

Dyadic Emotion Regulation

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Keywords

interpersonal emotion regulation, social support, dyadic coping, close relationships, emotion regulation

Abstract

A robust approach to understanding dyadic emotion regulation needs to incorporate insights from affective science and relationship science. To date, research emerging from these two traditions has largely unfolded separately with limited cross-disciplinary collaboration. Here we review research from these two disciplinary perspectives, focusing on social support and dyadic coping in the close relationship literature and on extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation in the affective science literature. We also present a framework of dyadic emotion regulation. This framework includes both affect-improving and affect-worsening processes that can be motivated by hedonic or instrumental goals and that can have effects not only on the emotions targeted for regulation but also on the relationship dynamics of the dyadic partners. We identify key gaps in the literature and directions for future research, and we conclude that recognition of the complex interplay between emotion regulation and relationship processes allows for deeper and more nuanced models of dyadic emotion regulation.

Contents

INTRODUCTION	366
FROM THE LENS OF AFFECTIVE SCIENCE	367
Emotion Regulation	368
Interpersonal Emotion Regulation	368
Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Strategies and Their Effectiveness	369
Goal-Directed Nature of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation	370
FROM THE LENS OF RELATIONSHIP SCIENCE	371
Dyadic Coping	373
Social Support	375
Guilt and Jealousy Induction	377
POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE	378
DYADIC EMOTION REGULATION	381
Theoretical Framework	381
Open Questions	382
CONCLUDING REMARKS	384

INTRODUCTION

Social aspects of emotional experience have been studied under different names across research traditions. Notably, both affective science and relationship science offer valuable insights into how emotions are transformed in dyadic exchanges. Despite this, both fields have largely evolved in parallel, with limited cross-disciplinary integration. Affective scientists have studied the strategies to improve and worsen one's own or others' affect in a social context. The outcome of interest has mainly been effectiveness in achieving specific emotion regulation goals. In parallel, relationship scientists have studied the joint efforts of close relationship partners coping with stress together (i.e., dyadic coping literature) and the supportive responses of one partner to the other's stress or broader goal pursuits (i.e., social support literature), with some studies examining affect worsening (i.e., guilt/jealousy induction). The outcomes of interest in these literatures have mainly been health and general well-being as well as the quality of the relationship between the dyadic partners.

While these traditions examine similar processes—how people influence each other's emotions—they differ in their relative emphases (see **Table 1**). Affective scientists have studied goal-directed regulatory behaviors systematically with taxonomies of regulation paths and strategies and, most recently, flexible use of strategies across different situations. Relationship scientists, on the other hand, have acknowledged the relationship embeddedness of these actions and have

Table 1 Relative research emphasis of different literatures studied under different traditions

Research tradition	Affective science	Relationships science
Literature	■ Intrinsic emotion regulation ■ Extrinsic emotion regulation	■ Dyadic coping ■ Social support ■ Guilt and jealousy induction
Research emphasis	■ Regulatory strategies ■ Change in affect ■ Well-being	■ Relationship processes ■ Relational outcomes ■ Well-being

mainly focused on relationship dynamics that both shape and are shaped by regulation attempts. Nevertheless, in the last decade, there has been growing interest in research and theory at the intersection of these two fields (e.g., Shu et al. 2021, Springstein et al. 2023, Pauw et al. 2024, DiGiovanni & Ochsner 2024), which warrants an integrative framework combining insights from both fields.

The central thesis of this article is that emotion regulation frameworks studied in affective science could deepen relationship scientists' understanding of how relationship partners regulate their own and their partner's emotions within relationships. Moreover, relationship science research on the relational antecedents and consequences of interactions between partners could broaden emotion regulation models in affective science to include the critical relationship context between parties. An integration between relationship science and affective science is essential for a comprehensive understanding of how partners' individual or joint efforts shape their own or each other's emotional experiences while maintaining a satisfying relationship—what we define as dyadic emotion regulation.

In this article we set two specific goals. First, we review theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence from these two distinct research traditions (i.e., affective science and relationship science) and lay the foundation for dyadic emotion regulation. Rather than viewing partners' regulatory behaviors as merely unidirectional and independent of relational context, our dyadic emotion regulation framework builds on the mutual emotional exchanges in close relationships and takes the uniqueness of the relationship between the target and the regulator into account. The dyadic emotion regulation framework includes multilevel motivational factors; individual, situational, and relational antecedents; specific goal-directed regulatory pathways; and dual outcomes for individuals and relationships. Our second goal is to identify key gaps in this literature to point the way toward fruitful future work.

