune et al., 2001). Previous research indicates for a romantic relationship to be perceived as fulfilling, the expression of positivity needs to be five times or more than the expression of negativity (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Expression of negative emotions is needed for communicational purposes and will not influence relationship quality if it is kept to a minimum and if it is accompanied by a great deal of positivity. Further expression of negativity is correlated with lower relationship satisfaction (Gottman & Levenson, 1992).

In summary, emotional expression does not by default benefit the individual. Benefits of expression depend on the following factors: 1) *Situational appropriateness of expression vs. suppression*: Emotional suppression can be beneficial if it is used sparingly and in the service of the relationships but can be detrimental when used indiscriminately and on a habitual basis. 2) *The type of relationship between the expresser and the receiver of emotional expression*: Communal relationships thrive on emotional expressivity, whereas non-communal relations are not an appropriate stage for emotional manifestations. 3) *The learning that occurs as a result of emotional expression (or lack thereof)*: This learning could include a new understanding of a problem, oneself, or one's partner. 4) *Probability of improving the interpersonal relationship*: If the receiving end of emotions accepts

and values emotional expression, the violated relationship expectancies can be restored but if the receiver is invalidating, emotional expression may not be beneficial. 5) *Distress relief*: Selective expression of negative emotions can alleviate distress. However, if expression assumes a ruminative quality, it may not be helpful. 6) *The ratio of positive to negative expressed emotions*: Even though the expression of negative emotions may be a necessity in romantic relationship, it can damage the quality of the relationship. If negative expressivity is not supplemented with positivity, emotional expression can harm the relationship.

#### Emotional Expression as a Predictor of Relationship Satisfaction

Research agrees with common knowledge on the importance of emotions in romantic relationships. People regularly describe their significant relationships in affective terms (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001). Honeycutt and Cantrill (2001) go as far as claiming that nonverbal affectivity is what distinguishes happy and unhappy couples from one another. Weiss (1984) suggests that the general affective stance of people towards their spouse shapes the interpretation of the spouse's demeanor. In a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies on marriage, Karney and Bradbury (1995) found the experience and expression of negative emotions to be the most significant variable affecting marital outcomes. Kurdek (1999) adds that lack of emotional expressivity is among the predictors of low relationship satisfaction.

Given the demonstrated importance of emotional expressivity in relationship satisfaction, it is paramount that we better understand the *mechanisms* by which emotional expressivity influences relationship satisfaction. Below, I review different conceptualizations of romantic relationships that have the theme of affective

experience and expression in common. The two approaches to relationships that are relevant here are “intimacy” and “conflict resolution” in relationships.

Intimacy, an important element of romantic relationships, is described as closeness, affection, self-disclosure, interpersonal engagement (Berscheid & Reis, 1998), and emotions towards the partner (Downey, 2001). Reis (1990) posits that intimacy starts with self-disclosure of one member of a dyad and continues with appropriate responding of the other member. Disclosure of emotions is more closely related to liking and intimacy than revealing factual information about oneself (Morton, 1978). It has also been shown that with self-disclosure, marital satisfaction increased especially for the recipient of information (Hendrick, 1981; Gottman & Levenson, 1988).

The conflict resolution perspective assumes the inevitability of discord in relationships and thus explores how people resolve them. Partners in romantic relationships are bound to have personal and cultural differences and to face conflict situations (Cramer, 2000; Gottman & Silver, 1999). In fact, some theorists state that conflict is a given in relationships that are moving toward closeness. They add that the partners’ approach to the conflict and the nature and tone of their affective give and take determines the fate of the relationship (Berscheid & Ammazalorso, 2004). In other words, the quality of a romantic relationship depends to a large extent on the experience, expression and exchange of positive versus negative emotion in the course of a conflict (Carrère & Gottman, 1999; Gottman & Levenson, 1999). In a longitudinal study Gottman and Carrère (1990) were able to predict the possibility of divorce in newlywed couples by measuring various aspects of couples’ emotional

responses during a baseline conversation and during conflict resolution. Experience and display of high levels of negative in proportion to positive emotions during conflict was found to be associated with higher divorce rates in future. Compared to conflicts that included positivity, conflicts that started with significant amounts of negative emotion were more likely to prove unproductive in the short-term and to lead to emotional disengagement and possibly divorce in the long-term (Gottman & Carrère, 1990). Swann, Rentfrow, and Gosling (2003) found further evidence for this proposition and demonstrated that the display of negativity (such as criticism) can significantly undermine the quality of a relationship, especially when a vocal female partner unleashes her disapproval to a reserved male partner.

When the role of emotional exchange in a *conflict* situation and its impact on the fate of a relationship were known, Gottman and Levenson (1999) pointed to the significance of emotional interactions in *everyday* couple relations. They found that run-of-the-mill conversations about daily events can set the stage for a couple to engage in constructive or destructive conflict resolution attempts. The emotional tone of events of the daily conversations primed the participant couples to demonstrate primarily positive or negative affect in conflict resolution. Emotional interchange between partners in a romantic relationship may thus decide the fate of a relationship in the long run. At this point, I will switch the discussion to the extent and significance of the differences between people in emotionality.

### Individual Differences in Emotion Regulation

Individuals are quite different in emotionality and emotion regulation. In a recent study, Gross, Richards, and John (in press) found that their participants

reported between zero to 100 instances of emotion regulation per week. It is therefore easy to see that individuals vary tremendously in emotion regulation. Emotional concepts are so important to us that in everyday conversations, we frequently distinguish people from one another in terms of emotionality and emotion regulation: “My brother has a short fuse,” “Her boss was a hothead,” and “She is cool as a cucumber” (Lakoff, 1990). Temperament research demonstrates that there are differences in the biological makeup of emotions in people (John & Gross, 2004). Hence, folk theories and science agree that emotions and emotion regulation constitute important dimensions of personality and individual differences (Richards & Gross, 2000). There are similarities and differences in how often people experience certain emotions as well as emotion regulatory processes they employ (Gross & John, 2002).

An important source of variability in expression of emotions is the person’s attachment style. Romantic relationships can be viewed as the perfect place for the emergence of attachment styles developed earlier in life (Bowlby, 1980, Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Attachment style is important in deciding whether to express or suppress one’s emotional states. Expression of emotions to others happens with the intent of communicating one’s needs. Individuals with secure attachment view others (especially close others) as responsive to their needs and therefore are more likely to express emotions. In contrast, people with an avoidant style do not see much need or benefit in emotional expression as their conception of others is primarily unhelpful and unresponsive to their needs (Clark, Fitness, & Brissette, 2004). Indeed, habitual users of emotional suppression have more avoidant attachment styles (John & Gross,

2004). Feeney (1999) proposes that individual differences in attachment style come into play especially when people face negative emotions. In the context of romantic relationships, individuals with insecure attachment styles have been shown to experience negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and anxiety more frequently and have more difficulty regulating and expressing those emotions. On the other hand, secure attachment is associated with the experience of more partner-related positive emotions, fewer negative emotions, and more general relationship satisfaction (Feeney, 1999).

Gross (1999) takes a different stance on individual differences in emotion regulation. He states that these differences lie in one or more of the following areas: (1) goals or the purpose of emotion regulation (for instance individuals who subscribe to a culture that sets emotional reticence as a goal will differ from the followers of a cultural tradition of free emotional expression), (2) methods of emotion regulation, and (3) emotion regulation ability (people have varying degrees of success to regulate emotions). According to Eisenberg and Fabes (1992), the variation in the regulation of different elements of an emotion constitutes an important source of individual difference in emotion regulation. Other research confirms the existence of significant personal differences between individuals in emotion regulation (Fitness & Fletcher, 1993). Regardless of the source of interindividual differences in emotionality, it is essential to know that these differences produce different personal and interpersonal outcomes.



### Transitional Summary

A summary of the important points will provide a segue to the rationale of the study: 1) romantic relationships play a crucial role in people's physical and psychological well-being, 2) members of a couple are highly dependent on each other and therefore, are able to violate the other person's relationship expectancies, 3) by virtue of personal idiosyncrasies and cultural differences, members of a romantic dyad are bound to violate their partners' expectancies and consequently create emotions, 4) there are remarkable differences in experience, expression, and regulation of emotions between individuals, 5) the individual differences in emotionality are likely to produce different outcomes in romantic relationships, and 6) the differences in one's level of communal orientation to the relationship may be associated with fundamental differences in expression of emotions to and acceptance of emotions from the partner.

### Rationale of the Current Proposal

The key points in transitional summary lead to the assumptions of the current proposal: 1) romantic relationships are the home of many positive and negative emotions (Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2004), 2) emotional expression is a necessity for romantic relationships because of its role in communication (Guerrero & Andersen, 2000), and 3) individuals vary in how they regulate their emotional responses with different results at the individual and interpersonal level (Gross & John, 2003). The logical conclusion would be that depending on how individuals experience and express their emotions, the quality of their relationships should be different.

Interestingly, a previous study did not find a significant correlation between the net amount of emotional expressivity and relationship satisfaction (Fardis & Waltz, 2004). In an attempt to explain the lack of support for this hypothesis and based on the information presented earlier in this paper, it is suggested that the relation between emotional expressiveness and relationship satisfaction is more complex than a direct correlation and is affected by factors such as 1) relationship type (high or low in communal orientation), 2) the preponderance of positive or negative affect, 3) whether an explanation is provided for negative emotions, 4) whether the romantic partner is accepting and encouraging of emotional expression, and 5) whether emotional suppression is habitual or selective. To the best of the writer's knowledge, all of these factors have not been studied in a comprehensive fashion within a dyadic relationship. Past studies have manipulated the regulation of emotions whose source was outside of the dyadic relationship. Furthermore, in previous studies of emotion regulation in interpersonal relationships, the members of the dyad were not involved in an ongoing, long-term relationship (Butler et al., 2003). This study will attempt to investigate the interpersonal consequences when emotions are generated within a dyadic relationship and are personally relevant.

Interaction of Emotion Valence and Communal Orientation of a Relationship:

### Transition to Hypotheses

This section will provide an overview of the expected findings in this study. It should be noted that the variables in this study such as communal orientation of a relationship, expression of positivity and negativity, or partner's receptivity to emotional expression occur and are measured on a dimensional basis. The following

sections at times use a categorical terminology (e.g. expression vs. suppression or communal vs. non-communal) solely for ease of explication.

The main theoretical point of this section is how the level of communal orientation of a relationship can determine the consequences of expressivity for relationship satisfaction. This proposal focuses primarily on the expression of negative emotions since the expression of positive emotions is generally linked to increased satisfaction regardless of relationship type. I expect that the expression of negative affect is more detrimental to relationship satisfaction in low communal than high communal relationships. Below, I outline the hypothesized nature of the expression-satisfaction relation in both high and low communal orientations.

Low Communal Orientation: Expression of positive emotions in a non-communal relationship is not necessary for the survival of the relationship but will add a pleasant flavor to the interactions. As a result, the expression of positive emotions will produce satisfaction with the relationship. On the other hand, expression of negativity is unnecessary in a non-communal relationship and will probably lead to low relationship satisfaction. Negative emotionality in such relationships is unwelcome for the receiver, who does not see the need for it, and invalidating for the expresser, who will not elicit an empathetic response.

It follows from this that suppression of negative emotions is a necessity for maintaining a non-communal relationship because the receiver of such emotions cannot be bothered with the plight of the expresser. Therefore, suppression of such negative emotions will actually increase the satisfaction with a non-communal relationship.

High Communal Orientation: In relationships high in communality, expression of positive emotions can create bonding and intimacy and will be associated with increased relationship satisfaction in almost any circumstance. The expression of negative emotions, however, is not as unilaterally straightforward. On the whole, the expression of negative emotions is generally a healthy part of a normal communal relationship; thus I expect that, unlike in non-communal relations, this expression will sometimes lead to more relationship satisfaction, creating the proposed *level of communality X negative emotional expressivity* interaction.

However, I do not expect *all* expression of negative emotions in communal relationships to lead to more relationship satisfaction. I propose that in communal relationships, the influence of negative emotional expression on relationship satisfaction is shaped by two factors: 1) whether or not positive emotions are expressed alongside of negative emotions, 2) whether a cogent explanation is offered for the negative emotions. In particular, to the degree that negative emotions are explained well and positive emotions are simultaneously expressed, relationship satisfaction will be higher in the presence of negative emotional expression. Thus, negative emotional expression will increase relationship satisfaction the more these two factors are present, and decrease satisfaction the more that they are absent. In other words, within communal relationships, each of these two factors will interact with negative emotional expression to predict relationship satisfaction.

