

Running Head: MENTALIZATION, EMOTION CONTROL AND SATISFACTION IN COUPLE

Understanding the roles of Reflective Function and Emotion Control in Relationship Satisfaction

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Abstract

Reflective function, defined as a person's capacity to be curious about and open to their own and other peoples' mind-states, is a concept that has gained attention in the attachment literature as a way to explain the affect-regulating function of attachment relationships (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004). Attachment theorists have found that greater emotional control in couple relationships is linked to insecure attachment styles (Feeney, 1995) and that lower emotion control tends to lead to spouses feeling more satisfied within their marriage (Feeney, 1999). Reflective function is a factor which, to our knowledge, has never been investigated in terms of its effects on couple relationship functioning. Furthermore, the role of reflective function in emotion regulation in couple relationships has not yet been examined in the literature. As such, the aim of the current research was to investigate the role of reflective function and of emotion control in relation to relationship satisfaction within adult couples. We hypothesized that couples' higher reflective function, and lower emotional control would be related to their higher relationship satisfaction and that couples' higher reflective function would be related to their higher relationship satisfaction through their own lower emotional control. The participants in this study consisted of 27 couples involved in committed romantic relationships. Couples had to have been living together for at least one year and had to be over eighteen years of age. They were asked to complete a battery of questionnaires online. Results demonstrated that relationship satisfaction and reflective function were significantly related, but in the opposite direction than expected. We also found that emotion control and relationship satisfaction were significantly related, a finding that is consistent with previous research (e.g., Feeney, 1999).

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Table of contents

Abstract ii

Acknowledgments iii

Introduction 1

 Attachment theory in couple relationships 1

 Emotion control, attachment security and relationship satisfaction 2

 Reflective function, attachment security and adult attachment relationships 4

 Reflective function and couple therapy 8

 Reflective function, emotion control and relationship satisfaction 9

 Current study 10

Methodology 11

 Participants 11

 Measures 12

 Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ) 12

 Courtauld Emotional Control Scale-Revised (CECS-R) 14

 Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) 15

 Design 16

 Procedure 16

 Analyses 17

Results 18

Discussion	24
Reflective function	26
Emotion control.....	29
Clinical Implications	32
Strengths and Limitations.....	32
Future directions.....	34
Conclusions	37
References.....	38
Appendices.....	44
Appendix A: Online consent form	44
Appendix B: Ethics certificate	46
Appendix C: Recruitment poster.....	47
Appendix D: Sociodemographic Questionnaire.....	48
Appendix E : Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ)	49
Appendix F: Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)	51
Appendix G: Courtauld Emotional Control Scale-Revised (CECS-R).....	56

Understanding the Roles of Reflective Function and Emotion Control in Relationship Satisfaction

There is no doubt that the question of “what makes a relationship work?” is one that many people have been curious about. Though there is no single or simple answer to this question, researchers and couple therapists have an active role in identifying potential factors that contribute to a healthy relationship functioning. Relationship satisfaction, in particular, is a component of relationship functioning that has gained a significant amount of research interest (e.g., Velotti et al., 2016; Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017; Feeney, 1999; Murray, 2005). This is an important area of research because findings related to relationship satisfaction could not only allow couples to gain insight and reflect on their own relationship functioning, but could also serve as useful information for therapists who are working with couples.

Attachment theory in couple relationships

To date, much of couple research has focused on attachment styles (i.e., Bowlby’s attachment theory) as something to consider when examining relationship functioning. Attachment styles are often used as a way of understanding couples because there are several studies that have found that Bowlby’s child-parent attachment theory can be applied to adult romantic attachment as well (e.g., Feeney, 1995; Hazan & Shaver 1997; Feeney, 1999, Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017). In general, Bowlby’s attachment theory suggests that children learn how to handle distressing situations through experiences with caregivers (e.g., Feeney 1999). According to adult attachment theory, securely attached individuals tend to have experienced warm and sensitive caregiving, which in turn lead them to handle negative feelings constructively by acknowledging their distress and seeking support (Feeney, 1999). These individuals also tend to view themselves as loveable and worthy, and tend to approach new

experiences with curiosity, confidence and trust (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017). Conversely, insecurely attached children will tend to have experienced inaccessible, negligent and/or inconsistent caregiving (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017), which in turn can result in an individual restricting their expression of negative feelings in order to reduce conflict with attachment figures (i.e., avoidant attachment) or in an individual showing heightened awareness and expression of negative feelings (i.e., anxious-ambivalent attachment; Feeney, 1999). In terms of the relationship between attachment theory and relationship satisfaction, it has been found that one's own attachment security is linked to higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017), that attachment insecurity in general is linked to lower levels of satisfaction (e.g., Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017) and that insecure attachment is related to less frequent and intense positive emotions and more frequent and intense negative emotions (Feeney, 1999). Thus, as a result of these findings, some researchers might wonder what leads securely attached individuals to be more satisfied in their adult relationships, than insecurely attached individuals.

Emotion control, attachment security and relationship satisfaction

In line with this question, Feeney's (1999) research found that emotion control, a form of emotion regulation defined as being the "bottling up" of emotion, is one factor that was linked to both security of attachment and to relationship satisfaction experienced by a married person (Feeney, 1999). Specifically, the findings from this study suggested that insecure attachment was related to greater emotion control in married couples, and that spouses tend to be more satisfied within their marriage when they express their positive emotions and when their partner express their negative emotions (Feeney, 1999). This relationship between lower emotion control and spouses' satisfaction could be explained by the logic that expressing negative feelings to a partner, as opposed to "bottling them up", enables couples to discuss, and potentially resolve

certain relationship problems (Feeney, 1999). In addition, it also makes sense that securely attached individuals are less likely to control their emotions than insecurely attached individuals, because securely attached individuals tend to seek support after they acknowledge their distress, which as a result, makes them more likely to express their feelings (i.e., rather than “bottling them up”). This is not the case for insecurely attached individuals, however, as people who are high in attachment avoidance tend to use suppression as an emotion regulations strategy, which results in them inhibiting the behavioral expression of distress (Garrison, Kahn, Miller & Sauer, 2014), and people who are high in attachment anxiety tend to fear rejection, which may also lead them to engage in suppression (Garrison, Kahn, Miller & Sauer, 2014). Emotion suppression and emotion control, then become important considerations when investigating the link between security of attachment and relationship satisfaction.

Consistent with this line of thought, Velotti and colleagues (2016) examined the role of “bottling up” or “supressing” emotions on relationship satisfaction, and found that emotion suppression, defined as being “the attempt to reduce or inhibit ongoing emotional expression,” was linked to marital satisfaction within newlywed couples (Velotti et al., 2016). Specific results from this longitudinal study suggested that, 5 months after getting married (at time 1), wives’ marital quality was negatively influenced by their own and by their partner’s use of suppression and that husbands’ marital quality was affected by their own use of suppression. It was also found that, two years after marriages (at time 2), husbands use of suppression remained a significant predictor of marital quality as perceived by both spouses (Velotti et al., 2016). Thus, put together, the findings discussed above suggest that the act of “bottling up”, “supressing” or “reducing/inhibiting” emotion expressions is linked to insecure attachment and leads to lower satisfaction within adult attachment relationships.

Reflective function, attachment security and adult attachment relationships

In addition, another interesting factor to consider when looking at satisfaction within adult attachment relationships through the lenses of Bowlby's attachment theory is the role of reflective function (i.e., mentalizing). Reflective function, a term often used interchangeably with "mentalization," stems from attachment theory and involves a person's capacity to be curious about and open to the mind-states of others (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004). More specifically, it refers to a person's ability to understand, perceive and reason about oneself and others in terms of mental states (i.e., feelings, beliefs, intentions and desires; Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1998) and has also been understood as being "the capacity to recognize and articulate one's own affect and to be empathetically attuned to those of others" (Ringel, 2011, p. 62). Attachment theorists and clinicians have observed that individuals who mentalize well tend to be interested in their own and other peoples' mental states, comfortable exploring difficult memories and experiences, open to perspectives other than their own, curious about others, able to learn from others, able to tolerate uncertainty and change, interested in understanding how they impact others, capable of forgiveness and able to tolerate conflict and conflict resolution (MacIntosh, 2019). Conversely, people who are low in reflective function have a tendency to make automatic assumptions, struggle in regulating their emotional distress in relation to others, lack flexibility about their own perspective, tend to focus on external features of self and others, tend to focus on behavioural characteristics rather than deeper motivations, tend to avoid mentalizing and can become angry, avoidant, defensive or uncooperative when challenged to expand their own mental view (MacIntosh, 2019). Interestingly, research on this topic has also found that the ability to explore the meaning of others' actions (i.e., the ability to mentalize)

arguably underlies the capacity for affect regulation, impulse control and self-monitoring (Fonagy & Target, 1997).

Developmental attachment theorists (e.g., Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004; MacIntosh, 2019), propose that mentalization abilities start developing in childhood through the child's relationship with an optimally responsive and attuned caregiver (MacIntosh, 2019). According to MacIntosh (2019), children of optimally responsive caregivers are more likely to believe that they are loveable, knowable and tolerable, that others are knowable, safe and understandable and that their own feelings and other peoples' feeling are important (MacIntosh, 2019). However, when a caregiver is missattuned and provides confusing and incongruent mirroring of their own distressed state, it might leave the child feeling confused, disoriented and bad about themselves in their own inner world (MacIntosh, 2019).