To guide the reader through this synthesis, we begin by reviewing affective science literature and lay a conceptual foundation on how and why emotions are modified. In doing so, we also reflect on the recent shift of focus in the field from an individual view of emotion regulation to a more social one. Then, we turn to the close relationship literature and elaborate on how relationship-related variables (e.g., attachment, relationship satisfaction) may weigh in this complex process of dyadic emotion regulation, especially when improving partners' emotions.

We then discuss recent findings that lie at the intersection of these two fields. In our focus on regulatory goals, mechanisms, and outcomes, we examine the points where these research traditions align and diverge. Finally, by integrating the evidence reviewed throughout the article, we present a dyadic emotion regulation framework and conclude with possible future research venues to be pursued.

FROM THE LENS OF AFFECTIVE SCIENCE

Emotions serve multiple adaptive functions, such as coordinating survival responses or reinforcing social bonds (Tooby & Cosmides 1990, Fredrickson 2001, Sznycer et al. 2017). However, emotions may arise in ways that do not align with goals or social contexts, such that people may implement strategies to modify their emotional state. Changing the intensity, duration, and expression of emotions to achieve a desired affective state is called emotion regulation (e.g., Gross 1998, Gross & Thompson 2007). In general, the ability and propensity to deploy emotion regulation strategies effectively has been associated with a range of psychological and physiological benefits, such as a reduced risk of heart disease (DeSteno et al. 2013, Appleton & Kubzansky 2014), improved social adjustment (English et al. 2012, Farsijani et al. 2022), and better mental health (Gross & Muñoz 1995; for a review, see Gross et al. 2019).

Emotion Regulation

Reappraisal: an antecedent-focused cognitive emotion regulation strategy that involves changing the way one interprets a situation in order to alter its emotional impact

Expressive suppression: a response-focused emotion regulation strategy that involves inhibiting the outward expression of emotions through facial expressions or verbal cues

Intrinsic emotion regulation: the process of regulating one's own emotions by seeking support, comfort, or guidance from others

Extrinsic emotion regulation: the process of changing another person's emotional state, typically with a specific affective outcome or goal in mind

The earliest research into emotion regulation focused on individual strategies (e.g., Gross 2002) such as cognitive reappraisal (i.e., reframing one's view of a situation) and suppression (i.e., holding back from the expression of emotions). An example of this research is a literature driven by the process model of emotion regulation (Gross 1998). The process model classifies strategies based on when they occur in relation to an emotional experience: (a) before emotions arise (antecedent-focused regulation) or (b) after emotions have been generated (response-focused regulation). While early research suggested that cognitive reappraisal is more effective than expressive suppression (e.g., Gross & John 2003, Haga et al. 2009), the use and absolute effectiveness of these strategies in terms of achieving a target emotional state have been under dispute, and they have been shown to vary across individuals and situations (e.g., Sheppes et al. 2011, 2014; Troy et al. 2013; Ford & Troy 2019; Kalokerinos et al. 2019). Indeed, recent findings update this view by suggesting that individuals who flexibly apply a variety of strategies across different contexts achieve better emotion regulation outcomes (Specker et al. 2024, Toh & Yang 2024). Today, affective science research adopts a more nuanced approach and examines several strategies, some of which involve interactions with other people (i.e., intrinsic emotion regulation), as we discuss below, opening the floodgates to research on close relationships.

In parallel with this expansion in emotion regulation strategies, researchers have also begun to study diverse motivations underlying emotion regulation (for a review, see Tamir 2016). Earlier accounts have studied emotion regulation as a tool for maximizing positive emotions and minimizing negative ones in order to achieve hedonic goals. In this line of research, negative emotions (e.g., anxiety or sadness) could be reduced by reappraising a stressful situation, whereas positive emotions (e.g., joy and pride) could be extended by savoring a win. Yet, what has often been overlooked is the possibility that affect worsening, too, is a form of emotion regulation. For instance, one may need to remind themselves of a stressful upcoming deadline to motivate task completion or temper the expression of joy at a success to avoid offending others. Formulating this insight, instrumental accounts of emotion regulation suggest that individuals may also deliberately choose to experience or thwart negative emotions when they serve their goals (Tamir 2009, Tamir & Ford 2012). In the face of a threat, for instance, successful reappraisal of negative emotions is associated with doing less to mitigate that threat, which may lead to suboptimal outcomes (Wenzel et al. 2023). In other words, the field now embraces the possibility that upregulating negative emotions and downregulating positive ones could both hold utility for goal-directed behavior, depending on the context.