What about active attempts at emotional suppression in communal relationships? I would like to reiterate that suppression of negative emotions is expected to be associated with higher relationship satisfaction in non-communal

relationships, but not for communal relationships. There is a distinct factor relevant to emotional suppression in communal relationships: The degree to which an individual uses suppression on a *habitual* or *situational* basis. In particular, emotional suppression in such relationships that is habitual, i.e. occurring most of the time, will lead to less relationship satisfaction. In case of habitual suppression of emotions, violated relationship expectancies cannot be restored and no less importantly, the individual and the partner will both sense the inauthenticity stemming from suppression. As a result, formation of intimacy will be jeopardized and so will the quality of the relationship. However, emotional suppression in communal relationships that is strategically situational– that is, judicious, to accommodate the partner, and *some* of the time– will lead to more relationship satisfaction. In such cases, conflict can be avoided and the expectancies can be addressed at a later time. Therefore, relationship satisfaction will be high.

#### Primary Hypotheses

The processes outlined above lead to specific hypotheses for the present study.

Hypothesis I: Expression of Positive Emotions: Positive emotional expression is associated with high relationship satisfaction in both communal and non-communal relationships.

Hypothesis Set II: Expression of Negative Emotions: The influence of negative emotional expression on relationship satisfaction depends on the extent of communal orientation of the relationship. In particular:

(1) *An interaction is expected between the communal orientation of the relationship and level of expressed negativity on relationship satisfaction. At lower*

levels of communal orientation, the correlation between negative expressivity and satisfaction will be more negative than this same correlation at higher levels of communal orientation. The logic of this interaction is as follows: For non-communal relationships, negative emotional expression is unilaterally bad (in terms of relationship satisfaction). However, for communal relationships, it is sometimes good; therefore, the slope of the negative emotional expression-satisfaction effect will be more positive for communal than non-communal orientations.

(2) *An interaction is expected between negative expressivity and two other variables on relationship satisfaction in communal relationships:* Although I expect negative emotional expression to have a more desirable effect on communal relationships at a general level, I do not anticipate that negative expression is *always* good for a communal relationship. More specific hypotheses thus expound exactly under what circumstances negative emotional expression helps or hurts communal relationships. In particular, this correlation between negative emotional expression and relationship satisfaction in communal relationships will be affected by the following variables.

(2a) *Expression of Positive Emotions:* In relationships high in communal orientation, there will be an interaction between expression of negative emotions and expression of positive emotions on relationship satisfaction. That is, to the degree that positive emotions accompany the negative expression, relationship satisfaction will be higher and to the degree that positivity does not accompany the negative expression, relationship satisfaction will be lower. Thus, for communal relationships,

the expression and positive emotions and the expression of negative emotions should interact to affect the relationship satisfaction.

(2b) *Explication of Negative Emotional Expression*: In a communal relationship, if the expression of negative emotions is accompanied by explanations for negativity, the relationship satisfaction will be higher than when no such explanations are given. Thus, for communal relationships, the expression of negative emotions and explanations for those emotions should interact to affect relationship satisfaction.

Hypothesis III: Habitual Suppression of Negative Emotions: *An interaction is expected between the level of communal approach to the relationship and the level of habitual suppression of negative emotions.* The effects of suppression of negative emotions on relationship satisfaction depend on the extent of communal orientation of the relationship. When the communal orientation is low, habitual suppression of negative emotions will be associated with high relationship satisfaction. However, when the communal orientation is high, habitual suppression of negative emotions will lead to lower relationship satisfaction. It is important to note that emotional suppression can also be selective and situational. In communal relationships, strategically situational suppression of negative emotions is helpful and will be associated with higher relationship quality.

#### Exploratory Hypotheses

Although not the primary focus of this proposal, I will also address in an exploratory fashion what factors lead to more or less emotional expression in the first place. This will shed light on the mechanisms leading to emotional expression or

suppression and elucidate the lawful nature of emotional expressivity. I propose that whether the emotions are expressed or not depends on three variables:

(1) *Attachment Style*: People with more secure attachment styles are more likely to express emotions than the ones with more avoidant attachment styles.

(2) *Partner's Receptiveness to Emotional Expression*: If the romantic partners are open to and accepting of emotional expression, the individuals will be more likely to communicate their affective states.

(3) *The Communal Orientation of the Relationship*: The relationships on the communal end of the spectrum call for emotional expressivity whereas non-communal relationships do not. Although variability is expected in that persons in communal relationships recognize this, it is expected that on average individuals who have a higher communal orientation to their relationship will also be more emotionally expressive to their partners. Such emotional expression is generally more functional in communal than non-communal relationships.

## Method

### *Participants*

One hundred twenty participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology courses offered at The University of Montana during the spring semester and the two summer sessions of 2006 academic year. Individuals recruited for this study were required to be in a self-identified exclusive romantic relationship. Certain inclusionary criteria were put in place to minimize contamination of data by extraneous variables and also to abide by the rules of the university Internal Review Board: (1) The minimum length of relationship was set at 3 months because it is



known that during the initiating and experimenting stages of a romantic relationship, most people engage in self-presentation and express mainly positive emotions to their partners (Strzyzewski Aune, Aune, & Buller, 2001). (2) The romantic relationship needed to be ongoing at the time of the study in order to minimize the memory biases that might have existed in recalling an old relationship. (3) Participants had to be 18 or older to be able to take part in the study. (4) There were no limitations on the type of the relationship; that is, marital, non-marital, same and other sex relationships were included. The questionnaires that did not meet one or more of these criteria were discarded, reducing the total number of valid profiles to 85.

The participants in the spring semester earned experimental credits for the Introductory Psychology course and the ones in the summer semesters were awarded extra credits for their respective psychology classes. The average length of time to complete the study was about 15 minutes.

### *Measures*

Adult Attachment Scale (AAS). The construct of adult attachment is based on the attachment and internal working models of infancy (Collins & Read, 1990). Hazan and Shaver (1987) devised the trichotomous adult attachment model as it pertains to romantic relationships, which was later used by Collins and Read (1990) to develop the Adult Attachment Scale. This scale was developed to fill in the gaps that a trichotomous model would create. For instance, in Hazan and Shaver's (1987) Attachment Style Model, the respondent is forced to choose between three narratives, which may or may not entirely fit the individual. In contrast, the AAS operates on a

dimensional approach that provides more accuracy and is easily convertible to Hazan and Shaver's categorical approach.

In developing the AAS, Collins and Read (1990) converted the personal descriptions of the original measure to statements with which the individual would agree or disagree on a Likert scale. The final version of AAS has 18 items and loads on three factors of dependency (Depend), anxiety (Anxiety), and closeness (Close). In response to each statement, the individual can choose between 1= not at all characteristic to 5=very characteristic. This measure has satisfactory internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .75, .72, and .69 respectively for Depend, Anxiety, and Close factors. The means and standard deviations for each composite are: Depend: Mean= 18.3, SD= 4.7, Anxiety: Mean= 16.2, SD= 5.1, and Close: Mean= 21.2, SD= 4.8. The stability of scores over a two-month period is good with test-retest reliability of .68, .71, and .52 for Close, Depend, and Anxiety. Please refer to Appendix A for a complete version of this questionnaire.

Emotional Expressiveness (Modified Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire).

For this study, the questions from the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire were minimally modified and adapted to a relational context. Gross and John (1995) developed the BEQ to measure inter-individual differences in experience and expression of emotions. The BEQ has 16 items with which the individual agrees or disagrees on a 7-point Likert scale. The BEQ yields a total score in addition to 3 subscales for Impulse Strength, Positive Expressivity, and Negative Expressivity. The Total scale has an internal consistency of .82 to .86 and the three subscales have had internal consistencies ranging between .65 to .80. The test-retest reliability of the

BEQ is .86. BEQ scores correlate well with self-described and partner-reported emotional expressiveness as well as the direct observation of the expressivity in laboratory settings (Gross & John 1995; Gross & John, 1997). Please refer to Appendix B for a complete version of this questionnaire.

Communal Strength Measure (CSM). This measure was devised by Mills, Clark, Ford, and Johnson (2004) to assess the degree of communal orientation to a specific relationship. The CSM quantifies the communal strength by drawing on three basic constructs that define the communal nature of relationships: 1) the costs a person is willing to accept to benefit the partner, 2) the degree of discomfort the person would experience if the partner's needs were neglected, and 3) the strength of the communal orientation. In a series of 6 studies, Mills et al. (2004) demonstrated that this measure has satisfactory reliability and validity with an alpha coefficient of .85 to .94 (depending on the gender and type of relationship). The construct measured by the CSM is distinct from behavioral interdependence and liking. The CSM can be used for different kinds of relationships with varying degrees of communality as well as one-sided or mutual communal relationships (Mills et al., 2004). This measure can predict helping behavior towards and willingness to accept help from the partner as well as self-disclosure and expression of emotions (Mills et al., 2004). There are 10 items on this questionnaire with answers on a Likert scale from 0= not at all to 10=extremely. Please refer to Appendix D for a complete version of this questionnaire.

Habitual Emotional Suppression. The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire was developed by Gross and John (2003) in an attempt to measure individual differences

in the habitual use of two emotion regulation strategies of suppression versus positive reappraisal. This questionnaire is a valid measure for both positive and negative emotions and has also been found valid for various minority groups and for both genders. Gross and John (2003) reported an alpha-reliability of .70 for Reappraisal and .73 for Suppression on this measure and a test-retest reliability of .69 in the span of 3 months. This measure has moderate association with other personality constructs such as the Big Five, suggesting a relationship between the concepts of Suppression and Reappraisal and broader concepts of personality. However, the size of this relationship is not such to imply that ERQ measures the same constructs as personality tests (Gross & John, 2003). Furthermore, participants are unlikely to score highly on both suppression and reappraisal, providing evidence for relative independence of these two constructs. The questionnaire has 10 rationally developed items on a Likert scale of 1 to 7, four of which tap into suppression and six into reappraisal. The mean suppression and reappraisal scores are calculated by averaging the responses from questions corresponding to suppression and reappraisal consecutively.

For this study, only the four questions pertaining to the habitual use of suppression (questions 2, 4, 6, and 9) will be used. These questions were slightly modified and adapted to a relational context. The modified suppression questions are:

- 1) I keep my emotions to myself.
- 2) When I'm feeling positive emotions with ---- (partner's name), I am careful not to express them.

- 3) I control my emotions by not expressing them to----.
- 4) When I'm feeling negative emotions with ----, I make sure not to express them.

For a complete version of the ERQ, please refer to Appendix E.

Habitual Emotional Suppression. The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire is a measure of general suppression and does not distinguish directly between situational and habitual emotional suppression. For this study, ten questions were rationally developed that inquire about the situational (and strategic) or habitual (and indiscriminate) use of emotional suppression. The intent of these items is to see if the respondents tactfully use emotional suppression to accommodate the partner and in the service of the relationship or they use emotions suppression in a chronic, non-strategic way. These questions yield 1) a Habitual Suppression of Positive Emotions, and 2) a Habitual Suppression of Negative Emotions. The questions are:

- 1) With ----(partner's name), I carefully select when to keep my *positive* emotions to myself and when to express them (reverse scored).
- 2) With ----, I carefully select when to keep my *negative* emotions to myself and when to express them (reverse scored).
- 3) If I want to express my *positive* emotions to ----, I think about whether it'll be helpful or not (reverse scored).
- 4) If I want to express my *negative* emotions to ----, I think about whether it'll be helpful or not (reverse scored).
- 5) I sometimes don't express my *positive* emotions to ---- because the situation doesn't call for it (reverse scored).

- 6) I sometimes don't express my *negative* emotions to ---- because the situation doesn't call for it (reverse scored).
- 7) I never show my *positive* emotions to ----, whatever they are.
- 8) I never show my *negative* emotions to ----, whatever they are.
- 9) I have to deal with my *positive* emotions on my own, without displaying them to --  
--.
- 10) I have to deal with my *negative* emotions on my own, without displaying them to ----.