Given the similarities that exist between a securely attached individual and an individual who is high in reflective function, it is not surprising, then, that a person's capacity to mentalize has been found to be rooted in the absence or presence of attachment security (Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1998). Indeed, studies have suggested that reflective function develops in the context of secure attachment relationships, and that disruptions in attachment relationships have been associated with impairments in mentalizing (Fonagy et al., 2016). Past research has also demonstrated that people with higher reflective function scores are more likely to have more securely attached children than people with lower reflective function scores (Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1998), that a caregiver's ability to picture the mental states of their own parents is predictive of the infant's attachment security (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004) and that there is a direct and indirect link between a mother's mentalizing ability and the development her child's reflective function ability (i.e., the child's theory of mind; Fonagy,

Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004; Benbassat & Priel, 2012). Moreover, this association between mentalization and attachment can be further justified through some of Fonagy and colleagues (2004) observations, which suggested that securely attached children are able to feel safe when it comes to attributing mental states to their caregiver's behaviour (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004). This, in turn allow them to reflect on, and makes sense of, their own and other peoples' mind-states. Insecurely attached children, however, are more likely to shun the mental state of others to some degree, or to stay focused on their own state of distress (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004).

Additionally, even though mentalization has been discussed within the context of childhood development here, it should be noted that reflective function is a construct that can be measured and assessed in adulthood. One way that reflective function is measured is through coding the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) using the Reflective Function Coding Scale (Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1998). The AAI is a semi-structured attachment interview that asks individuals about their early experience with caregivers (e.g., Jessee, 2017). This interview asks individuals to reflect on their childhood experiences and to think about the impact that these experiences might have on their current personality and behaviours (De Haas, Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van Ijzendoorn, 1994). One important thing to note about the AAI coding system is that it measures both attachment experiences (i.e., experiences that have likely taken place in the past), and 'state of mind' (i.e., the way in which individuals represent those experiences; De Haas, Bakermans-Kranenburg & Van Ijzendoorn, 1994). Utilisation of the Reflective Function Coding Scale (Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1998) for the AAI requires substantial training on the part of coders, and is a highly time consuming procedure. Recently, efforts have been made to develop a questionnaire that would allow reflective functioning to be assessed more

efficiently (albeit with less nuance). The Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ; Fonagy et al., 2016) is a new questionnaire with adequate psychometric properties that has been created for this purpose.

Although not yet thoroughly tested, it has been suggested that reflective function is linked to the development and maintenance of strong, loving couples (MacIntosh, 2019). For example, MacIntosh (2019) reported that mentalization abilities make it possible for a person to acknowledge and take responsibility for themselves in relationships, to be empathetic and compassionate towards their partner, to be vulnerable and open, and to establish both safe and clear boundaries with one's partner (MacIntosh, 2019). Relatedly, the idea of reflective function as being a contributing factor to relationship satisfaction has been indirectly explored in the past in a study by Jessee and colleagues (2017), who investigated the role of reflective function in marital and co-parenting quality. The results from this study suggested that that wives' higher levels of reflective function was linked to higher levels of positive- and lower levels of negative-marital and co parenting interactions, suggesting that there is a link between maternal reflective function and marital quality (Jessee et al., 2017). In their study, marital quality was coded based on twelve different variables including engagement, enjoyment, expression of positive affect, irritation, expression of negative affect, cooperation, balance, sensitivity/support, conflict resolution, and global interaction quality (Jesses et al., 2017). It is true that the construct of marital quality differs from the construct of relationship satisfaction, but because a central part of both marital quality and relationship satisfaction involves examining the dyad's interaction patterns (e.g., Feeney, 2002), and that both of these constructs are measured in adult attachment relationships, it becomes clear that these two constructs are quite similar in nature. In fact, when looking at previous studies that have investigated the construct of relationship satisfaction, this

construct was defined as being “the degree to which respondents feel satisfied with their partner” (e.g., Spanier, 1976; Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017) which by nature, includes looking at their dyadic interactions as well. Therefore, it would not be surprising to find a link between levels of reflective function and relationship satisfaction within a wider range of couples as well (e.g., couples who are not married and couples who do not have kids). Additionally, when discussed within the context of couple therapy, it has been suggested that poor mentalization capacities strongly influence the development of distress in the couple and can create challenges in the therapeutic process, particularly for those who have experienced a severe lack of attuned caregiving in the form of developmental trauma (MacIntosh, 2019). Specifically, MacIntosh (2019) described this experience as therapists “putting out fires, and containing and explaining, but never getting anywhere” (MacIntosh, 2019). A person’s mentalization capacities, then, could potentially help explain why some couples progress better in couples therapy than others and why therapy is more successful for some couples than others.

Reflective function and couple therapy

In terms of couple therapy, one approach that has been found to have an effective outcome for many couples is Emotionally focused couple therapy (EFT; Johnson, 2004), an attachment-based approach which uses experiential and systemic methods to help improve relationship distress within couples (Burgess et al., 2015). EFT is an example of an approach to couple therapy in which a high percentage of couples (i.e., 70–73% of couples) showed recovery from relationship distress after only 8–12 sessions (Burgess et al., 2015), and in which 60-70% of couples had maintained or increased their levels of satisfaction within their relationship 3 months to 2 years after therapy (Burgess et al., 2015). However, some researchers might still wonder why there are couples who do not fall within these categories. Specifically, it would be

interesting to know what differs the 70-73% of couples who do show recovery after 8-12 sessions, from the 27-30% of couples who do not, and what differs the 60-70% of couples who maintain or increase levels of relationship satisfaction posttherapy, from those who do not. Assuming that some couples are in therapy in order to feel more satisfied in their relationships, one way to further investigate these questions would be to gain a better understanding of the factors that contribute to relationship satisfaction. In other words, understanding some of the things that lead to higher levels of relationship satisfaction within couples, may also help in identifying and understanding some of the factors that could lead to a better couple therapy outcome.

Reflective function, emotion control and relationship satisfaction

Taking together some of the things that have been discussed here so far about reflective function, emotion control and relationship satisfaction, it would not be surprising to find both direct and indirect links between these three constructs in couple relationships. Specifically, knowing that previous research has suggested that maternal reflective function is related to quality of marital interactions (Jessee, 2017), and that lower emotion control and suppression are linked to higher satisfaction within married couples (Feeney, 1999; Velotti et al., 2016), encourages the possibility that emotion control and reflective function could be directly related to relationship satisfaction. In addition, taking into account some of the other things that have been discussed here so far, namely the proposition that reflective function develops within the context of secure attachment relationships (e.g., Fonagy et al., 2016) and that securely attached individuals tend to be able to seek support when they acknowledge their distress (i.e., as opposed to “bottling up” feelings; e.g., Feeney, 1999), then it would also not be surprising to find that individuals who have better mentalization capacities also control their emotions less, which, as

Feeney (1999) and Velotti and colleagues (2016) suggested would lead them to be more satisfied within their relationships. The link between reflective function and emotion control can be further justified through McIntosh's (2019) observations which suggest that individuals who have poor mentalization capacities also tend to have avoidant tendencies (e.g., they avoid mentalizing and tend to become defensive or avoidant when someone challenges their mental view (Macintosh, 2019)) and tend to have troubles regulating their emotions with others (e.g., Macintosh, 2019).

Current study

To our knowledge, no research to date has investigated the roles of both emotion control and reflective function on relationship satisfaction. This is an important topic to explore not only because it will allow us to gain a better understanding of what contributes to a healthy relationship functioning within couples, but also because the findings could lead to some important implications for couple therapy. For example, if our findings were to suggest that a person's level of reflective function and emotion control are related to relationship satisfaction, then it may also be possible that these two variables play a role in the progress of couple therapy (e.g., an individual's level of reflective function and emotion control could be linked to the couples' success in couples' therapy). Another interesting implication for couple therapy relates to how practitioners may chose to approach couple therapy. Specifically, if our research were to suggest that reflective function is linked to relationship satisfaction *because* people with higher reflective function also control their emotions less, then reflective function is something that could be useful to incorporate/ integrate into couple therapy. For example, working with couples within a therapy context to increase their ability to mentalize, may in turn help them be more satisfied within their relationships. Moreover, because reflective function has been found to be

linked to attachment security within the context of a parent-child relationship (Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1998), it could also be possible for it to play a role in the creation of attachment security within an adult romantic relationship.

With this in mind, the aim of the current research was to investigate the role of reflective function and of emotion control in relation to relationship satisfaction, while taking into consideration a variety of different types of couples (e.g., married, non-married, heterosexual, non-heterosexual, parents, non-parents etc). Here, the construct of relationship satisfaction, rather than marital quality, was chosen in order to be able to broaden the sample (i.e., our study will assess relationship satisfaction in both married and non married couples). We hypothesized that 1) couples' higher reflective function would be related couples' higher relationship satisfaction, 2) couples' lower emotional control would be related to couples' higher relationship satisfaction and 3) couples' higher reflective function would be related to couples' higher relationship satisfaction through their lower emotional control (mediation effects). In other words, this third hypothesis states that we expected reflective function to be related to relationship satisfaction, because couples with higher levels of reflective function control their emotions less, which in turn leads to a more satisfying relationship.