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

While contemporary views of emotion regulation strategies and motivations behind them have transformed the literature, until recently the field has largely focused on intrapersonal processes—those that involve only the individual themselves. Yet, emotional experiences rarely occur in isolation; rather, they often unfold in the broader social context (e.g., Burkitt 1997). This recognition that other people may participate in emotion regulation has catalyzed a shift in the field. Individuals can employ other people in their regulation attempts (e.g., taking a friend along to a dreaded dentist appointment), whereby these other people constitute another tool in one's toolbox of strategies. An individual's use of someone else in their attempts to regulate their own emotions has been referred to as intrinsic emotion regulation (Zaki & Williams 2013, Hofmann et al. 2016). However, other people can also attempt to regulate the emotions of a target, independent of the target's desire to regulate their emotions. This is known as extrinsic emotion regulation and specifically refers to when a person proactively attempts to regulate someone else's emotions.

These lines of research fall under the umbrella of interpersonal emotion regulation and transcend the traditional emphasis on individual regulatory processes, acknowledging the inherently social nature of emotional experiences and expressions (e.g., Zaki & Williams 2013, Reeck et al. 2016). The use of interpersonal emotion regulation has been found to be associated with improved emotional and social well-being (e.g., Williams et al. 2018). Indeed, recent studies have shown that reappraisal is more effective when a friend helps the target to shift their perspective, compared to reappraising the situation alone, both at the moment and over time (Sahi et al. 2025), underlining the unique benefits of interpersonal emotion regulation over intrapersonal emotion regulation.

According to theoretical models, effective extrinsic emotion regulation is achieved through four steps. The first step is the accurate identification of another person's emotions. Empirically, empathic accuracy, or one's ability to correctly identify another's emotions, has been shown to be linked to whether individuals provide the strategies desired by their romantic partners (Arican-Dinc & Gable 2025, Pauw et al. 2025). Individual differences in how one typically experiences their own emotions (e.g., emotional clarity) also are positively associated with identifying others' emotions (e.g., Gregory et al. 2020).

The second step entails setting a goal to change these emotions. This goal may be driven by benevolent motivations and aimed either at affect improvement (e.g., Niven et al. 2009) or at affect worsening, that is, worsening the target's affect to benefit them in the long term by enabling them to achieve a goal or attain more favorable outcomes (López-Pérez et al. 2017). For instance, individuals high in extraversion and agreeableness tend to be motivated by improving others' affect (Austin et al. 2014). However, these individuals may also engage in affect worsening when trying to help them achieve a long-term goal. Alternatively, the goal may be self-oriented, whereby one seeks to change another person's emotion to benefit themselves (e.g., increasing a rival's worry before a competition), and is more prevalent among those with high narcissism (Austin et al. 2014; for a review, see Niven et al. 2024). Once an emotion regulation goal is activated, the third step involves selecting the optimal strategy—a choice likely to depend on the goal itself (e.g., decreasing a negative emotion through reappraisal or increasing it by teasing the person). The fourth step is implementing that strategy (Reeck et al. 2016, Nozaki & Mikolajczak 2020). When these stages are effectively carried out, an interpersonal emotion regulation attempt is more likely to succeed (Dixon-Gordon et al. 2015).

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Strategies and Their Effectiveness

The specific strategies employed in interpersonal emotion regulation vary widely, with different strategies yielding different emotional outcomes. For example, dyadic reappraisal, in which the regulator helps the target reframe a negative situation, has been linked to momentary changes in affect as well as in the target's perception of affect improvement. However, encouraging targets to suppress their emotions does not show comparable improvement (Jurkiewicz et al. 2023). Supporting these findings, Ruan et al. (2024) found that while many interpersonal emotion regulation strategies are viewed as effective, suppression of negative emotions produces mixed results, and dampening of positive emotions is generally seen as ineffective. Sahi et al. (2023) also revealed that people prefer and benefit from validation the most after sharing negative experiences. Together, these findings indicate that not all interpersonal emotion regulation strategies are equally effective, emphasizing the need for careful strategy selection in social contexts.