To make the best use of the data, a Composite Suppression Index was created that combines the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire Suppression and the above 10 items and served as the general indication of the respondents' tendencies to suppress their emotional responses in a chronic manner.

Explanation of Emotional Expression. Five questions were developed that ask the respondents whether they attempt to construct a meaningful narrative of negative emotional experiences at the time of emotional expression. These questions are:

- 1) When I express my negative emotions to ----(partner's name), I try and explain the reasons for my emotions.
- 2) I make sure ---understands why I'm expressing negative emotions to him/ her.
- 3) If I'm upset with ----, I'd like him/her to know why.
- 4) I don't think it's necessary to go into any detail with ---- if I'm feeling bad (reverse scored).
- 5) I really don't see the need for ---- to know why I have negative feelings of any sort (reverse scored).

Partner's Receptivity to Expression. To include the dyadic factors that affect emotional expression, five questions were developed that ask about the partner's receptivity to emotional disclosure. These questions are:

- 1) I feel like ----(partner's name) is open to my emotional expression.
- 2) If I express my emotions to ----, I know he/ she will not mock me or use my expressiveness against me.
- 3) I don't express my emotions to ----because I'm not sure how he/she will take it (reverse scored).
- 4) I feel comfortable to tell ---- how I'm feeling, whatever it might be.
- 5) ---- doesn't react favorably when I disclose my emotions, so I tend not to do it much (reverse scored).

Combined Emotional Expressivity Questionnaire (CEEQ). To include all of the items related to emotion regulation in one questionnaire, the above-mentioned emotion-related questions are consolidated in one packet named Combined Emotional Expressivity Questionnaire. This packet covers the following areas of interest: 1) general emotional expressivity, 2) negative expressivity, 3) positive expressivity, 4) habitual vs. strategic and situational use of emotional suppression in the relationship, 5) whether the respondents explain and elucidate their negative emotional expressions to the partner, and 6) whether the partner is receptive and encouraging of emotional expression. Please refer to Appendix C for a complete version of this questionnaire.

Relationship Satisfaction Measure: Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). Hendrick (1988) modified the Marital Assessment Questionnaire to create the Relationship Assessment Scale, a generic measure of relationship satisfaction

applicable to both marital and non-marital relationships. RAS correlates well with self-disclosure, commitment, investment in the relationship, dyadic satisfaction, cohesion, and consensus, as well as certain types of love such as Eros. RAS correlated at .80 in one study and at .88 in another with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, a psychometrically sound measure of various relationship dimensions (Hendrick, 1988; Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998). RAS has been found to correlate with the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale at .64 for men and .74 for women. It has been successfully used for clinical and non-clinical samples and for different ethnic and cultural groups. The test-retest reliability of RAS has been found to be .85 (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998). The RAS has 7 items and the responses range from 1 to 5 on a Likert scale. Lower scores indicate lower satisfaction and possible relationship problems (Hendrick, 1988). RAS scores over 4.0 denote lack of distress and scores of 3.0-3.5 for women and 3.5 for men could be a sign of low satisfaction and distress (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998). Please refer to Appendix F for a complete version of this questionnaire.

### *Procedures*

During the spring 2006 semester, this study utilized the normal Psychology 100 participant recruitment channels. That is, sign-up sheets were posted in the lobby of the second floor of The University of Montana Skaggs Building where interested individuals specified their participation time and date. In the summer 2006 semesters, the principal investigator attended various classes, presented the study, and passed out sign-up sheets for the interested participants. The location of the study was room 303 in Skaggs Building. The participants first received a brief verbal introduction to the



study, signed the informed consent form (Appendix G), and then proceeded to complete the study questionnaires. At the end of the session, study participants were given a debriefing form (Appendix H), and their experimental credit form was signed and stamped. The contact information of the principal investigator was made available to all participants in the debriefing forms in case of any questions or concerns about the study.

*Power Analysis*

In the preliminary analyses, it was found that in multiple regression equations, for two predictors and their interaction term an estimated effect size of .15, a sample size of 18 would generate the power of .80. However, the correlation equations proved to be different in that a presumed effect size of .20 for one dependent and one independent variable would require a sample size of 190 to produce the power of .80. Initially, it was decided that the larger sample size be used in order to have enough power to reject the null hypothesis for both the correlation and multiple regression equation analyses. However, after analyzing the data from the collected 85 profiles, it became clear that Hypothesis I that relies on correlation was significant with the existing sample size. Two out of three exploratory hypotheses, which also relied on correlation proved to be significant as well. Considering that Hypotheses II and III relied on multiple regression, for which a sample size of 18 was sufficient, it was concluded that collecting more data would not add to the significance of the study hypotheses. Most of the correlations had already been found to be significant and multiple regressions would most likely not improve by collecting more data.

To further explore the need for collecting more data, a series of *observed power* analyses were performed that indicated that the power was adequate for all hypotheses (Soper, 2007). In these analyses, the objective was to see whether collecting more data could contribute the statistical significance of the hypotheses that were found not significant. Table 1 illustrates the findings:

Table 1

*Observed Power for Each Hypothesis*

	Hypothesis	Statistical Significance	Power
I	(correlation)	.000	
II (1)	(multiple regression)	Model Significant Interaction Not Significant	.98
II (2a)	(multiple regression)	Model Significant Interactions Not Significant	1.00
II (2b)	(multiple regression)	Model Significant Interactions Not Significant	1.00
III	(multiple regression)	Model Significant Interaction Not Significant	.88
Exploratory	(correlation)		
1		not significant	
2		.03	
3		.000	

As suggested by this table, it appears that the existing amount of data is adequate to make conclusions about the study findings. In other words, even though the principal hypotheses of this study did not have significance for their interaction terms, they all had statistical power greater than .80 and thus, collecting more data would not change the outcome.

### Results

Consistent with the registration rates for psychology courses at The University of Montana the majority of participants in this study were females. The racial distribution of the participants was also comparable to that of The University of Montana with a predominant majority of Caucasians. The summary of the demographic data is presented in Table 2 and the questionnaire items inquiring about demographics can be found in Appendix I.

Table 2

*Demographics of the Sample*

<b>Gender</b>					
Male			Female		
37.6%			62.4%		
<b>Ethnoracial Background</b>					
Caucasian	Hispanic	Native American	Asian	African American	Other
94.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%
<b>Relationship Status</b>					
Dating		Living Together		Married	
60%		21.2%		18.8%	
<b>Age in Years</b>					
Range 18-44		Mean 22.14		Median 20	
SD 4.96					
<b>Length of Relationship in Months</b>					
Range 4-360		Mean 35.36		Median 13	
SD 55.95					
<b>Year in School</b>					
1	2	3	4	5 or more	
38.8%	17.6%	16.5%	12.9%	14.1%	
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>					
Heterosexual			Homosexual		
95.2%			4.8%		

The distribution of most study measures was normal except for age that was skewed to the left due to the heavy presence of younger participants, Explanation of Negative skewed to the right, indicating a general tendency for participants to attempt to explain their negative expressivity, and ERQ Suppression skewed to the left, suggesting that the respondents were more likely to express than suppress their

emotions. In general, the collected data does not display any abnormalities or unexpected qualities. A summary of the important dimensions of the data is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics of the Sample*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire	85	3.42	6.11	4.9781	.63274
Relationship Assessment Scale	85	2.14	5.00	4.0639	.70625
Communal Strength Measure	85	4.60	10.00	8.1454	.97895
Explanation of Negative Emotion	85	2.80	7.00	5.8776	.93915
Habitual Suppression of Positive Emotion	85	1.20	5.40	3.4612	.84798
Habitual Suppression of Negative Emotion	85	1.40	5.00	2.9929	.87801
Composite Suppression Index	85	1.71	5.14	2.9597	.59153
Partner's Receptivity to Emotion	85	2.80	7.00	5.5247	1.19203
AAS Secure	85	2.00	5.00	3.3961	.64395
AAS Avoidant	85	1.00	5.00	2.6196	.74296
AAS Anxious Ambivalent	85	1.17	4.17	2.3353	.62546

Hypothesis I stated that positive expression is correlated with relationship satisfaction. To test this hypothesis, relationship quality was measured by Relationship Assessment Scale and the expression of positive emotions was calculated using the Modified Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire. Recall that the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire yields a general expressivity score, Positive Expressivity, Negative Expressivity dimensions as well as Impulse Strength. Both Positive Expressivity and relationship satisfaction obtained from the Relationship Assessment Scale are continuous variables. A Pearson correlation equation was used to determine the relationship between these variables. They were found to correlate to each other in a positive and linear manner. Table 4 summarizes the findings.

Table 4

*Correlation between BEQ Positive Expressivity and Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)*

		BEQ Positive Expressivity	RAS
BEQ Positive Expressivity	Pearson Correlation	1	.444(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	85	85
RAS	Pearson Correlation	.444(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	85	85

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

For the visual inspection of the results, a scatterplot was generated as well (Figure 1).

Hypothesis II (1) predicted an interaction between the respondent's communal orientation level and negative expressivity on relationship satisfaction. The measures used to test this hypothesis were the Communal Strength Measurement, the Negative Expressivity score of the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire, and Relationship Satisfaction Scale. To test this hypothesis, 1) the three scales were converted to  $z$  scores, 2) a Communal Strength Measure X Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Negative interaction term was computed by multiplying their respective  $z$  scores, and 3) Communal Strength Measure, Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Negative, and the Communal Strength Measure X Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Negative interaction term was entered into a simultaneous regression analysis to predict relationship satisfaction.

It was originally expected that at low levels of Communal Strength Measure, negative expressivity would predict lower Relationship Assessment Scale scores whereas at higher levels of Communal Strength Measure, negative expressivity would be predictive of higher Relationship Assessment Scale scores. However, the study findings indicate that even though the model as a whole is significant, the predicted interaction does not have statistical significance. In other words, Communal Strength Measure and Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Negative Expression were both positively correlated with and had predictive value in Relationship Assessment Scale but their interaction did not. The results of the analyses corresponding to this hypothesis are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*RAS Predicted by BEQ Negative Expression, Communal Strength Measure, and Their Interaction*

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.435(a)	.189	.159	.91715972

a Predictors: (Constant), CSM-BEQ Interaction, Zscore: BEQ Negative Expressivity, Zscore (CSM)

ANOVA(b)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.864	3	5.288	6.286	.001(a)
	Residual	68.136	81	.841		
	Total	84.000	84			

a Predictors: (Constant), CSM-BEQ Neg Expression Interaction, Zscore: BEQ Negative Expressivity, Zscore (CSM)

b Dependent Variable: Zscore (RAS)



		Coefficients(a)				
Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.001	.100		.010	.992
	Zscore	.311	.108	.311	2.879	.005
	(CSM)					
	Zscore:	.265	.101	.265	2.621	.010
	BEQ					
	Negative					
	Expressivity					
	CSM-BEQ	-.008	.089	-.010	-.095	.925
	Neg					
	Interaction					

a Dependent Variable: Zscore (RAS)

Hypothesis II (2a) postulated that in communal relationships, an interaction between negative expressivity and positive expressivity is expected on relationship satisfaction. If positive emotions are expressed concurrently with negative emotions, relationship satisfaction would be higher than when positive emotions are not expressed. In other words, the slope of the correlation between negative emotionality and relationship satisfaction would change from negative to positive as the expression of positive emotions increase. Negative and positive expressivity were both drawn from the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire and are called Negative Expressivity and Positive Expressivity respectively. Communal orientation of the relationship was assessed by the Communal Strength Measure and relationship satisfaction by

Relationship Assessment Scale. To test this hypothesis, 1) the Communal Strength Measure, Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Positive, Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Negative, and Relationship Assessment Scale scales were converted to  $z$  scores, 2) the Communal Strength Measure, Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Negative, Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Positive, all two-way interaction terms, and the Communal Strength Measure X Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Negative X Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Positive interaction term were computed and entered into a regression analysis to predict the Relationship Assessment Scale.