Methodology

Participants

Twenty seven couples participated in this research. Couples had to be living together for at least one year prior to taking the survey, had to be able to complete a questionnaire in English and had to be at least eighteen years of age. Because the eligibility criteria to participate to this study was quite broad, it allowed a variety of different types of couples to participate (e.g.,

married and non-married couples, heterosexual and non-heterosexual couples, parents and non-parent couples, couples who are seeking therapy or not seeking therapy, couples from all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds etc.), thus allowing greater generalizability of the results to the general population of adult couples. The participants were recruited through advertisements online (e.g., social media, university websites, emails, Kijiji, Craigslist, Online community boards etc.), through posters that were placed in universities in Ottawa (i.e., the University of Ottawa, Saint Paul University, Carleton University), in public places throughout the city (e.g., public libraries, coffee shops, community centers etc.), and in a few public locations outside of Ottawa (e.g., train stations). Participants who failed to complete at least ninety percent of each questionnaire were removed from the study, which resulted in a final sample of 27 couples. Missing values were imputed. Prior to running the regression analyses, all variables were assessed for normality. All variables of interest showed normal distributions.

Measures

Participants were asked to complete a battery of questionnaires online which measured reflective function, emotion control and relationship satisfaction. The questionnaires included a sociodemographic questionnaire, the Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ; Fonagy et al. 2016), the Courtauld Emotional Control Scale-Revised (CECS-R; Feeney, 1995; Watson & Greer, 1983) and the dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976).

Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ; Fonagy et al. 2016) The Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ) was designed to provide an easy-to-administer self-report measure of mentalizing (Fonagy et al. 2016). The version of the RFQ that was used in this study had 46 items and was rated on a 6-point likert scale, where 1 represented “completely disagree” and 6 represented “completely agree” (Fonagy et al. 2016).

The RFQ contains two subscales, including the “Certainty about Mental States (RFQ_C)” subscale and the “Uncertainty about Mental States (RFQ_U)” subscale. The RFQ_C scale measures the extent to which an individual is certain about mental states by how much they disagree with statements such as “People’s thoughts are a mystery to me” (Fonagy et. al., 2016; Cucchi, Hampton & Moulton, 2018). Scores on this scale are calculated as follows: 2 (i.e., if the person selected “1”), 1, 0, 0, 0, 0 (i.e., if the person selected “6”; Fonagy et al. 2016). High agreement (lower scores) here represents a more genuine mentalizing, and low agreement (higher scores) represents hypermentalization or “excessive mentalization”, which Fonagy and colleagues describes as being representations of actions without appropriate evidence available to support them (Fonagy et. al., 2016). Conversely, RFQ_U measures the extent to which an individual is uncertain about mental states by how much the individual agrees to a statement such as, “Sometimes I do things without really knowing why” (Fonagy et al. 2016 & Cucchi, Hampton & Moulton, 2018). Scores on this scale were coded as follows: 0 (i.e., if the person selected “1”), 0, 0, 0, 1, 2 (i.e., if the person selected “6”). Lower scores reflect genuine mentalizing, while very high scores reflect almost a complete lack of knowledge about mental states or “hypomentalizing” (i.e., “an inability to consider complex models of one’s own mind and/or that of others” Fonagy et al., 2016).

The RFQ shows satisfactory reliability and test–retest reliability (Fonagy et al. 2016). In addition, the internal consistency and test–retest reliability of both subscales were reported to be satisfactory to excellent. Specifically, estimates of internal consistency for RFQ_U and RFQ_C were reported to be 0.77 and 0.65 when tested in a clinical sample, and 0.63 and 0.67 when tested in a non-clinical sample (Fonagy et al. 2016). The test–retest reliability over a period of 3 weeks was excellent ($r=0.84$ for the RFQ_U and $r=0.75$ for the RFQ_C)(Fonagy et al. 2016).

Previous studies have also reported that the RFQ shows good construct validity (Cucchi, 2016). In the present study, the RFQ_U was found to have an alpha coefficient of .77, and the RFQ_C had an alpha coefficient of .82. In addition, in order to stay consistent with Fonagy and colleagues' (2016) procedures, we only used the 17 items from each scale in our analyses. Each of these items were deemed important according to their factor analysis (Fonagy et al., 2016).

Courtauld Emotional Control Scale-Revised (CECS-R; Feeney, 1995; Watson & Greer, 1983) The original CECS was developed to evaluate the extent to which individuals report controlling anger, anxiety and depressed mood. The CECS is a 21-item questionnaire which has 3 subscales (i.e., anger, depressed mood and anxiety) and includes questions such as “What happens when you get angry, what do you do?” (Watson & Greer, 1983). Good internal consistency has been reported for each subscale of the CECS, with an alpha coefficient of 0.86, for anger, 0.88 for depressed mood and 0.88 for anxiety (Watson & Greer, 1983). Good test-retest reliability has also been reported for the anger subscale ($r=0.86$), the anxiety subscale ($r=0.84$), and depressed mood subscale ($r=0.89$) (Watson & Greer, 1983). Additionally, face validity was also provided for the CECS, as significant inverse correlations were found between the CECS and the Bortner Scale (the Bortner; Bortner, 1969), a scale used to measure patterns of Type A Behaviour (Watson & Greer, 1983; the Bortner; Bortner, 1969).

The current study used a revised version of the CECS (i.e., the CECS-R), in order to measure emotion control. The CECS-R was originally used by Feeney (1995) and contains similar properties as the CECS (i.e., same subscales, same number of items etc.), but was created in order to measure emotional expression, specifically within the context attachment relationships (Feeney, 1995). Similar to the original CECS, participants in the current study were asked to rate their degree of control of a particular emotion (anger, depressed mood,

anxiety), but were asked to rate these specifically within the context of their couple relationship (e.g., “When I feel angry about some aspect of our relationship, my reaction when I am with my partner is to...”). Participants were asked to rate their answer on a 6-point likert scale ranging from 1 (hardly ever) to 6 (almost always) (Feeney, 1995) with regards to each item. Some items on the CECS-R include, but are not limited to, “I keep quiet”, “I bottle it up” and “I avoid making a scene.” High scores here indicated greater emotional control, wherein “emotion control” was defined as being participants “hiding and smothering their feelings” (Feeney, 1995). Scores were then be summed across emotions to yield an overall measure of emotional control (Feeney, 1995). In the present study, the CECS-R was found to have an alpha coefficient of .93.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) The DAS is a 32-item questionnaire which measures the quality of marriage and other similar dyads. This questionnaire has been designed to be used with either married or unmarried cohabiting couples (Spanier, 1976), and was used in the current study to measure relationship satisfaction. The DAS includes four subscales, including the dyadic satisfaction subscale, the dyadic cohesion subscale, the dyadic consensus subscale, and the affectional expression subscale (Spanier, 1976). The total DAS scale and its components have been deemed to have a sufficiently high reliability to justify their use (Spanier, 1976). Specifically, the reliability of the DAS has been reported to be .96, the reliability of the Consensus Subscale has been reported to be .90, the reliability of the Dyadic Satisfaction Subscale has been reported to be .94, the reliability of the Dyadic Cohesion Subscale has been reported to be .86 and the reliability of the Affectional Expression Subscale has been reported to be .73. Additionally, in order to determine the construct validity of the DAS, this questionnaire was compared to the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale. The correlation between these scales was .86 for married respondents and .88 for divorced respondents,

suggesting that the DAS was measuring the same general construct as a well-accepted marital adjustment scale. In the present study, the DAS was found to have an alpha coefficient of .92.

Questions from the DAS include, but are not limited to, “In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?” and “How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?” Moreover, this questionnaire allows for easy coding and scoring, and yields a total score, as well as four sub scores (i.e., scores for each individual scale) (Spanier, 1976; Carey, Spector, Lantinga & Kraus, 1993).

Design

This research used a quantitative, cross-sectional, survey design wherein recruited couples were asked to fill out a battery of questionnaires online regarding reflective function, emotion control and relationship satisfaction. The online surveys were completed through a secure website. The order of the questionnaires were counterbalanced (i.e., randomized).

Procedure

Participants were invited to complete each questionnaire online through a secure online website. Each participant was notified that the battery of questionnaires would take approximately thirty minutes to complete and that each questionnaire would be answered anonymously. Every participant was expected to complete one set of questionnaires, meaning that there were two completed questionnaires per couple. In order to assure anonymity, a unique code was assigned to each individual participant and to each couple (i.e., only one code was assigned to each couple), and no identifying information, such as name or date of birth was asked in the questionnaires. Consent was obtained electronically from participants before they began answering the questions, where the purpose of the study, the data collection process and the participants rights to withdraw from the study at any time were explained. The researchers’

contact information such as their email address and the University's phone number was also provided. Once the participants completed the questionnaires, they were given the opportunity to take part of a draw, which gave them a chance to win a 250\$ amazon gift certificate. If the participant was interested in participating to this draw, they were asked to provide an email address where they could be reached, if they won the prize. Participation in this draw was optional. The answers to each questionnaire were coded by the experimenter and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Ethics approval was obtained from the Saint Paul University Research Ethics Board (REB file number: 1360.2/19).

Analyses

Descriptive statistics were conducted in order to explore some of the sample's characteristics. Gender, age, sexual orientation, annual income, ethnicity, relationship length, number of years that the couple live together, and whether couples have previously participated in, or are currently seeking couple therapy were explored.

Correlational and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted in order to determine the relationship between reflective function, emotion control and relationship satisfaction.

Drawing from Baron and Kenny 's (1986) article on mediation models (Baron & Kenny, 1986), five simple regression analyses and one hierarchical regression analysis were conducted in order to determine whether reflective function and emotion control would predict relationship satisfaction, and whether emotion control was a mediating variable between reflective function and relationship satisfaction. These analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

According to the mediation model, in order to establish meditation, the independent variable (i.e., reflective function) must affect the mediator (i.e., emotion control), the

independent variable (i.e., reflective function) must be shown to affect the dependent variable (i.e., relationship satisfaction) and the mediator (i.e., emotion control) must affect the dependent variable (i.e., relationship satisfaction) (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Therefore, the regression analyses that were conducted not only allowed us to determine the individual effects of reflective function and emotion control on relationship satisfaction, but also allowed us to determine whether emotion control is a mediator between reflective function and relationship satisfaction.

Results

Descriptive statistics were conducted in order to explore some of the characteristics of the participants (table 1) and of their relationship (table 2). Five correlation analyses and five regression analyses were conducted for the purpose of this study. A summary of the results from the correlation analyses can be found in table 3, and a summary of the results from the regression analyses can be found in table 4.

The first simple regression analysis was conducted in order to predict relationship satisfaction based on levels of reflective function according to the RFQ_C scale. A significant regression equation was found between these two variables, $F(1,25)= 6.394$, $p < .05$, with an R^2 of .204, showing that higher scores on the RFQ_C were significantly related to higher scores on the DAS. The relationship between these two variables is presented in figure 1. The second simple regression analysis was conducted in order to predict relationship satisfaction based on levels of reflective function according to the RFQ_U scale. No significant relationship was found between these two variables, $F(1,25)= .095$, $p > .05$, with an R^2 of .004. The third simple regression analysis was conducted in order to predict relationship satisfaction based on emotion control. A significant regression equation was found between these two variables, $F(1,25)= 12.654$, $p < .01$, with an R^2 of .336, showing that lower scores on the CECS-R were significantly

Table 1*Participants' Characteristics*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Women	30	55.6
Men	24	44.4
Non-Binary	0	0
Other	0	0
Age		
18-24	13	24.1
25-34	29	53.7
35-44	6	11.1
45-54	6	11.1
55-64	0	0
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	40	74.1
Bisexual	5	9.3
Gay/Lesbian	7	13.0
Other	2	3.7
Annual Income		
Under 20000	5	9.3
20000-50000	12	22.2
50000-100000	20	37.0
More than 100000	17	31.5
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	42	77.8
Black (e.g., Haitian, African, Jamaican, Somali)	0	0
Asian (e.g., Chinese, East Indian, Japanese, Vietnamese)	6	11.1
Latino or Hispanic	2	3.7
Pacific Islander	0	0
Middle Eastern	0	0
Native Canadian/First nations/Métis	1	1.0
Other	3	5.6

Note. *n* = 54 individuals

Table 2*Participants' Relationship characteristics*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Relationship Length		
1-2 years	12	22.2
2-5 years	20	37.0
5-10 years	12	22.2
10-15 years	4	7.4
15-20 years	2	3.7
20-25 years	0	0
Over 25 years	4	7.4
Years of cohabitation		
1-2 years	22	40.7
2-5 years	18	33.3
5-10 years	6	11.1
10-15 years	2	3.7
15-20 years	2	3.7
20-25 years	1	1.9
Over 25 years	3	5.6
Previously involved in couple therapy		
Yes	14	25.9
No	40	74.1
Currently seeking couple therapy		
Yes	7	13.0
No	47	87.0

Note. *n* = 27 couples

Table 3

Summary of correlations between emotion control, relationship satisfaction and reflective function

Variable	RFQ_C	CECS-R	DAS	RFQ_U
1. Reflective Function Certainty (RFQ_C)	-	.19	.01*	-
2. Emotion Control (CECS-R)	.19	-	.00**	.60
3. Relationship Satisfaction (DAS)	.01*	.00**	-	.76

4. Reflective Function Uncertainty (RFQ_U)	-	.60	.76	-
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Note. *p<.05, **p<.01

Table 4

Summary of regression analyses predicting relationship satisfaction and emotion control

Dependent Variable	Predictor Variables	B	Std. Error	R ²	F	Sig	
Relationship Satisfaction	Model 1	Reflective Function Certainty (RFQ_C)	.45	.48	.204	6.39	.01
	Model 2	Reflective Function Uncertainty (RFQ_U)	.06	.61	.004	.09	.76
	Model 3	Emotion Control (CECS-R)	-.58	3.51	.33	12.65	.00
Emotion Control	Model 1	Reflective Function Certainty (RFQ_C)	.25	.02	.06	1.76	.19
	Model 2	Reflective Function Uncertainty (RFQ_U)	-.10	.02	.01	.27	.60

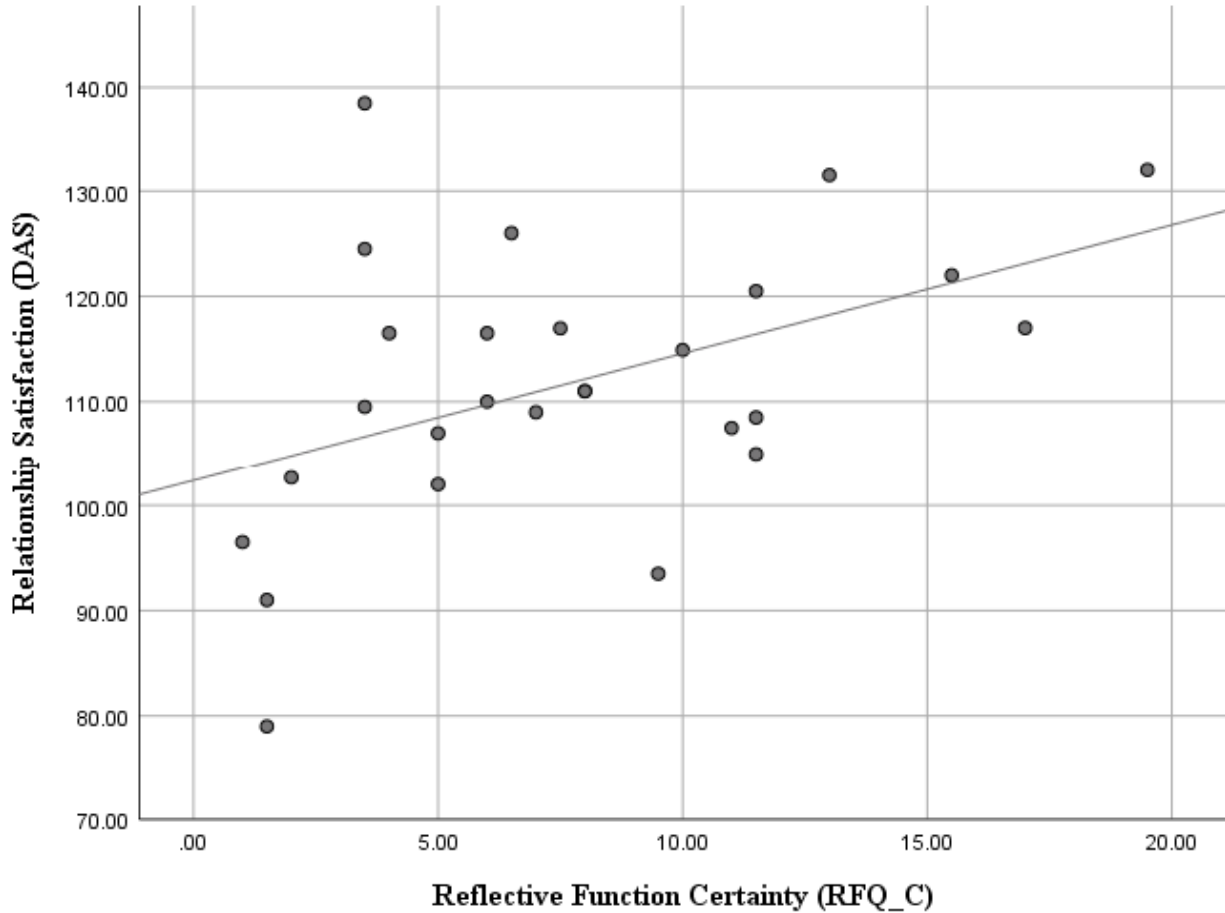


Figure 1: Scatterplot showing the relationship between relationship satisfaction (DAS) and reflective function through certainty scale (RFQ_C)

related to higher scores on the DAS. The relationship between these two variables is presented in figure 2. The fourth simple regression analysis was conducted in order to determine whether there was a significant relationship between emotion control and reflective function according the certainty scale (RFQ_C). No significant regression equation was found between emotion control and reflective function according to the certainty scale, $F(1,25)= 1.769 p > .05$, with an R^2 of .066. The final regression analysis was conducted in order to determined whether there was a significant relationship between emotion control and reflective function according the