The results were expected to indicate that if negative emotions are expressed alongside of positive emotions, relationship satisfaction would be higher, while the expression of negative emotions without positive emotions predicts lower relationship satisfaction. This effect was expected to only occur for those higher in communal orientation; at the lower ends of the communal orientation scale, no Positive X Negative expression interaction was anticipated. The actual findings were that the model as a whole was statistically significant but none of the predicted interactions materialized. The significance of the model was due to the predictive validity of Communal Strength Measure, BEQ Positive Expression and to a lesser extent, BEQ Negative Expression as individual predictors. The results are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

*RAS Predicted by BEQ Negative Expression, BEQ Positive Expression, Communal Strength Measure, and all Possible Interaction Terms*

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.539(a)	.290	.226	.87991115

a Predictors: (Constant), CSM-BEQ neg-BEQ pos Interaction, Zscore: BEQ Positive Expressivity, BEQ neg-BEQ pos Interaction, Zscore: BEQ Negative Expressivity, CSM-BEQ pos Interaction, Zscore (CSM), CSM-BEQ neg Interaction

ANOVA(b)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	24.383	7	3.483	4.499	.000(a)
	Residual	59.617	77	.774		
	Total	84.000	84			

a Predictors: (Constant), CSM-BEQ neg-BEQ pos Interaction, Zscore: BEQ Positive Expressivity, BEQ neg-BEQ pos Interaction, Zscore: BEQ Negative Expressivity, CSM-BEQ pos Interaction, Zscore (CSM), CSM-BEQ neg Interaction

b Dependent Variable: Zscore (RAS)

Expression of Emotions

		Coefficients(a)				
Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.037	.105		-.355	.724
	Zscore (CSM)	.241	.115	.241	2.086	.040
	Zscore: BEQ Negative Expressivity	.208	.108	.208	1.930	.057
	Zscore: BEQ Positive Expressivity	.316	.105	.316	3.008	.004
	CSM-BEQ pos Interaction	.010	.108	.011	.095	.925
	CSM-BEQ neg Interaction	-.074	.124	-.088	-.592	.555
	BEQ neg- BEQ pos Interaction	.128	.114	.114	1.120	.266
	CSM-BEQ neg-BEQ pos Interaction	-.039	.109	-.054	-.359	.721

a Dependent Variable: Zscore (RAS)

Hypothesis II (2b) anticipated an interaction between the expression of negative emotions and explanations for negativity on relationship satisfaction in a communal relationship. Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Negative was used as a measure of negative expressivity, Explanations for Negativity as an index of attempted clarification of negative expression, Communal Strength Measure for communal orientation of the relationship, and Relationship Assessment Scale for relationship satisfaction. To test this hypothesis, 1) the Communal Strength Measure, Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Negative, Explanation for Negativity, and Relationship Assessment Scale scales were converted to  $z$  scores, 2) the Communal Strength Measure, Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Negative, Explanation for Negativity, all two-way interaction terms, and the Communal Strength Measure X Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire Negative X Explanation for Negativity interaction term were computed and entered into a regression analysis to predict the Relationship Assessment Scale.

It was expected that negative emotional expression accompanied by high scores on the explanation measure leads to higher relationship satisfaction, while negative emotional expression accompanied by low scores on the explanation measure leads to lower relationship satisfaction. This effect was to occur only for those higher in communal orientation and no interaction between negative expression and explanations was anticipated in the lower scores of communal strength. The actual findings point out that once again, the model as a whole is significant but not the interactions. The individual predictors such as Negative Expression and

Explanation of Negative were responsible for making the model significant. Table 7 presents the figures for this hypothesis.

Table 7

*RAS Predicted by BEQ Negative Expression, Communal Strength Measure, Explanation of Negative, and Interaction Terms*

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.517(a)	.267	.201	.89408683

a Predictors: (Constant), BEQ Neg-Expl-CSM Interaction, Zscore: BEQ Negative Expressivity, Zscore (CSM), CSM-BEQ Neg Interaction, Explanation of Negative-CSM Interaction, Zscore: Explanation of Negative Emotion, BEQ Neg-Explanation of Negative Emotion Interaction

ANOVA(b)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22.447	7	3.207	4.011	.001(a)
	Residual	61.553	77	.799		
	Total	84.000	84			

a Predictors: (Constant), BEQ Neg-Expl-CSM Interaction, Zscore: BEQ Negative Expressivity, Zscore (CSM), CSM-BEQ Neg Interaction, Explanation of Negative-CSM Interaction, Zscore: Explanation of Negative Emotion, BEQ Neg-Explanation of Negative Emotion Interaction

b Dependent Variable: Zscore (RAS)

		Coefficients(a)				
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.002	.107		.021	.984
	Zscore (CSM)	.208	.123	.208	1.692	.095
	Zscore: Explanation of Negative Emotion	.298	.123	.298	2.433	.017
	Zscore: BEQ Negative Expressivity	.232	.104	.232	2.222	.029
	BEQ Neg-Explanation of Negative Emotion Interaction	.094	.133	.113	.704	.483
	CSM-BEQ Neg Interaction	-.059	.098	-.071	-.606	.546
	Explanation of Negative-CSM Interaction	-.063	.114	-.065	-.548	.585
	BEQ Neg-Expl-CSM Interaction	-.023	.137	-.031	-.166	.869

a Dependent Variable: Zscore (RAS)

Hypothesis III pertains to the interaction of habitual emotional suppression with the communal orientation of the relationship. To measure suppression, the Composite Suppression Index was used but since this measure was crafted for this study and has not been validated, the suppression items of Emotion Regulation

Questionnaire were also used as a security mechanism. Communal Strength Measure and Relationship Assessment Scale were utilized to assess relationship orientation and satisfaction. Hypothesis III was tested in the following manner: 1) The Communal Strength Measure, Relationship Assessment Scale, and suppression measures were converted to  $z$  scores, 2) the Suppression X Communal Strength Measure interaction were computed, and 3) the Suppression, Communal Strength Measure, and the interaction term were entered into a simultaneous regression analysis predicting relationship satisfaction. Since the Composite Suppression Measure is not a standardized measure, identical analyses were performed using the suppression scale of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire.

The expected interaction was such that habitual suppression of emotions is associated with lower relationship satisfaction in communal relationships, but higher satisfaction in non-communal relationships. It was also predicted that situational suppression of emotions is associated with increased satisfaction in communal, but not in non-communal, relationships. Similar to previous hypotheses with interactions, the model in its entirety was significant but the interaction was not.

When the Composite Suppression Index was used as an indicator of emotional suppression, the significance of the model was only due to the Communal Strength Measure as a predictor of Relationship Assessment Scale. But when the Suppression scale of the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire was used as an independent variable, it proved to have predictive validity as well. Table 8 contains the data obtained from this study when the Composite Suppression Index was used as a measure of emotional suppression. The addendum to this table demonstrates the parallel analyses



performed with the Suppression scale of Emotion Regulation Questionnaire instead of Composite Suppression Index.

Table 8

*RAS Predicted by Communal Strength Measure, Composite Suppression Index, and Interaction Terms*

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.352(a)	.124	.092	.95309767

a Predictors: (Constant), Composite Suppression-CSM Interaction, Zscore (CSM), Zscore: Composite Suppression Index

ANOVA(b)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.420	3	3.473	3.824	.013(a)
	Residual	73.580	81	.908		
	Total	84.000	84			

a Predictors: (Constant), Composite Suppression-CSM Interaction, Zscore (CSM), Zscore: Composite Suppression Index

b Dependent Variable: Zscore (RAS)

Coefficients(a)

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.001	.103		.007	.994
	Zscore (CSM)	.350	.104	.350	3.354	.001
	Zscore: Composite Suppression Index	-.063	.105	-.063	-.603	.548
	Composite Suppression- CSM Interaction	-.020	.118	-.018	-.168	.867

a Dependent Variable: Zscore (RAS)

Table 8 Addendum

*RAS Predicted by Communal Strength Measure, Emotion Regulation Questionnaire*

*Suppression, and Interaction Terms*

Model Summary (b)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.489(a)	.239	.211	.88808282

a Predictors: (Constant), CSM-BEQ suppression Interaction, Zscore (CSM), Zscore: BEQ Suppression

b Dependent Variable: Zscore (RAS)

## ANOVA (b)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.116	3	6.705	8.502	.000(a)
	Residual	63.884	81	.789		
	Total	84.000	84			

a Predictors: (Constant), CSM-BEQ suppression Interaction, Zscore (CSM), Zscore: BEQ Suppression

b Dependent Variable: Zscore (RAS)

## Coefficients (a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.018	.098		-.183	.855
	Zscore: ERQ Suppression	-.347	.099	-.347	-3.504	.001
	Zscore(CSM)	.297	.099	.297	3.000	.004
	CSM-ERQ sup Interaction	-.102	.099	-.101	-1.030	.306

a Dependent Variable: Zscore (RAS)

The exploratory hypotheses concern the factors predicting general emotional expression or suppression in the context of romantic relationships. General emotional expressivity was obtained from the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire.

The first variable predicting the degree of emotional expressiveness was the respondent's attachment style measured by the Adult Attachment Scale. Adult Attachment Scale items that indicate a secure attachment are 3, 4, 7, 13, 14, and 17. Higher scores on these items were expected to be correlated with higher scores on Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire General Expressivity. An avoidant attachment style was measured by items 1, 2, 5, 15, 16, and 18 of the questionnaire. Higher scores on this dimension were expected to be correlated with lower General Expressivity scores on the Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire.

The study findings did not corroborate the hypothesized correlations directly. Secure attachment as measured by Adult Attachment Scale did not have a significant correlation with emotional expressiveness from Berkeley Expressiveness Questionnaire. *However, secure attachment correlated robustly and negatively to emotional suppression.* Since suppression is commonly considered the opposite of expression, this finding, while not directly supporting the hypothesis, is consistent with the general notion that securely attached people are more comfortable sharing their emotions.

The correlation between avoidant attachment and emotional expressiveness did not reach the .05 significance level but did approach it ( $p < .07$ ). The processed data for secure attachment and expressiveness are displayed in Table 9 below and the results for suppression and secure attachment appear in the addendum to Table 9. A scatterplot of the correlation between expressivity and avoidant style can be found in Figure 2 and another one portraying the correlation of suppression and secure attachment in the addendum to Figure 2.

Table 9

*Correlation between Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire and Adult Attachment Scale Secure and Avoidant Styles.*

		Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire	AAS Secure
Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire	Pearson Correlation	1	.103
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.347
	N	85	85
AAS Secure	Pearson Correlation	.103	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.347	.
	N	85	85

		Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire	AAS Avoidant
Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire	Pearson Correlation	1	-.197
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.071
	N	85	85
AAS Avoidant	Pearson Correlation	-.197	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.071	.
	N	85	85

Table 9 Addendum

*Correlation between Emotion Regulation Questionnaire Suppression and Secure Adult Attachment Scale.*

		ERQ Suppression	AAS Secure
ERQ Suppression	Pearson Correlation	1	-.319(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.003
	N	85	85
AAS Secure	Pearson Correlation	-.319(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.
	N	85	85

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The second variable predicting expressiveness is the relationship type measured by the Communal Strength Measure. Higher scores on Communal Strength Measure indicate a more communal orientation to the relationship and were anticipated to be correlated with higher scores in Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire general expressivity. The actual findings supported this hypothesis and a statistically significant correlation was found between the communal orientation of the relationship and the expression of emotions. Table 10 exhibits the results and Figure 3 portrays the correlation in graphic terms.

Table 10

*Correlation between Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire and Communal Strength Measure.*

		<i>Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire</i>	<i>Communal Strength Measure</i>
Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire	Pearson Correlation	1	.228(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.036
	N	85	85
Communal Strength Measure	Pearson Correlation	.228(*)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.036	.
	N	85	85

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The third variable in predicting emotional expressiveness is the partner’s receptiveness to emotional disclosure measured by the Partner’s Receptivity to Expression questions on the Combined Emotional Expressivity Questionnaire. A higher sum of these questions were expected be correlated with higher scores on Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire general expressivity. The obtained data supports this hypothesis and respondents with higher scores on Partner’s Receptivity also had higher emotional expressivity scores. Table 11 and Figure 4 display the findings.

Table 11

*Correlation between Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire and Partner's Receptivity to Expression of Emotions.*

		Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire	Partner's Receptivity to Emotion
Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire	Pearson Correlation	1	.405(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	85	85
Partner's Receptivity to Emotion	Pearson Correlation	.405(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	85	85

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Lastly, a general correlation matrix was created to explore the correlations that might exist between the study variables other than the ones specified in the hypotheses. Instead of presenting the findings in detail here, I will provide a summary of the key points in the discussion section (the interested reader can pursue the numeric details by viewing the table that appears in the attached Excel worksheet).