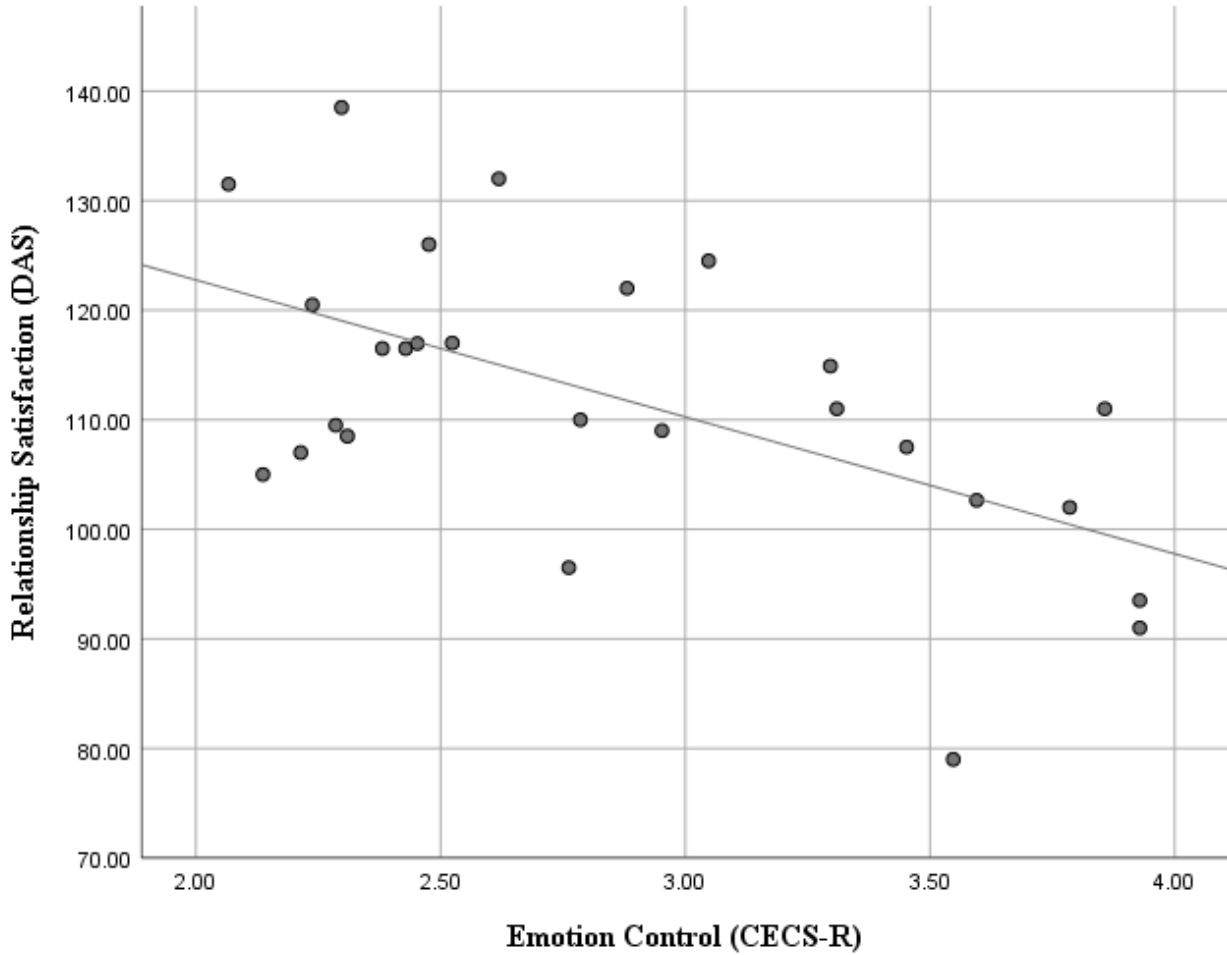


Figure 2: Scatterplot showing the relationship between relationship satisfaction (DAS) and emotion control (CECS-R)

uncertainty scale (RFQ_U). No significant regression equation was found between emotion control and reflective function according to the certainty scale, $F(1,25)= .275 p > .05$, with an R^2 of .011.

Due to the non significant results found between reflective function and emotion control, we did not report the findings from the hierarchical regression here because, according to Baron and Kenny ‘s (1986) article on mediation models (Baron & Kenny, 1986), the relationship between emotion control (i.e., the mediator) and reflective function (i.e., the independent

variable) needs to be significant in order for emotion control to be considered a mediating variable between reflective function and relationship satisfaction (i.e., the dependant variable).

Discussion

Reflective function, emotion control and relationship satisfaction have been the three main concepts of interest in this research. The findings from this research suggested that 1) couples who were lower in reflective function through scoring higher on the certainty scale (i.e., the scale that measures hypermentalization) were more satisfied in their relationships than couples who were higher in reflective function, 2) couples who controlled their emotions less were more satisfied in their relationships than couples who controlled them more, and 3) there was no significant relationship between reflective function and emotion control.

Based on attachment theory literature, one thing that emotion control, relationship satisfaction and reflective function have in common is that they are all related to attachment theory and security of attachment in some way. In the case of reflective function, research has suggested that a person's ability to mentalize is rooted in their attachment security (i.e., people who are raised in a secure environment, tend to be able to develop this ability more optimally; Allen, Fonagy & Bateman, 2008). This makes sense because people who are raised within a secure attachment relationship tend to experience more feelings of safety (Allen, Fonagy & Bateman, 2008), which can extend to them feeling safe to be curious about their environment and their own and other peoples' mind states (e.g., feeling safe in being curious about how their caregiver is feeling, their intentions, their behaviours etc.). Conversely, a person who is not provided with that safety and security (i.e., a person who is insecurely attached to their caregiver), is more likely to shun the mental state of others to some degree, or to stay focused on

their own state of distress (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004), making them less likely to develop this ability.

In the case of emotion control, previous research found that higher levels of emotion control is linked to insecure attachment styles within adult romantic relationships (Feeney, 1995), and that lower levels of emotion control is linked to having a more secure attachment style in adult romantic relationships (Feeney, 1999). This makes sense, as people who are securely attached may be more likely to use their partner as a “safe haven” when they are in need of emotional support, a function of attachment that has been said to offer considerable benefits to individuals, particularly when they are feeling sad (Feeney, 1999).

Interestingly, in the case of relationship satisfaction, research has not only found that higher relationship satisfaction is linked to security of attachment (i.e., people who are more satisfied in their relationships tend to be more securely attached; Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017) but that it is also linked to lower levels of emotion control (Feeney, 1999; Velotti et al., 2016). Specifically, previous research has found that people who control or suppress their emotions less tend to be more satisfied within their relationships (Feeney, 1999; Velotti et al., 2016).

Given that emotion control is linked to both attachment security and relationship satisfaction, and that attachment security is directly related to relationship satisfaction, some researchers may have wondered what other factors embedded within a secure attachment could lead to more satisfying relationships (i.e., because secure attachments seem to be the common factor). Moreover, knowing that reflective function is rooted in attachment (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2004), that previous research has found that maternal reflective function leads to more positive- and less negative- marital interaction (Jessee et al., 2017) and that some clinicians and theorists have suggested that reflective function (i.e., mentalization) plays a role

in engaging and maintaining healthy and fulfilling adult relationships (Allen et al., 2008) as well as in the maintenance of strong, loving couples (MacIntosh, 2019), the current study involved an investigation of reflective function as a factor that may contribute directly to relationships satisfaction, as well as the possibility that emotion control may be a mediating factor

Reflective function

The first hypothesis, which stated that couples' reflective function would be related to couples' relationship satisfaction was partially supported, but in the opposite direction than expected and on only one scale of the reflective function questionnaire. Specifically, contrary to our hypothesis, we found that couples who were lower in reflective function through scoring higher on the certainty scale (i.e., the scale that measures hypermentalization), were more satisfied in their relationships than couples who were higher in reflective function according to that scale. There are many possible ways to interpret the finding from this hypothesis.

The first thing that is important to consider when interpreting these findings is the definition of hypermentalization and how it differs from hypomentalization and reflective function. Hypermentalization, often referred to as "excessive mentalization" (Sharp et al., 2011; Sharp, 2014) has been defined as being the "making of assumptions about other peoples' mental states that go far beyond observable data that the average observer will struggle to see how they are justified" (Sharp et al., 2013; Sharp, 2014; Sharp & Vanwoerden, 2015). It has also been defined as being making "overly complex inferences about others' mental states" (Kalpakci et al., 2016) and as attributing "intentions, ideas, beliefs, wishes and so forth to other people where there is no objective data to support such attributions" (Bo et al., 2017).

One aspect that hypermentalizing and reflective function (i.e., genuine mentalizing) have in common is that both of these seemingly imply having the ability to attribute mental states to

oneself and others, whether they are faulty or not. Another common factor between the two is that both people who tend to hypermentalize and people who are high in reflective function hold a certain degree of certainty in attributing mind states to themselves and others, but while people with high reflective function abilities tend to be more modest in terms of understanding their own mind, and humble about understanding others', people who hypermentalize tend to be too certain about the conclusions they draw regarding mental states (Fonagy et al., 2016). This is one of the main factors that differs these two concepts from the concept of hypomentalizing, which implies that people are unable (i.e., do not have the ability) to consider complex models of their own and other people's minds (Fonagy et al., 2016).

Considering the results that came from testing our first hypothesis (i.e., that hypermentalizing is related to higher satisfaction in relationships), as well as what is known about hypermentalizing (e.g., that it implies attributing mind states to oneself and others while not having enough evidence to support them; Sharp, 2014), some questions that arise and that would be worth further investigation include: 1) Could possible faulty assumptions about a partner's mindset be better for the relationship functioning than no assumptions at all? 2) Is there something about a person making an assumption about their partner, even if it's a faulty one, that leads them to feel more satisfied in the relationship? If so, could it be the fact that an effort is made to understand the partner's mindset, even if it's not the right understanding? 3) Could it be possible that people who hypermentalize do not always arrive to the wrong conclusions about their partner's mind states (i.e., they arrive to the right conclusion), even if there is not enough observable data to support it? and 4) could a person's misinterpretation of their partner's mind states be beneficial to the relationship in some way? Given the limited research on hypermentalizing and relationships, it would be important to investigate these questions further

through future research. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn from the existing literature that may help explain why hypermentalization is linked to relationship satisfaction.

One interesting consideration found within the literature is that there is a distinction that has been made between attachment styles and felt attachment security within a current attachment relationship (Diamond & Hicks, 2005). In other words, “attachment style” and “felt attachment security within a current attachment relationship” are two separate constructs and one may not imply the other. Indeed, Diamond and Hicks (2005) suggest that while attachment styles refer to global, trait-like interpersonal orientations that develop based on early interactions with caregivers, current attachment security refers to how much individuals “successfully derive feelings of emotional security within a specific, current attachment relationship” (Diamond & Hicks, 2005). Therefore even though research suggested that reflective function is related to having a secure attachment (Fonagy, Target, Steele & Steele, 1998; Fonagy et al., 2016; Fonagy & Luyten, 2009), which in turn is related to relationship satisfaction (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017), it may not be the case that reflective function leads to having a felt sense of security within a relationship as they are two separate constructs. This introduces the question of whether hypermentalization, as opposed to reflective function, could be a contributing factor to couples’ felt sense of emotional security within their existing relationship. Other research has shown that, in order to feel secure in a specific relationship, people need to believe that their partners see positive qualities in them worth valuing (Murray, 2005), and that people who feel more highly regarded by their partner read less into stressful events than people who feel less positively regarded by their partner (Murray et al., 2003). When relating this to the concept of hypermentalization in romantic relationships, one question that presents itself is whether the assumptions that are drawn from individuals who hypermentalize could be positive ones (e.g., a

person assuming, without necessarily having enough observable data that their partner is accepting and loving of them). If this is the case, then perhaps the mere confidence that a person feels in terms of their partner viewing them in a positive way could be a contributing factor to felt relationship security.

With this in mind, however, it is important to interpret the results from our first hypothesis with some caution, given the nature of hypermentalizing and the way in which the study was conducted (i.e., through self report questionnaires). Specifically, because people who hypermentalize tend to make assumptions without having enough observable data (Sharp. 2014; Sharp et al., 2013), then they may also be making assumptions about how satisfied they are in their relationships (i.e., they may not be genuinely reflecting on the state of their relationship, and be quick to assume their relational state, which may not necessarily be accurate). This is something to consider for future research, and will be discussed in more detail in the “future direction” section of this paper.

Emotion control

The second hypothesis, which stated that couples’ lower levels of emotion control would be related to couples’ higher levels of relationship satisfaction was in fact supported. These findings are consistent with Feeney’s (1999) study, which found that people who control their emotions less tend to be more satisfied within their marriages and with Velotti and colleagues’ study who found that satisfaction with marriage was negatively influenced by the use of suppression (Velotti et al., 2016). This is not a surprising finding because expressing an emotion enables couples to discuss, and potentially resolve certain relationship problems (Feeney, 1999). There is also evidence that shows that people who suppress their emotions tend to experience less positive emotions, have lower self esteem, experience lower life satisfaction and experience

greater symptoms of depression, than people who engage in reappraisal, another form of emotion regulation (Bariola et al., 2011), and that expressing certain emotions such as anger (i.e., as opposed to bottling up the emotion) is beneficial to long term satisfaction within marriages (Feeney, 2002). Thus, considering what is known about emotion control and satisfaction, it makes sense that the current study found that lower emotion control is significantly related to higher relationship satisfaction in couples.

In addition, given that our sample consisted of a broader range of couples (e.g., participants did not need to be married in order to participate), our findings also suggest that lower levels of emotion control contribute to higher levels of satisfaction in a wider range of couples. Specifically, the requirements to participate in our research were purposefully made broad in order to allow a greater variety of couples, coming from different backgrounds and marital statuses, to participate in our research. Indeed, the only requirements to participate in the current study were the following: 1) couples must have been living together for at least one year, 2) both partners in the couple must have been at least 18 years of age and 3) both partners must have been able to understand English well enough to complete questionnaires in English. This differs from some of the previous research done on emotion control and satisfaction within adult attachment relationships, which often focused on married couples (e.g., Feeney, 1999; Velotti, 2016). Thus, by broadening the requirements to participate in this study, the results found on lower emotion control being related to higher relationship satisfaction can be generalized to both married and non-married couples.

Our third hypothesis, which stated that emotion control would act as a mediating variable between reflective function and relationship satisfactions (i.e., that higher reflective function would be significantly related to higher relationship satisfaction *because* of lower levels of

emotion control), was not supported. In order for it to have been supported in that direction, a significant relationship would have had to be found between high reflective function levels and high levels of relationship satisfaction, and a second significant relationship would have had to be found between high reflective function levels and low levels of emotion control, which was not the case in the current study. Interestingly, the findings from testing this hypothesis suggested that there was no significant relationship between reflective function and emotion control in either direction (i.e., not only in the direction that we had hypothesized).

There exist a number of different possibilities that can help explain why no significant relationship was found between emotion control and reflective function. The first possibility stems from the idea that emotion control is only one of many different existing emotion regulation strategies. Some other examples of emotion regulation strategies include, but are not limited to, cognitive reappraisal, rumination, acceptance, denial, blame, avoidance, problem solving (Tang & Huang, 2019; Aldao et al., 2010). Therefore, Fonagy and Target's (1997) observation that reflective function arguably underlying a person's capacity for emotion regulation (Fonagy & Target, 1997) may still be true, but may apply to emotion regulation strategies other than emotion control or emotion suppression. As such, it would be beneficial for future research to investigate, in more detail, whether other emotion regulation strategies are related to a person's reflective function ability. This will be discussed in more detail in the "future direction" section of this paper

Another possibility that could help explain why no significant relationship between reflective function and emotion control was found, can be drawn from some recent research on emotion regulation which found that context had a significant impact on the selection of the emotion regulation strategies used (Tang & Huang, 2019). Contextual factors that were

considered in their research include social context, location, emotion valence, and personality (Tang & Huang, 2019). Therefore, when relating this to the present study, it could be argued that a person's tendency to control their emotions, as opposed to expressing them, has less to do with having the ability to reflect and be curious about mind states, and more to do with the specific contexts in which a person is placed when the emotion is or is not expressed.

Clinical Implications

Some clinically relevant implications can be drawn from this study. Specifically, because, to our knowledge, no research exists on the specific role of hypermentalizing within couple relationships, the results from the current study may be useful for therapists who are working with couples that have a tendency to hypermentalize. Indeed, while some literature may have had a more negative view on hypermentalization (e.g., the idea that misinterpretations of other peoples' mind states can interfere with the development of stable interpersonal relationships; Bo et al., 2017), the current research suggests that there may be some benefits related to hypermentalization in relationships. This, in turn, may encourage couple therapists to stay open minded about the possibility that hypermentalization is contributing to, rather than hindering, the relationship functioning in some way, and explore what it is about this tendency that leads to relationship satisfaction, rather than working on changing that behaviour altogether.

Strengths and Limitations

To our knowledge, no research to date has been done on reflective function in couple relationships. Though there have been some proposed observations from clinicians implying that reflective function is beneficial to relationships in some ways (Allen et al., 2008; MacIntosh, 2019), the specific relationship between reflective function and relationship satisfaction had never been investigated. As such, the main strength of this research is that this was the first study

that investigated this relationship directly. This not only allows us to better understand reflective function and hypermentalization within the context of romantic relationships on a theoretical level, but also, as discussed above, leads to some noteworthy implications on a practical level (i.e., for couple therapists). This study also sets a foundation for future couple research to be done within this area in order to address certain questions that still remain unanswered.

Of course, within every research there also exist certain limitations. In the case of our study, one limitation involves the fact that the data was collected based on self-report questionnaires, which does not ensure the accuracy of answers. Some participants may not have understood a question, may not know have known the answer to a question or may not have felt comfortable to answering a question truthfully (e.g., due fear of judgement and/of discomfort in answering honestly). Additionally, as mentioned previously, it is possible that participants who hypermentalize may have been quick to assume the answers of certain questions, without giving each question enough genuine thought (e.g., not reflecting on the answers as much as other participants may have). It is also possible that some participants did not take the time to answer the questionnaires carefully (e.g., wanting to rush through the questionnaires), and that other participants became fatigued in the process. Participant fatigue might alter the accuracy of the answers, especially towards the end of the questionnaires. Another limitation that is worth noting is our sample size and the nature of our sample in general. Specifically, our sample size was relatively small ($n=27$ couples), and our sample included mostly heterosexual and Caucasian participants, thus limiting the generalizability of the results. In addition, one last noteworthy limitation involves the fact that-the current study did not include a control group, which limits our ability to draw any conclusions about causality.