### Discussion

It is first necessary to reiterate that the methodology of this study was correlational and thus, it is not possible to make cause and effect conclusions about the study findings. With that caveat in mind, I first discuss the hypotheses and then turn to some ancillary relationships also uncovered in the present work.



*Study Hypotheses*

This study found support for the statement that expression of positive emotions is unilaterally good for romantic relationships, whether they are high or low in communal orientation. This finding could mean that expressing positive affect promotes the quality of the relationship or that functional relationships tend to create positive emotional expression. Taking the former, it could be claimed that positive emotions signal interest and call for approach, making the partner feel good about him/ herself, the expresser, and the relationship, all conducive to better relationship quality. Taking the latter perspective would be compatible with the theory that considers emotions as goal-oriented phenomena that are in the service of maintaining what “feels good,” in this case, the romantic relationship. In other words, expression of positivity indicates that the relationship is healthy and in a good state. That in turn means that one of the primary goals of all people, which is bonding with other humans, is fulfilled.

Another line of research provides an alternative explanation for the correlation between positive emotions and relationship outcome. Tashiro (2005) suggests that positive emotions broaden the person’s cognitive scope and subsequently improve problem solving and other executive functions necessary for maintaining a relationship (Tashiro, 2005). This perspective implies that cognitive flexibility is essential in the complex dynamics of romantic relationships and that the experience of positive emotions allows the person to be open and accommodating of circumstances and thus, be more effectively engaged in the relationship.

Hypothesis II (1) stated that the communal approach to the relationship would interact with the expression of negative affect in predicting relationship quality. The actual findings indicate that communality is indeed a predictor of relationship satisfaction, which is consistent with past research (Zak et al, 1999). High communal orientation means that a person cares for the partner regardless of what the circumstances might be. It can create a situation similar to unconditional positive regard for the partner, which in turn generates a sense of security and permanence in the relationship, allowing the parties involved to focus and invest on the relationship. Being in a relationship with a high communal orientation often means that the partner is willing to provide help and support when one needs them.

An alternative interpretation of the findings would be that healthy relationships can create a communal orientation in people. This approach is compatible with the view that romantic relationships involve the growth of self to overlap with and include part of another person's self (Aron & Aron, 1996). In other words, as a romantic relationship becomes more intimate, the boundaries that distinguish the individuals from each other blur. As such, the partner's well-being becomes almost the same of the well-being of oneself, with no or little expectations for returns.

In regards to negative expressivity, the data obtained from this study are not similar to the past research. Previous studies suggested that negative emotions can damage the relationship by reducing the person's coping capabilities and restricting one's cognitive and behavioral repertoire (for example Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Tashiro, 2005). This study demonstrated a positive correlation between expression of

negativity and relationship satisfaction. Some of the reasons for the observed effect likely have to do with the functions mentioned earlier for emotional expression: 1) Negative expression has a communicational value in relation to the partner. 2) It can organize the expresser's experience and restore the person's psychological homeostasis to some extent. For instance, it could be that the expression of negativity allows the expresser to vent and feel good about the relationship, with the caveat that it might lead to lower relationship satisfaction in the partner. 3) It can help identify the source of distress and set the stage for goal-oriented behavior to rectify the problems.

The interaction expected between the communal orientation and negative expression to predict relationship satisfaction did not materialize in this study. The reasons could be the following: 1) This study sampled only one member of the dyad; that is, one person's responses were used as an index of the general functioning of the relationship. If the other member of the couple diverges widely from the respondent's views, it is possible for some error to have been introduced to the study. For instance, it is possible that the respondent scores high on both communal approach and negative expressivity while the partner scores low on communality. In a case like this, the respondent's relationship satisfaction will be negatively affected by the partner's low communal orientation. As such, even though the study hypothesis might have otherwise been true (interaction of high communal and high negative expression predictive of satisfaction), the results reported by the respondent would suggest otherwise.

2) The second reason may have to do with the characteristics of the sample obtained for this study. You may recall from the Results section that the communal orientation of this sample is slightly skewed to the right, meaning that on average, most participants endorsed a communal approach. If both partners share the communal approach, it is possible that the expression of negative affective states (such as sadness) creates an empathic response and elicits support from the partner, which would lead to higher satisfaction. Consequently, it is possible that in a less skewed sample (including more participants lower on communal orientation) negative expression would predict lower relationship satisfaction and thus, demonstrate the hypothesized interaction between negative expressivity and communal orientation.

3) The relationships low on communality and high in negativity may dissolve quickly and thus, form a small percentage of all relationships. 4) It is possible that such an interaction does not exist, in which case, one could argue that negative expression and the type of a relationships can function independently of each other. For instance, it is possible that negative affectivity is more in the realm of personality traits but the type of the relationship is rather a function of the experiences of the couple.

Hypothesis II (2a) stated that concomitant expression of positive emotions can buffer the effects of negative expressivity in communal relationships and thus, predicted an interaction between positive and negative emotions as well as the communal orientation. The findings were indicative of the value of communal orientation, positive, and negative affectivity individually but not their interactions.

The possible reasons for the predictive value of positive and negative emotions as well as communality are explicated above, so I discuss the interaction.

The reasons that the predicted interaction did not occur could be one or more of the following: 1) This study found that the expression of negative and positive emotions were highly correlated. Therefore, it is possible that these dimensions are not as separate as previous research has suggested (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). At least in this sample, they had some degree of overlap, suggesting that at least sometimes, people who express emotions do so *in general*, irrespective of whether that emotion is positive or negative – and that this general expression of emotion is healthy for relationships. 2) The questionnaires in this study inquire about a person's usual way of expression as opposed to creating a real-time and dynamic model of negative and positive expression. The interaction may actually lie in the well-timed expression of both instead of what the respondent usually does. 3) There may be no such interaction between positive and negative emotions in predicting the relationship outcome. For instance, it is possible that negative expression is valuable for the relationship and that the simultaneous expression of positive emotion does not serve any additional function. It also may be the case that positive emotions cannot temperate the effects of negative expression, whether they are good or bad for the relationship.

Hypothesis II (2b) proposed an interaction between negative expression, explanations provided for negativity to the partner, and the communal orientation. It was found that negative expressivity and explanations for negativity do predict the relationship satisfaction individually, but no interaction was found. Since the role of

negative affectivity is already covered, I will discuss the function of explanation of negativity.

Various emotion theories agree that an emotional response such as anger can be visceral without much cerebral activity about the circumstances. However, it is shown that when the person actually engages in creating a narrative (to oneself or others) about the emotions, identifying the cause and effect relationships in the environment, and understanding the implications for future of the person and the romantic partner, the benefits of emotion and its expression are maximized.

Attempting to explain the conditions leading to negative emotions to the partner adds a cognitive element to the raw biology of emotions that encompasses all of the above. Therefore, not only the expresser gains better clarity about the precedents of negative affect and learns a lesson for future, but also the partner comes to a more coherent understanding of his/ her interactions with the expresser and ultimately the give and takes in the relationship become more lawful and predictable. It is worth noting that the explanation of negative emotion variable significantly predicted relationship satisfaction above and beyond the predictive power of negative expressivity, suggesting that it is indeed capturing something uniquely important in understanding relationship satisfaction. Lack of support for the predicted interaction could mean that explanation of negative affect is useful for any level of communal orientation.

Hypothesis III proposed an interaction between emotional suppression and communal orientation to predict the relationship quality. As mentioned before, each of the independent variables had predictive validity but no interaction was found. The questionnaire crafted for this study to assess emotional suppression was not a

valid predictor of relationship satisfaction but the standardized measure we also used in the survey was. Since the role of communality in relationships has been previously presented, I will briefly discuss the significance of emotional suppression as an important factor in the quality of relationships. It is known that suppression of emotions may mask the outward appearance of emotions but is not very effective in controlling the subjective feelings of the person. So an individual who suppresses feelings in response to a partner, may still feel dissatisfied with the situation.

Suppressing emotions is an active and energy consuming process, taking away from the limited resources at the person's disposal and leaving less for interacting with others in a meaningful way. Lastly, suppressing feelings often makes the person look and feel phony. The unhealthy consequences of suppression, especially when it occurs on a regular basis, have been studied and shown in the past research as well.

In an attempt to explain lack of findings for this hypothesis' interaction, it should once again be noted that this study relies on one person to report about a dyadic relationship. The problem this design could create is that we would expect that the respondent who is a habitual suppressor and high on communal orientation would not have high relationship satisfaction (another way of explaining the interaction terms). However, if the partner of this respondent is expressive and highly communal, the respondent would likely be satisfied with the relationship and the predicted interactive effect would not be found in this study.

#### *Exploratory Hypotheses*

The exploratory hypotheses of this study investigated the factors predicting emotional expressiveness. In strict statistical terms, attachment style was not found to

correlate to general expressiveness. The research by Kerr, Melley, Travea, and Pole (2003) might partly explain the reasons for the lack of findings. They found that individuals with an anxious style were *more expressive when they were in a romantic relationship but less so when they were single*. In this study, all of our subjects had to be in a relationship to participate; therefore, it is possible that if the anxious attachment individuals had been tested outside of a relationship, we would have seen the anticipated result and that the recruitment criteria of this study made it harder to obtain a thorough depiction of expressiveness in relation to attachment style.

Since the results obtained in this study did not match the previous research findings on the relation between attachment style and expressivity (e.g., Simpson, 1990), I performed additional analyses in which *emotional suppression* was substituted for expression and this strategy yielded significant and meaningful results. In simple terms, individuals with a secure style were less likely to suppress, which is another way of saying they would express emotions. The reason for this apparent paradox may be one of the following: 1) the questionnaires are not constructed in such a way for the opposite constructs of expression and suppression to be mutually exclusive. 2) The constructs of expression and suppression may not be the two ends of the same spectrum and could co-exist and co-vary somewhat independently of one another.

There was robust support for the hypothesis on the correlation between the communal orientation of the relationship and emotional expressivity. It was explicated earlier in this paper that communal relationships call for emotions to



function and non-communal relationships do not require much emotional disclosure since the other person does not matter much beyond the calculated give and take.

This study also found evidence supporting the idea that a romantic partner's receptiveness to emotions is in fact correlated with expressiveness. Relationships are living and dynamic entities that thrive on the moment-to-moment give and takes as well as established patterns of behavior. Romantic partners that are on average validating and attentive to emotions encourage more emotional expressivity.

#### *Ancillary Findings*

In addition to testing the hypotheses, the present methodology allowed for an exploration of the interrelationships among several other variables. I will now go over the meaning and significance of these ancillary results obtained from looking at the zero-order correlations between all the variables in the study. I will focus here on only those relationships that had statistical significance and that were not already discussed above in relation to the hypotheses (the interested reader may observe all the correlations in the accompanying correlation matrix). I divide these findings into four main categories: (1) Issues pertaining broadly to lifecycle development, (2) issues related to attachment styles, (3) issues relating to gender differences, and (4) matters of emotion expression.

#### *Lifecycle Development*

As suggested in the pattern of correlations, findings that might be of developmental interest are: 1) Older age was correlated with a more avoidant and less secure attachment. This correlation was linear in this sample. This finding appears to be contradictory to some and consistent with other existing research. For

instance, Zhang and Labouvie-Vief (2004) found that with aging, the likelihood of a secure attachment increases. However, they also found that older individuals tend to be more dismissive as well, which is an attribute of an avoidant style. Because of primarily young and homogeneous age distribution of our study's sample, it is possible that we did not have enough older participants to make a meaningful conclusion about the relationship between age and attachment. 2) The subjects with more school seniority endorsed less relationship satisfaction. The increasing amount of academic load that students face in the higher years of college, the pressures to graduate, and the prospect of being on the job market for a career and finally, the high likelihood of having to move to another city or state might be the factors contributing to more general life stress and lower relationship satisfaction.