Nonetheless, we were able to address some of these limitations carefully. Firstly, to address the limitation that some people may not have felt comfortable answering these questions honestly, we ensured that all questionnaires were answered anonymously. This was done in order to increase the probability of participants feeling less worried about their answers by reassuring them that no one will be able to know what they answered. Another limitation that was addressed in this study was potential participant fatigue (i.e., the idea that participants may get as they progress through the questionnaires, which may affect the accuracy of the results). To address this limitation, the order of the questionnaires were purposefully counterbalanced (i.e., randomized).

With this in mind, however, it is equally important to note that not all limitations were addressed. For example, the limitations regarding the small sample size and the homogeneity of the sample (i.e., couples were mostly heterosexual and causation) were not addressed in this study. Therefore, it would be important to consider addressing these in future research.

Future directions

Taking together everything that has been mentioned so far, it becomes clear that there would be value in conducting future research related to relationship satisfaction, emotion control and reflective function in order to address some of the limitations from this study as well as some of the questions mentioned previously that have yet to be answered. As such, the current study can be taken as a first step to a potentially larger project.

The first limitation that could be addressed in future research is the sample size. Increasing the sample size by including more couples in the study will allow researchers to have more conclusive and confident results about whether hypermentalization and emotion control are both truly linked to relationship satisfaction, or whether this just happened to be the case for the

majority of the couples who participated in the current study (i.e., whether it happened by chance). Recruiting more non-heterosexual and non-Caucasian participants, as well as couples from a greater variety of ages may also be beneficial in order to increase the generalizability of the results.

Next, to address the possibility that people who hypermentalize might be making false assumptions about their relationship satisfaction or may be overly confident about the state of their relationships without giving it enough genuine thought, future researchers might want to consider adding one or a few open ended questions about couples' relationship satisfaction that would reflect their thought process in terms of how they arrived to the conclusion that they are satisfied in their relationship. For example, a question such as "how did you reach that conclusion about your relationship satisfaction?" or "what is it about this relationship that leads you to feel satisfied or unsatisfied in your relationship?" may help the researchers understand how much genuine thought the participants put into their answers. Relatedly, if future research continues to find that couples who hypermentalize are indeed more satisfied in their relationships, then the addition of an open question may help researchers gain a deeper understanding of what it is, specifically about couples who hypermentalize, that lead them to feel more satisfied in their relationships by looking for commonalities within their answers. Regardless of what is found in future studies, adding open ended questions relating to relationship satisfaction will allow researchers to better understand participants' subjective experience of their relationship, rather than solely relying on an objective, multiple choice questionnaire which does not allow much room for understanding people's unique experiences. It may also be noteworthy for future research to consider using a different measure to measure hypermentalization such as MASC (Dziobek, 2006), which has been used in previous research to

measure the following four types of responses: 1) a hypermentalizing response, 2) an undermentalizing response, 3) no mentalization response and 4) accurate mentalizing response (Sharp et al., 2011).

Moreover, in order for future research to explore the possibility that emotion regulation strategies other than emotion control (i.e., emotion suppression) may be linked to reflective function, it may be useful to use a more global measure of emotion regulation such as the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) (Gratz & Roemer, 2004) to explore several different dimensions of emotion regulation. Dimensions of emotion regulation measured through this scale include acceptance, ability to engage in goal directed behaviour, impulse control during negative emotions, awareness, access to and use of emotion regulation strategies and clarity (Gratz & Roemer, 2004; Rick et al., 2017). This measure may be especially helpful because it has already been used previously within the context of couple research (e.g., Rick et al., 2017).

Finally, it would be important for future studies to investigate the role of one's own levels of reflective function and emotion control on their partner's perception of relationship satisfaction, rather than computing one mean score for the couples' relationship satisfaction, emotion control and levels of reflective function as it was done in the current study. Doing this would help researchers and clinicians further understand what factors contribute to each partner's relationship satisfaction, and to what degree. It would also be interesting to see whether there are differences that appear based on the characteristics of each participant and couple (e.g., whether gender, sexual orientation, marital status, socioeconomic status, ethnicity etc. effect the results). One way to conduct such research would be by using the Partner Actor Independence Model

which has been reported to be well suited for analysing the influence that members of a dyad have on each other (Fitzpatrick, Gareau, Lafontaine & Patrick Gaudreau, 2016).

Conclusions

The current research explored the relationship between emotion control, reflective function and relationship satisfaction within couples. The findings from this research suggested that both emotion control and hypermentalization were related to relationship satisfaction in couples, and that there was no significant relationship between reflective function and emotion control. Though the findings about emotion control being related to relationship satisfaction were not surprising due to previous research having found similar results (Feeney, 1999; Velotti, 2016), certain questions about how hypermentalization relates to relationship satisfaction still remain unanswered. Future investigation of this would be important in order to get more conclusive answers about how they relate to one another, and would be especially useful for clinicians working with hypermentalizing couples in couple therapy. As such, the current study can be taken as a first step to a potentially larger project.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Online consent form

Reflective function and attachment in adult couple relationships

Informed Consent Form

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY: Reflective function and attachment in adult couple relationships

STUDY RESEARCHERS: Stephanie Wiebe, PhD., C. Psych., Sara Kriplani, B.A. (M.A. candidate), Monica Bridge, B.A. (M.A. candidate)

Invitation to participate: You are being invited to participate in this study about couple relationships. Stephanie Wiebe (PhD.), a clinical psychologist and assistant professor at the School of Counselling, Psychotherapy and Spirituality, is the primary researcher for this research study. This study will also serve as the basis for a Masters thesis for Sara Kriplani and Monica Bridge.

Dr. Wiebe can be reached by mail at 223 Main Street, Ottawa, ON, K1S 1C4, by phone at (613) 236-1393, ext. 2369, or by email at swiebe@ustpaul.ca.

Contact: Sara Kriplani is the main research assistant for this study. She can be reached by email at RelationshipLabSPU@gmail.com.

Purpose of the study: This study is designed to gain a better understanding of how the way partners think and feel in relationships may impact the couple relationship.

Participation: If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a set of questionnaires online that will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. No identifying information will be collected in the questionnaires. In order to link your responses with those of your partner, you should have received a couple code from the researcher that you will need to enter the questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire, you will be invited to enter your email address in order to be entered into a raffle with the chance to win one of four amazon gift cards worth \$250. You are free to choose whether or not to take part in the research study. Also, you are free to withdraw from this research study at any time. If you would like more information about something mentioned here, or if you have any other questions, please feel free to contact one of the researchers above.

Risks: The level of risk for participating in this study is minimal and may include experiencing uncomfortable or sad feelings when completing the questionnaires, as you will be asked questions about your emotions and your relationship.

If you experience emotional distress following completion of the study, you can access the following resources:

Ottawa Distress Centre

Distress: 613-238-3311; Crisis: 613-722-6914 or 1-866-996-0991

www.dcottawa.on.ca

Walk-in Counseling

walkincounselling.com

Benefits: By participating in this study you will be helping us to improve our understanding of couple relationships, which will allow us to develop better ways of helping couples relieve relationship distress and strengthen feelings of connection.

Confidentiality and conservation of data: The data you provide in this online questionnaire will be kept secure and confidential. We use an encrypted online survey provider and will be deleted once downloaded by the researchers. Your questionnaire responses will be stored separately from any identifying information (your email) that will be collected in order to contact you should you be the recipient of the raffle prize. Anonymity will be assured through the pooling of all data so that the published results will be presented in group format and no individual or couple will be identified. This anonymous pooled data will be stored on a password protected storage device. The data will be kept for 10 years at which point the data will be securely erased.

Compensation: In order to thank you for your time completing this questionnaire, you will be given the opportunity to provide your email address at the end of the survey.

Voluntary participation: You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences simply by exiting the questionnaire. If you choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be deleted upon request to the researcher.

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the researchers or their supervisor.

This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of Saint Paul University (#1360.2/19). If you have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Office of Research and Ethics, Saint Paul University, 223 Main Street, Ottawa, ON, K1S 1C4; tel: (613) 236-1393

Acceptance: If you agree to participate in the above study conducted by Sara Kriplani and Monica Bridge, in the Faculty of Human Sciences at Saint Paul University, under the supervision of Dr. Stephanie Wiebe, please indicate your acceptance by selecting “agree”, or, if you would like to decline to participate, please exit the survey.

Please enter your couple code here:

Appendix B

Ethics Certificate



UNIVERSITÉ
SAINT-PAUL
UNIVERSITY

20-08-2019
dd-mm-yyyy

Bureau de la recherche et de la déontologie
Office of Research and Ethics

Comité de la déontologie | Certificat d'éthique
Research Ethics Board | Ethics Certificate

REB File Number 1360.2/19

<u>Last name</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Sara	Kriplani	Faculty of Human Sciences	Principal Investigator
Wiebe	Stephanie	Faculty of Human Sciences	Supervisor

Type of project Research Project-Master's

Title Reflective function and attachment in adult couple relationships.

Approval date	Expiry Date	Decision
19-10-2018 (dd-mm-yyyy)	18-10-2019 (dd-mm-yyyy)	1 (Approved)

Update August 2019 Change of title of the poster, Addition of SPU logo and a picture

Committee comments

The Research Ethics Board (REB) approved the updated changes made to the recruitment poster. The researcher is invited to use the reference number 1360.2/19 when recruiting participants.

1. In accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, the Saint Paul University Research Ethics Board (REB) has examined and approved the application for an ethics certificate for this project for the period indicated and subject to the conditions listed above.
2. The research protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB. This includes, among others, the extension of the research, additional recruitment for the inclusion of new participants, changes in location of the fieldwork, any stage where a research permit is required, such as work in schools. Minor administrative changes are allowed.
3. The REB must be notified of all changes or unanticipated circumstances that have a serious impact on the conduct of the research, that relate to the risk to participants and their safety. Modifications to the project, information, consent and recruitment documentation must be submitted to the Office of Research and Ethics for approval by the REB.
4. The investigator must submit a report four weeks prior to the expiry date of the certificate stated above requesting an extension or that the file be closed.
5. Documents relating to publicity, recruitment and consent of participants should bear the file number of the certificate. They must also indicate the coordinates of the investigator should participants have questions related to the research project. In which case, the documents will refer to the Chair of the REB and provide the coordinates of the Office of Research and Ethics.

Louis Perron
Chair
Research Ethics Board

Appendix C

Recruitment poster

Are you in a committed relationship? We would love to hear about your experience!

Have you been in a couple relationship and have been living together for at least 1 year? Are you interested in contributing to research on relationships and coping?

The Couple Research Lab at Saint Paul University is recruiting couples to participate in an **online survey** on relationships and coping that takes approximately **30 minutes** to complete. Your responses are confidential and anonymous.

Eligible couples

- Over 18 years of age
- Living together for at least one year
- Able to respond to questions in English



This research will be used to help build our understanding of how to relieve relationship distress and build connection and resilience.

Participants will be entered into a raffle and have the **chance to win 1 of 4 Amazon gift cards worth \$250.**

If you are interested in participating or if you have any questions,

Contact: Sara (Research Assistant) at: RelationshipLabSPU@gmail.com

Appendix D

Sociodemographic Questionnaire

Sociodemographic Questionnaire

What is your age (in years)?

What is your gender?

How would you describe your sexual orientation?

How long have you been in your current couple relationship?

How long have you been living with your partner?

How many children do you have with your partner?

How many children do you have from previous relationships?

How would you describe your ethnicity? ()

Have you participated in couple therapy in the past? (Yes, No)

If yes, when did you have your last session? In the... (past week, past month, past year, past five years, more than 5 years ago)

Are you currently seeking couple therapy? (Yes, No)

Are you currently participating in couple therapy? (Yes, No)

What is your current annual household income? (under 20 000, 20 000-50 000, 50 000-100 000, more than 100 000)

Have you suffered from one of the following?

Mood Disorder (currently, in the past), Anxiety Disorder (currently, in the past), Substance Use Disorder (currently, in the past), Schizophrenia (currently, in the past), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (currently, in the past), Eating Disorder (currently, in the past), other, please describe _____ (currently, in the past)

Appendix E

*Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ)***Reflective Function Questionnaire (RFQ) (46 items)**

Please work through the next 46 statements. For each statement, choose a number between 1 and 6 to say how much you disagree or agree with the statement, and write it beside the statement. Do not think too much about it – your initial responses are usually the best. Thank you.

1. ___ People's thoughts are a mystery to me
2. ___ I worry a great deal about what people are thinking and feeling
3. ___ My picture of my parents changes as I change
4. ___ I realise that I can sometimes misunderstand my best friends' reactions
5. ___ I believe that my parents' behaviour towards me should not be explained by how they were brought up
6. ___ Other people tell me I'm a good listener
7. ___ I often have to force people to do what I want them to do
8. ___ I always know what I feel
9. ___ I feel that, if I am not careful, I could intrude into another person's life
10. ___ I often get confused about what I am feeling
11. ___ I believe that people can see a situation very differently based on their own beliefs and experiences
12. ___ I believe there's no point trying to guess what's on someone else's mind
13. ___ I get confused when people talk about their feelings
14. ___ I believe other people are too confusing to bother figuring out
15. ___ I find it difficult to see other people's points of view
16. ___ I am a good mind reader
17. ___ I don't always know why I do what I do
18. ___ I pay attention to my feelings
19. ___ In an argument, I keep the other person's point of view in mind
20. ___ Understanding the reasons for people's actions helps me to forgive them
21. ___ I believe that there is no RIGHT way of seeing any situation

22. ___ When I get angry I say things without really knowing why I am saying them
23. ___ Those close to me often seem to find it difficult to understand why I do things
24. ___ I am better guided by reason than by my gut
25. ___ I usually know exactly what other people are thinking
26. ___ I can't remember much about when I was a child
27. ___ Strong feelings often cloud my thinking
28. ___ I trust my feelings
29. ___ When I get angry I say things that I later regret
30. ___ My intuition about a person is hardly ever wrong
31. ___ For me actions speak louder than words
32. ___ I frequently feel that my mind is empty
33. ___ I anticipate that my feelings might change even about something I feel strongly about
34. ___ I like to think about the reasons behind my actions
35. ___ If I feel insecure I can behave in ways that put others' backs up
36. ___ Sometimes I do things without really knowing why
37. ___ I can tell how someone is feeling by looking at their eyes
38. ___ Sometimes I find myself saying things and I have no idea why I said them
39. ___ In order to know exactly how someone is feeling, I have found that I need to ask them
40. ___ I can mostly predict what someone else will do
41. ___ I'm often curious about the meaning behind others' actions
42. ___ I have noticed that people often give advice to others that they actually wish to follow themselves
43. ___ I wonder what my dreams mean
44. ___ How I feel can easily affect how I understand someone else's behaviour
45. ___ I pay attention to the impact of my actions on others' feelings
46. ___ I know exactly what my close friends are thinking

9.	Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10.	Aims, goals, and things believed important	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
11.	Amount of time spent together	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
12.	Making major decisions	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
13.	Household tasks	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
14.	Leisure time interests and activities	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
15.	Career decisions	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

All		More				
<u>The</u>	Most of	Often				
<u>time</u>	<u>the time</u>	<u>Than Not</u>	Occasionally	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Never</u>	

16. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?

	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
17. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?						
	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
18. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?						
	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
19. Do you confide in your mate?						
	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
20. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?						
	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
21. How often do you and your partner quarrel?						
	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
22. How often do you and your mate "get on each others' nerves"?						
	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
			Almost			
		<u>Every Day</u>	<u>Every Day</u>	<u>Occa-</u>	<u>Rarely</u>	<u>Never</u>
				<u>Sionally</u>		
23. Do you kiss your mate?						
		_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

	<u>All of Them</u>	<u>Most of Them</u>	<u>Some of Them</u>	<u>Very Few of Them</u>	<u>None of Them</u>
24. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

	<u>Never</u>	<u>Less than once a Month</u>	<u>Once or twice a Month</u>	<u>Once or twice a Week</u>	<u>Once a Day</u>	<u>More Often</u>
25. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
26. Laughter together	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
27. Calmly discussing something	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
28. Work together on a project	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

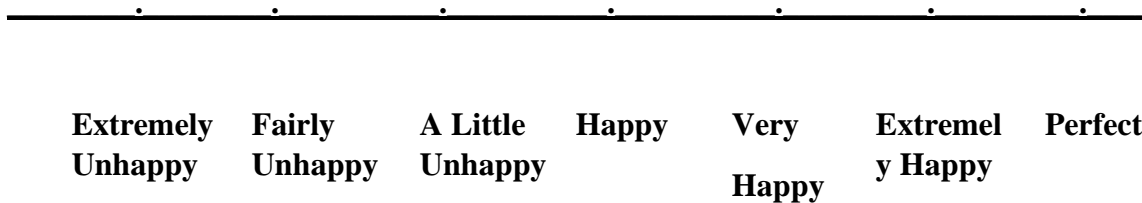
These are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometimes disagree. Indicate if either item below caused differences of opinions or were problems in your relationship during the last few weeks (Check yes or no).

Yes

No

29. ___ ___ Being too tired for sex.
30. ___ ___ Not showing love.

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



32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?

- _____ I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.
- _____ I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and will do all I can to see that it does.
- _____ I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and will do my fair share to see that it does.
- _____ It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I can't do much more than I am doing now to help it succeed.
- _____ It would be nice if it succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.
- _____ My relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.

Appendix G

Courtauld Emotional Control Scale-Revised (CECS-R)

Courtauld Emotional Control Scale-Revised (CECS-R)

When I feel **angry** about some aspect of our relationship, my reaction when I am with my partner is to:

1. Keep Quiet

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

2. Smother my Feelings

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

3. Hide my Annoyance

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

4. Bottle it Up

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

5. Say What I Feel

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

6. Refuse to Argue or Say Anything

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

7. Avoid making a scene

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

When I feel **sad** about some aspect of our relationship, my reaction when I am with my partner is to:

8. Keep Quiet

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

9. Let my partner see how I feel

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

10. Keep quiet

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

11. Hide my Unhappiness

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

12. Smother my Feelings

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

13. Refuse to Say Anything about it

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

14. Put on a bold face

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

When I feel **anxious** about some aspect of our relationship, my reaction when I am with my partner is to:

15. Tell my partner all about it

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

16. Let my partner see how I feel

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

17. Refuse to say anything about it

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

18. Say what I feel

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

19. Bottle it up

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

20. Keep quiet

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------

21. Smother my Feelings

Hardly Ever 1					Almost Always 6
------------------	--	--	--	--	--------------------