#### *Attachment*

Relatedly, some of these ancillary correlations suggested relationships potentially meaningful to our understanding of attachment. People with an avoidant style were less likely to express positivity. According to the adult attachment literature, the internal working model of these individuals does not sanction depending on others and letting others depend on one. People are seen as mostly rejecting and unsupportive. As such, establishing relationships would not be an urgent need for such an individual and hence, expression of positivity to signal interest in others would not be on the agenda either. For avoidant persons, relationships may not have the prime importance they do for other people; therefore, attempting to explain the negative emotions becomes irrelevant because such behavior is strategic and in service of maintaining relationships. Since emotions still

continue to exist in avoidant individuals, their way of dealing with them would be not expressing them, which explains the high levels of suppression in such cases.

Probably through conditioning or self-fulfilling prophecy, the partners of avoidant individuals are reluctant to receive whatever emotional disclosure they are willing to share. All in all, due to the low priority of other people in the life of an avoidant, means of communication may not be as valued or active as in other people. A natural conclusion of this premise is that if and when such individuals get into relationships, they will not be comfortable with intimacy and closeness and may not rank high in relationship satisfaction, which incidentally is another finding of this research. The last finding of interest in this section was that the avoidant and anxious styles were positively correlated. Conceptually, these two styles are considered “not secure” and this research verifies that. A short discussion of the findings on anxious attachment relevant to this study follows.

Anxious attachment style was associated to lower relationship satisfaction. In absolute theoretical terms, no level of intimacy is sufficient for such individuals and it comes as no surprise if they do not have a subjective sense of well being in relationships in general. An interesting finding of this study is that the participants with anxious style were less likely to explain their negative emotions. This finding may not at first blush appear credible because these individuals are literally “anxious to please” and they would be expected to try to explain their potentially upsetting behavior. However, our results are consistent with another study finding that indicates that the partners of these people are not very receptive of their emotional disclosures either, which in turn could clarify why the anxious respondents did not

explain themselves much. Maybe the content of their emotional expression transfers their anxiety to the partner, who may find it displeasing.

Finally, secure attachment was coupled with partner's receptiveness to emotion. Conceivably, individuals with a secure attachment seek out partners that are open and amenable to emotional expressions, something they are very likely to do.

### *Gender Issues*

In terms of gender issues, female participants in this study were found on average to be more emotionally expressive, to experience their emotions more strongly, and to engage in less emotional suppression. All of these findings are corroborated by the past research and are consistent with the mainstream cultural practices in the in the US in which women are socialized to be more accepting of emotions and emotional expression, whereas men are expected to be more stoic and less expressive (e.g., Wong, Pituch, & Rochlen, 2006).

### *Supplement to Emotional Expressiveness Hypotheses*

Some of these ancillary correlations complement or extend the results from the main emotional expression hypotheses. Expression of negative feelings was correlated to attempts made to explain oneself. That is to say, individuals who scored high on negative expressivity, also scored high on the efforts made to explain themselves. This should make logical sense since conveying unpleasant information to others requires some maintenance work if the relationship is to survive.

Expression of negative was also correlated with partner's willingness to receive emotional content. This also appears sensible because if the partner had no interest in entertaining negative affect, the expresser would likely have stopped this behavior or

the relationship would likely have come to an end. An unexpected finding was that with increases in negative expressivity, suppression of positive and negative also increased. The word of caution is that the measures we used to assess the suppression of positive and negative were developed for this study and were not previously standardized, so it is possible that they did not have adequate validity. If they are in fact accurate, this finding could mean that expression and suppression may not be diametrical opposites of one another and they could in fact co-exist. The answer to this question perhaps lies in future research.

An executive summary of all of the key study findings is presented in the next section.

#### *Executive Summary*

The most important study findings are summarized in these categories (a) relationship satisfaction, (b) emotional expression, and (c) attachment-related findings.

##### *Relationship satisfaction*

Results suggested that 1) expression of both positive and 2) negative emotions, 3) communal orientation, 3) explanation of negative affect, 4) and general emotional expressivity were all correlated with higher relationship satisfaction. 5) Emotional suppression, 6) anxious attachment, and 7) higher year in school were related to lower satisfaction.

##### *Emotional expression*

Results suggested that 1) communal approach, 2) partner's receptiveness, and 3) female gender were all related to more general emotional expressivity. 4)

Communal orientation was related to more and 5) avoidant attachment was related to less positive expression. 6) Secure attachment was related to less emotional suppression. 7) Higher negative expression was related to more suppression of both negative and positive emotions.

#### *Attachment-Related Findings*

Result suggested that 1) secure attachment correlated with more partner's receptiveness. 2) Anxious attachment accompanied less explanations for negative affect. 3) older participants had more avoidant attachments.

#### Study Limitations

The first limitation of this study has been mentioned a few times in the text: the sample consisted of only one member of the dyad and the partners of our respondents were not tested. The reasons for excluding the partners from this study were two: 1) we did not want to put the partner in the position of having to participate in a study because they had to help their significant other, 2) we did not have a way of compensating the partners for their time and did not want to put our subjects in a position of having to ask their partners for their time. Other more conceptual and less logistical study limitations follow.

Emotions are sometimes regulated through voluntary control and with conscious awareness of the individual. For example, one may suppress overt hostile behavior in dealings with one's spouse. On the other hand, some emotional experiences may be moderated without the conscious awareness of the individual. For example, painful emotions following the loss of a romantic partner may be regulated through repression and denial (Gross, John & Richards, 2000). For

simplicity and practical reasons, the current study attempts to elicit information about the conscious strategies used for emotion regulation. In other words, the respondents are asked to report on the segment their emotional reactions that are within the conscious realm. Therefore, it can be argued that the unconscious aspects of emotional expression and regulation are not measured in this study in spite of their significance.

It has been shown that expression of emotions in romantic relationships is a function of the age and development of the relationship. That is, experience and expression of negative emotions are more common around the middle of the relationship trajectory and very new and fully developed relationships tend to have more positive emotional interactions (Strzyzewski Aune, Aune, & Buller, 2001). Due to the nature of this sample, the study participants do not fully represent all stages of relationship development. Therefore, the nature of the correlation between emotionality and relationship quality might differ in other stages of life.

Another limitation of this study has to do with the effectiveness of emotion regulation efforts. It is known that attempts to regulate emotions do not always result in successful emotion regulation (McCoy & Masters, 1990). The effectiveness of affect regulation efforts depends on the match between the emotion regulation strategy and the emotion-eliciting event, the focus, and nature of emotion. The measures in this study ask the participants about their regulation *attempts* but we do not know about the degree to which they were in fact successful in their effort.

Another point of contention in this study is that romantic relationships are supposed to be communal and not business-like. Therefore, the Communal Strength

Measure may not detect a meaningful difference in the communal approach of the different study participants. The data obtained from this study *partially* supports this argument to some extent since the distribution of communal orientation had some skewness to the right. That is, our participants on average viewed their relationship as more communal than non-communal. This finding per se does not mean that all romantic relationships are by default communal. Perhaps if a wider net is cast in participant recruitment, for instance a community sample, it is more likely to have respondents in both communal and non-communal relationships.

Lastly, the methodology of this study was correlational, which in turn limits the conclusions that can be made based on the findings. To establish cause and effect relationships, this study needs to be followed up by a true experiment with a control group where variables are manipulated and the outcomes are measured accordingly.

### Implications for Intervention

The results of this study will be of practical use primarily for professionals who deal with intimate relationships, couples, and family issues in fields such as clinical and counseling psychology, psychiatry, and social work. However, the findings might also be applicable in organizational settings in which individuals have to work closely with and rely on one another.

Expression of emotions to one's partner is essential in maintaining a working relationship and the mental health providers would probably benefit from applying this in practice. The caveats that accompany this statement are it is important to encourage the clients to attempt to create a logical narrative of the events leading to negative emotions and communicate it to their partners. It is also important to note



that the evidence for optimal levels of negative expression is not conclusive at this point. In other words, this study suggests that there are benefits associated with such expression but its mechanism of action and the doses in which negative emotions can be safely expressed are awaiting future research. It is also known that suppression of emotions will not benefit the relationship and thus, clinicians may need to find ways of addressing this issue where relevant. It might be worthwhile to investigate the individual's cognitions about and previous experiences with emotional suppression to enable him/ her to use suppression judiciously and sparingly.

Constructs such as the level of communal orientation and attachment style are not readily modifiable in clinical work but are certainly worthy of attention. If the clinician is mindful of these dimensions, timely interventions can move the individual towards a more useful style in relating to intimate others. If these two concepts appear to be relevant to the presenting problem of a couple, the questionnaires in this study could easily be used to sketch a profile of the individuals' preferred styles of interpersonal relationships.

Finally, it is always worthwhile to encourage the clients to be open and receptive to the partner's expressions. Even though this might sound like an easy task, a majority of individuals in troubled relationships have difficulty listening to each other. Techniques such as modeling the desired behavior and rehearsing them might prove to be beneficial in ensuring open communication.

### Future Research

There are several unanswered questions in this study that could be addressed in future research. 1) The effects of negative expressivity on the quality of

relationship are not fully understood. The findings in this study do not concur fully with the past research and a more complex model may need to be developed. 2) The relation between negative and positive expressivity needs further evaluation. Existing research indicates that these two dimensions are highly correlated but their interaction is not fully understood. The circumplex model of emotions suggests that one can be either happy or sad but Larsen, Mc Graw, and Cacioppo (2001) have been able to empirically generate both negative and positive emotions in the same person and demonstrated that it is possible to have mixed affective states. 3) Based on the findings in this study, it was possible to infer that emotional suppression and expression may not be diametric opposites and instead of being placed on the same spectrum, they might indeed have some degree of independence from one another. Future research could focus on standardizing measures of expression and suppression and explore their relation with each other.

4) Methodologically, it will be helpful to replicate this study with both members of the dyad present so that they could answer questions about themselves as well as their perceptions of their partners. This way we will have a much more accurate depiction of what really goes on in the relationship. For instance, we will be able to investigate the effects of constructs such as communal approach, negative and positive expressivity and suppression on the partner. To give the study a more experimental flavor, it is possible to have a control and an experimental group and perform a pre and post test and manipulate various aspects of expressivity. 5) A natural extension of this study would be expanding the sample to the community and recruiting participants across different stages of relationship age and development.

Such a sample will likely provide a more naturalistic distribution of study variables.

6) Adding some diversity to the sample will lend a new flavor to this study. For instance, including gay and lesbian population as well as ethnoracial minorities may shed new light on the emotional communication patterns already known.

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Figure Caption

*Figure 1.* Scatterplot of the Correlation between Relationship Assessment Scale and BEQ Positive Expressivity.

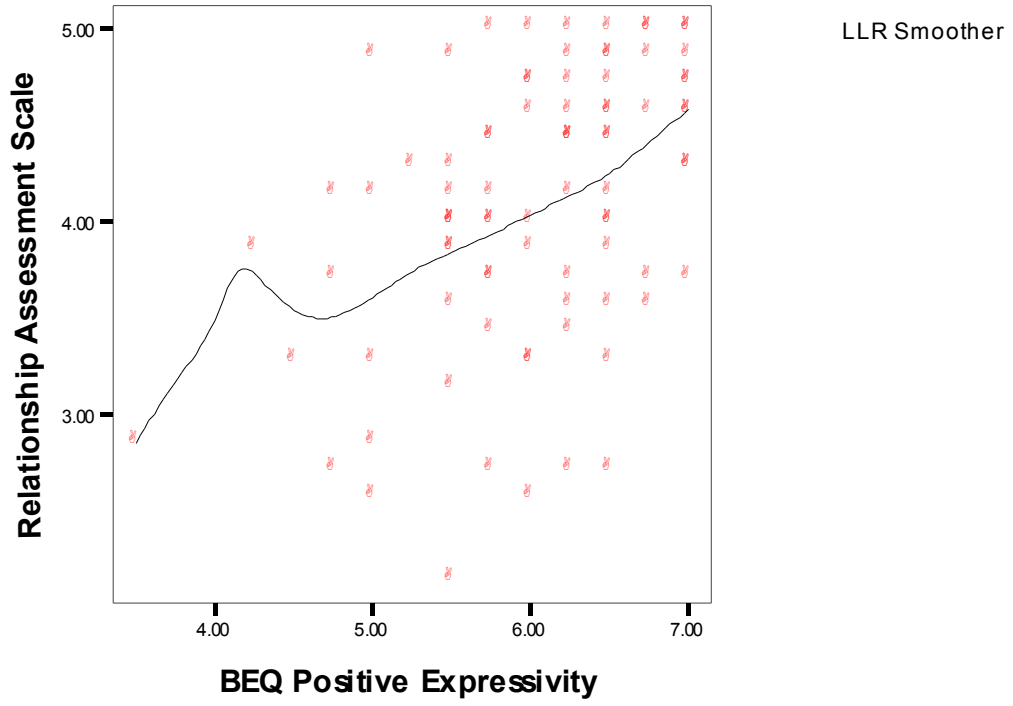


Figure Caption

*Figure 2.* Scatterplot of the Correlation between Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire and Adult Attachment Scale Avoidant style.

### Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire

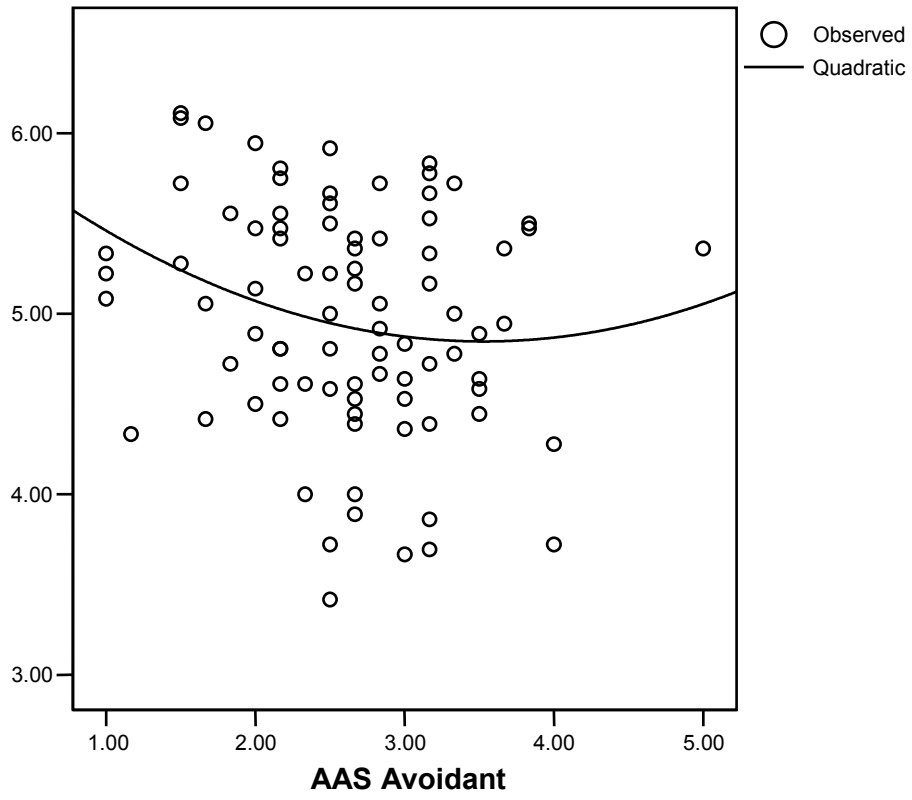
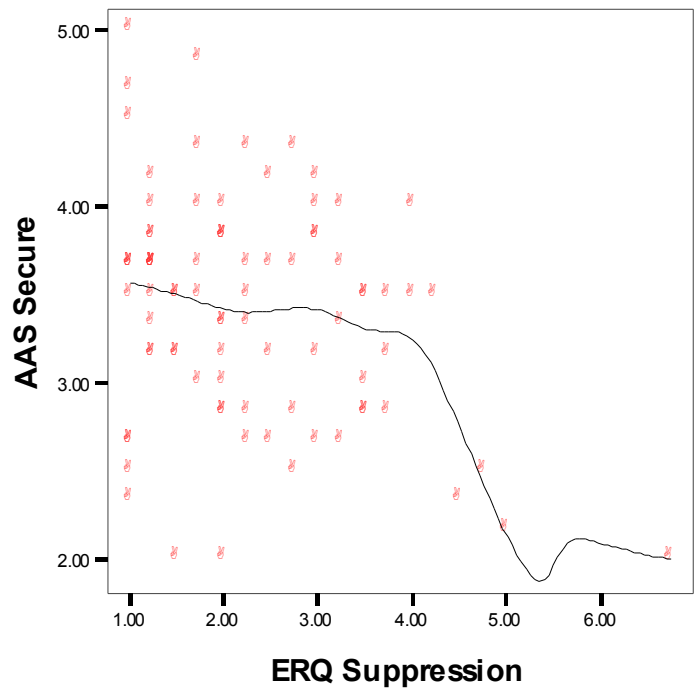


Figure Caption

*Figure 2 Addendum.* Scatterplot of the Correlation between Emotion Regulation Questionnaire Suppression and Adult Attachment Scale Secure style.



LLR Smoother

Figure Caption

*Figure 3.* Scatterplot of the Correlation between Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire and Communal Strength Measure.



### Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire

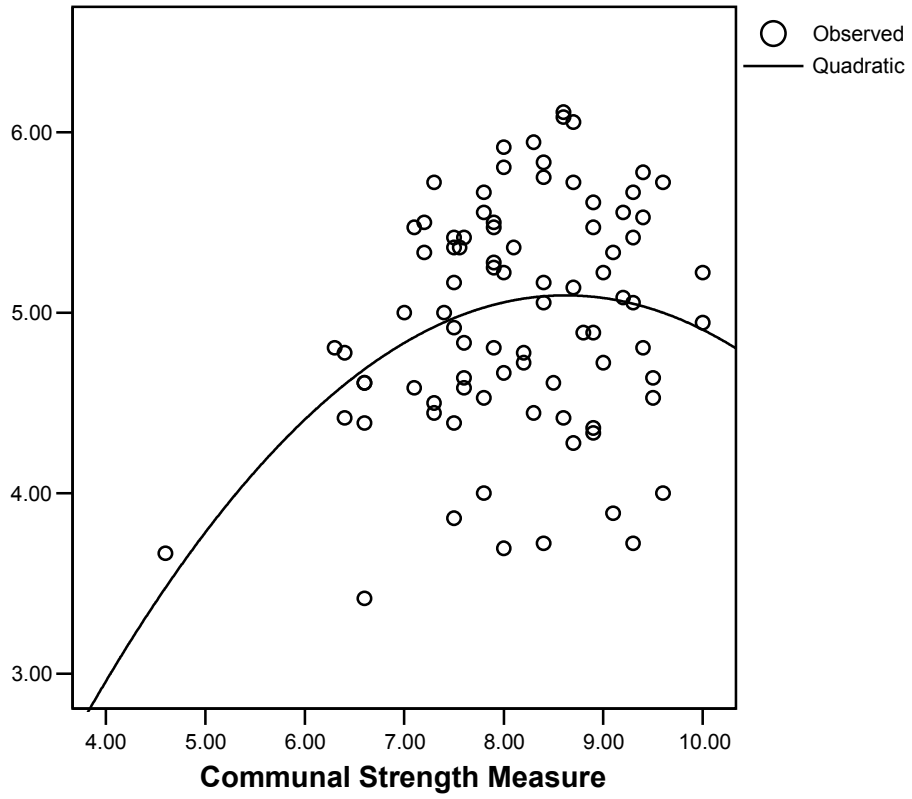
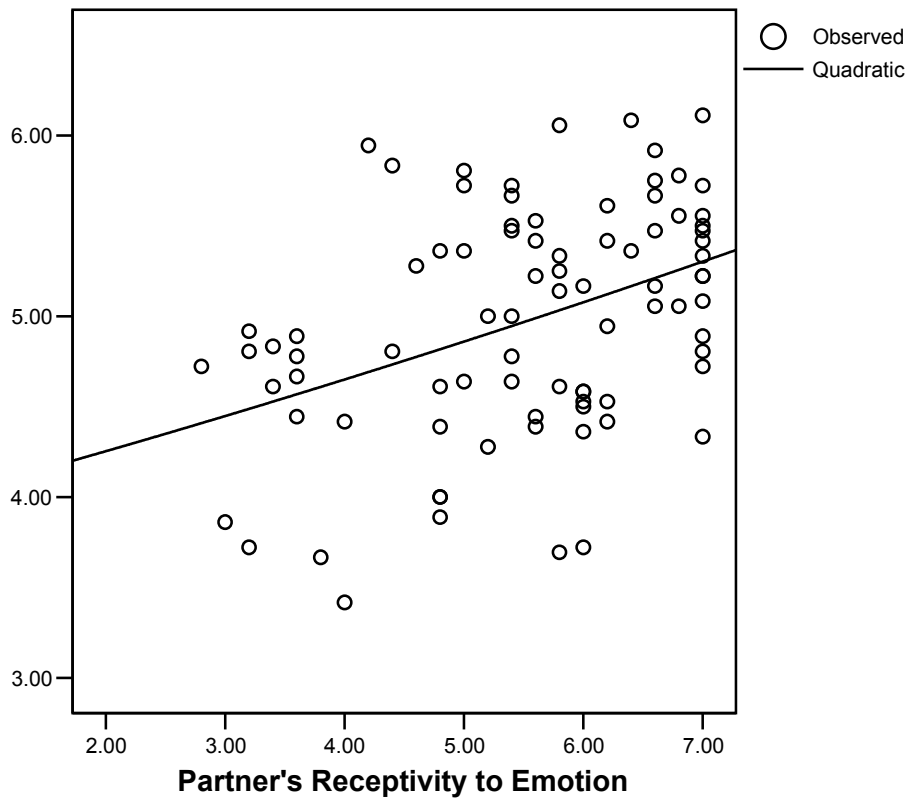


Figure Caption

*Figure 4.* Scatterplot of the Correlation between Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire and Partner's Receptivity to Expression.

### Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire



Appendix A: Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990)

For each statement below, please indicate your response by filling in the blank in front of each item with the appropriate number from the following rating scale:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
not at all characteristic very characteristic

Depend

1. \_\_\_\_ I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others. (Av)
2. \_\_\_\_ People are never there when you need them. (Av)
3. \_\_\_\_ I am comfortable depending on others. (S)
4. \_\_\_\_ I know that others will be there when I need them. (S)
5. \_\_\_\_ I find it difficult to trust others completely. (Av)
6. \_\_\_\_ I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them. (Ax)

Anxiety

7. \_\_\_\_ I do not often worry about being abandoned. (S)
8. \_\_\_\_ I often worry that my partner does not really love me. (Ax)
9. \_\_\_\_ I find others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. (Ax)
10. \_\_\_\_ I often worry my partner will not want to stay with me. (Ax)
11. \_\_\_\_ I want to merge completely with another person. (Ax)
12. \_\_\_\_ My desire to merge sometimes scares people away. (Ax)

Close

13. \_\_\_\_ I find it relatively easy to get close to others. (S)

14. \_\_\_\_ I do not often worry about someone getting too close to me. (S)
15. \_\_\_\_ I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others. (Av)
16. \_\_\_\_ I am nervous when anyone gets too close. (Av)
17. \_\_\_\_ I am comfortable having others depend on me. (S)
18. \_\_\_\_ Often, love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being. (Av)

Note: (S) indicates items that originated from the “secure” description; (Av) indicates items that originated from the “avoidant” description; and (Ax) indicates items that originated from the “anxious” description;

Appendix B: Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (Gross & John, 1995)

The Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ) assesses the differences in experience and expression of emotions between individuals. BEQ taps into three facets of emotional expressivity: negative expressivity, positive expressivity, and impulse strength.

Items and Instructions: For each statement below, please indicate your agreement or disagreement. Do so by filling in the blank in front of each item with the appropriate number from the following rating scale:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7  
 strongly neutral strongly  
 disagree agree

1. \_\_\_\_ Whenever I feel positive emotions, people can easily see exactly what I am feeling.
2. \_\_\_\_ I sometimes cry during sad movies.
3. \_\_\_\_ People often do not know what I am feeling.
4. \_\_\_\_ I laugh out loud when someone tells me a joke that I think is funny.
5. \_\_\_\_ It is difficult for me to hide my fear.
6. \_\_\_\_ When I'm happy, my feelings show.
7. \_\_\_\_ My body reacts very strongly to emotional situations.
8. \_\_\_\_ I've learned it is better to suppress my anger than to show it.
9. \_\_\_\_ No matter how nervous or upset I am, I tend to keep a calm exterior.
10. \_\_\_\_ I am an emotionally expressive person.
11. \_\_\_\_ I have strong emotions.

12. \_\_\_\_ I am sometimes unable to hide my feelings, even though I would like to.
13. \_\_\_\_ Whenever I feel negative emotions, people can easily see exactly what I am feeling.
14. \_\_\_\_ There have been times when I have not been able to stop crying even though I tried to stop.
15. \_\_\_\_ I experience my emotions very strongly.
16. \_\_\_\_ What I'm feeling is written all over my face.

Scoring

compute beq03r=(8-beq03).

compute beq08r=(8-beq08).

compute beq09r=(8-beq09).

compute beq.nex=mean (beq09r,beq13,beq16,beq03r,beq05,beq08r).

compute beq.pex=mean (beq06,beq01,beq04,beq10).

compute beq.str=mean (beq15,beq11,beq14,beq07,beq02,beq12).

compute beq=mean (beq.nex,beq.pex,beq.str).

Appendix C: Combined Emotional Expressivity Questionnaire (CEEQ)

The following questions ask about how you feel, manage, and express your emotions. Some of the questions are about your individual experiences and some are in relation to your romantic partner. For the ones that involve your partner, keep him/her in mind and fill in your partner's initials in the dotted line blank: ----. Even though some of the questions may seem similar to one another, please try and answer *all* of them. For each statement, indicate your agreement or disagreement by filling in the blank in front of each item: \_\_\_\_ with the appropriate number from the following rating scale:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7  
 strongly neutral strongly  
 disagree agree

Modified Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire

1. \_\_\_\_ Whenever I feel positive emotions, ---- can easily see exactly what I am feeling.
2. \_\_\_\_ I sometimes cry during sad movies.
3. \_\_\_\_ ---- often does not know what I am feeling.
4. \_\_\_\_ I laugh out loud if ---- tells me a joke that I think is funny.
5. \_\_\_\_ It is difficult for me to hide my fear from ----.
6. \_\_\_\_ With ----, my feelings show when I'm happy.
7. \_\_\_\_ My body reacts very strongly to emotional situations.
8. \_\_\_\_ With ----, I've learned it is better to suppress my anger than to show it.
9. \_\_\_\_ No matter how nervous or upset I am, I tend to keep a calm exterior with ----.



10. \_\_\_\_ I am an emotionally expressive person with ----.
11. \_\_\_\_ I have strong emotions.
12. \_\_\_\_ I am sometimes unable to hide my feelings from ----, even though I would like to.
13. \_\_\_\_ Whenever I feel negative emotions, ---- can easily see exactly what I am feeling.
14. \_\_\_\_ With ---, there have been times when I have not been able to stop crying even though I tried to stop.
15. \_\_\_\_ I experience my emotions very strongly.
16. \_\_\_\_ With ---, what I'm feeling is written all over my face.

#### Selectivity of Suppression

- 1) With ----(partner's name), I carefully select when to keep my *positive* emotions to myself and when to express them.
- 2) With ----, I carefully select when to keep my *negative* emotions to myself and when to express them.
- 3) If I want to express my *positive* emotions to ----, I think about whether it'll be helpful or not.
- 4) If I want to express my *negative* emotions to ----, I think about whether it'll be helpful or not.
- 5) I sometimes don't express my *positive* emotions to ---- because the situation doesn't call for it.

## Expression of Emotions

- 6) I sometimes don't express my *negative* emotions to ---- because the situation doesn't call for it.
- 7) I never show my *positive* emotions to ----, whatever they are (reverse scored).
- 8) I never show my *negative* emotions to ----, whatever they are (reverse scored).
- 9) I have to deal with my *positive* emotions on my own, without displaying them to -- -- (reverse scored).
- 10) I have to deal with my *negative* emotions on my own, without displaying them to ---- (reverse scored).

## Explanation of Negative

- 1) When I express my negative emotions to ----(partner's name), I try and explain the reasons for my emotions.
- 2) I make sure ---understands why I'm expressing negative emotions to him/ her.
- 3) If I'm upset with ----, I'd like him/her to know why.
- 4) I don't think it's necessary to go into any detail with ---- if I'm feeling bad (reverse scored).
- 5) I really don't see the need for ---- to know why I have negative feelings of any sort (reverse scored).

## Partner's Openness

- 1) I feel like ----(partner's name) is open to my emotional expression.
- 2) If I express my emotions to ----, I know he/ she will not mock me or use my expressiveness against me.

3) I don't express my emotions to ----because I'm not sure how he/she will take it (reverse scored).

4) I feel comfortable to tell ---- how I'm feeling, whatever it might be.

5) ---- doesn't react favorably when I disclose my emotions, so I tend not to do it much (reverse scored).

Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003)

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7  
strongly neutral strongly  
disagree agree

1) I keep my emotions to myself.

2) When I'm feeling positive emotions with ---- (partner's name), I am careful not to express them.

3) I control my emotions by not expressing them to----.

4) When I'm feeling negative emotions with ----, I make sure not to express them.

Appendix D: Communal Strength Measure (Mills et al., 2004)

Keeping in mind your romantic partner, answer the following questions. As you answer each question, fill in your partner's initials in the blank. For each statement below, please indicate your response by filling in the blank in front of each item with the appropriate number from the following rating scale:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7-----8-----9-----10  
 not at all extremely

1. \_\_\_\_ How far would you be willing to go to visit ---- (your partner's initials)?
2. \_\_\_\_ How happy do you feel when doing something that helps ---- (your partner's initials)?
3. \_\_\_\_ How large a benefit would you be likely to give ---- (your partner's initials)?
4. \_\_\_\_ How large a cost would you incur to meet a need of ---- (your partner's initials)?
5. \_\_\_\_ How readily can you put the needs of ---- (your partner's initials) out of your thoughts?
6. \_\_\_\_ How high a priority for you is meeting the needs of ---- (your partner's initials)?
7. \_\_\_\_ How reluctant would you be to sacrifice for ---- (your partner's initials)?
8. \_\_\_\_ How much would you be willing to give up to benefit ---- (your partner's initials)?
9. \_\_\_\_ How far would you go out of your way to do something for ---- (your partner's initials)?

10. \_\_\_\_ How easily could you accept not helping ---- (your partner's initials)?

Note: Items 5, 7, and 10 are reverse scored.

Appendix E: Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003)

The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire is designed to assess individual differences in the habitual use of two emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Items and Instructions: We would like to ask you some questions about your emotional life, in particular, how you regulate (that is, control and manage) your emotions. The questions below involve two distinct aspects of your emotional life. One is your emotional experience, or what you feel like inside. The other is your emotional expression, or how you show your emotions in the way you talk, gesture, or behave. Although some of the following questions may seem similar to one another, they differ in important ways. For each item, please answer using the following scale:

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7  
strongly neutral strongly  
disagree agree

1. \_\_\_\_ When I want to feel more positive emotion (such as joy or amusement), I change what I'm thinking about.
2. \_\_\_\_ I keep my emotions to myself.
3. \_\_\_\_ When I want to feel less negative emotion (such as sadness or anger), I change what I'm thinking about.
4. \_\_\_\_ When I am feeling positive emotions, I am careful not to express them.
5. \_\_\_\_ When I'm faced with a stressful situation, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me stay calm.

6. \_\_\_\_ I control my emotions by not expressing them.
7. \_\_\_\_ When I want to feel more positive emotion, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation.
8. \_\_\_\_ I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I'm in.
9. \_\_\_\_ When I am feeling negative emotions, I make sure not to express them.
10. \_\_\_\_ When I want to feel less negative emotion, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation.

Note

Do not change item order, as items 1 and 3 at the beginning of the questionnaire define the terms "positive emotion" and "negative emotion".

Scoring (no reversals)

Reappraisal Items: 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10

Suppression Items: 2, 4, 6, 9







Appendix G: Consent Form

**Subject Information and Consent Form**  
**Expression and Regulation of Emotions in Romantic Relationships**

- 1. Project Director:** You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Makon Fardis, MA, doctoral student in clinical psychology at The University of Montana. He can be reached in person at The University of Montana Psychology Department, Skaggs Building office 143, Missoula MT 59812, by phone at 406-243-4522, or by e-mail at [makon.fardis@umontana.edu](mailto:makon.fardis@umontana.edu). The **faculty supervisor** of this project is Luke Conway, PhD. Dr. Conway has the same physical address, his email is [luke.conway@umontana.edu](mailto:luke.conway@umontana.edu), and his phone is 243-4821.
- 2. Purpose and Procedures:** The purpose of this study is to help us understand how expression and regulation of emotions can affect the quality of romantic relationships. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to fill out a survey containing questions on how you manage your emotions as well as the quality of your romantic relationship. This questionnaire takes about 20-30 minutes to complete. If you have any further questions about this research, please feel free to ask the experimenter or the project director.
- 3. Credits:** You will earn 2 research credit points for your Introductory Psychology course.
- 4. Risks:** We do not know of any risks associated with participation in this study. There is no foreseeable discomfort in completing the surveys but it is possible to find some of the questions thought-provoking or even dispiriting. In the event that you experience any distress as a result of your participation, you are encouraged to contact the project director or The University of Montana's Curry Health Center's Counseling Services at 243-4711.
- 5. Benefits:** If you decide to participate, you will gain first-hand experience of scientific research and will assist the promotion of the field of human emotions and relationships.
- 6. Confidentiality:** The data collected in this study will remain completely confidential. You are not required to provide any identifying information on your questionnaires and the completed questionnaires will be stored in locked file cabinets in a locked research lab in the Department of Psychology. The signed consent forms will be stored separately from the questionnaires, also under lock and key. We keep a list of participants' names in case you need proof of participation for your Introductory Psychology experimental credit. This list is also kept in a locked cabinet in the Psychology Department.

**7. Liability:** Although we do not foresee any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms: “In the event that you are injured as a result of this research you should individually seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University’s Claims representative or University Legal Counsel.”

**8. Voluntary participation/ withdrawal:** Your decision to take part in this research is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study or refuse to participate at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are normally entitled. In other words, even if you decide to withdraw after having started the study, you will still receive 2 research credits for your time. You also have the right to skip any items in case you find them uncomfortable to answer.

**9. Questions.** If you have any further questions about this study and your participation, you may contact Makon Fardis, MA at 406-243-4522, e-mail [makon.fardis@umontana.edu](mailto:makon.fardis@umontana.edu). If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the IRB chair through the UM research office at 243-6670.

**10. Statement of consent/ signature.** I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

---

Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of participant

---

Date

Appendix H: Debriefing Form

**Debriefing Form**  
**Expression and Regulation of Emotions in Romantic Relationships**  
**Makon Fardis, M.A.**  
**The University of Montana**

Romantic relations are perhaps the most important relationships people develop in their adult lives. The quality of a romantic relationship has direct bearing on physical and psychological health and more broadly on the quality of life (e.g., Coyne & Downey, 1991; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Myers & Diener, 1995). Given the key role that emotions play in interpersonal relations (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Prager, 1995), the way emotions are experienced, regulated, and expressed is likely to affect the quality of romantic relations. This project attempts to study the nature of emotional regulation and expression in the context of romantic relationships and investigate the possible correlation of emotion regulation mechanisms with relationship satisfaction. Most of the items you answered are taken from standardized questionnaires and tap into the way you manage your emotional responses as well the quality of your romantic relationship.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or feel uncertain about any aspect of the project, I would encourage you to contact me at 406-243-4522 or via email at [Makon.Fardis@umontana.edu](mailto:Makon.Fardis@umontana.edu). I would be happy to address any questions or concerns.

Appendix H: Demographic Information

1. Age-----
2. Gender
  - Male-----
  - Female-----
5. Year in school
  - 1—2—3—4—5 or more
4. Race and Ethnicity (Indicate if more than one applies)
  - African American-----
  - Asian American-----
  - Caucasian (White)-----
  - Hispanic American-----
  - Native American-----
  - Other (specify)-----
5. Current Relationship Status (Indicate if more than one applies)
  - Dating-----
  - Living together-----
  - Married-----
  - Separated-----
  - Divorced-----
  - Not in a relationship-----
6. How long have you been in this relationship? -----
7. Your romantic partner's gender
  - Male-----
  - Female-----