While certain interpersonal emotion regulation strategies are generally deemed as effective, much of the research has focused on their overall efficacy rather than their context-dependent nature. However, studies examining the person-by-situation approach in the intrapersonal domain suggest that the use and effectiveness of these strategies depend not only on the strategies

themselves but also on their fit within the specific context in which they are applied (e.g., Troy et al. 2013). Building on this insight, recent work in interpersonal emotion regulation has begun to consider the moderating role of contextual demands in strategies' outcomes. For example, people report using lower socio-affective support (e.g., comforting) and higher suppression and distraction when the target is in greater need of immediate regulation compared to low regulatory demand (Pauw et al. 2019). Providing feedback to others was associated with lower positive affect, but only in situations perceived as less controllable (Wenzel et al. 2020). In addition, the emotion to be regulated (e.g., sadness or anxiety) mattered for which strategies (e.g., reappraisal or situation modification) were seen as more helpful (Shu et al. 2021). For alleviating depressive symptoms, those who report lower use of maladaptive intrapersonal strategies (i.e., rumination and catastrophizing) benefit more from interpersonal soothing (Ray-Yol et al. 2022), and the effectiveness of interpersonal soothing is further shaped by cultural context (i.e., Turkish versus German; Pruessner & Altan-Atalay 2025). Nevertheless, flexibility in employing different interpersonal emotion regulation strategies appears to be key to their success, such that a larger repertoire of regulatory strategies and higher responsiveness to social feedback are associated with reduced negative affect and increased positive affect (Battaglini et al. 2023). In other words, effectiveness depends not only on a particular strategy but also on its fit with situational demands and individual differences, and it can be further amplified by the flexible use of a wide range of strategies.

The quality of the relationship between the regulator and the target also contributes to interpersonal emotion regulation outcomes. For example, Coan et al. (2006) found that spousal hand-holding mitigates stress responses to threat, with this effect being enhanced by higher marital quality. Flores & Berenbaum (2012) provided supporting evidence by showing that even researcher-administered hand-holding can lessen emotional responses to negative stimuli, depending on the target's desire for emotional closeness. Reflecting the growing interest in incorporating relationship-specific variables into emotion regulation, a recent study also found that participants reported higher self-efficacy in regulating the emotions of a close friend compared to someone they barely knew (Tanna & MacCann 2023).

These findings complement decades of work in relationship science, which has long emphasized the importance of relationship-specific factors in understanding dyadic interactions. This suggests that interpersonal emotion regulation not only is a function of strategy selection and situational demands but also is embedded in relational dynamics. Although this direction is still in its infancy in the affective science literature, similar processes have been extensively studied in relationship science, albeit under different labels [e.g., dyadic coping (Landolt et al. 2023) or social support (Turner & Brown 2010)], as discussed in later sections of this article.

Goal-Directed Nature of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

Theoretical and empirical work recognizes that motivation to engage in interpersonal emotion regulation extends beyond the hedonic goals of making the other person feel better. In addition to improving affect, researchers studying interpersonal emotion regulation have emphasized that worsening others' affect could be useful for achieving regulators' own goals or helping a target achieve their goals (Netzer et al. 2015, López-Pérez et al. 2017). In their pioneering work, López-Pérez et al. (2017) defined altruistic affect worsening as the induction of negative emotions in another person in the short term to promote their long-term well-being and goal attainment.

For example, increasing a target's anger may help them confront a cheating colleague, and heightened fear may be beneficial when pursuing an avoidance goal, such as not failing an exam (Tamir et al. 2008, Tamir & Ford 2009). Thus, individuals may intentionally amplify anger in a target to encourage confrontation or induce fear to encourage avoidance goals (López-Pérez et al.

2017). Similarly, a regulator may deliberately elicit negative emotions in a target if they themselves stand to gain a desirable outcome from the situation (Netzer et al. 2015). For instance, one might induce guilt in a slacking coworker so they take some work off one's own plate; or, in an extreme example, a sociopath may take their own pleasure when inducing sadness in another person.

Regardless of whether the regulator's goals are hedonic or instrumental, these goals may be or may not be the same as the goals of the target. Zaki (2020) made this distinction when describing the constructs of cooperation versus paternalism: Cooperation is when the target's and regulator's goals align, and paternalism is when the target's and regulator's goals diverge. While it is easy to imagine that hedonic regulation is always cooperative, regulation can be employed to enhance positive emotions or reduce negative emotions even when the target itself does not have a hedonic goal. This misalignment can be because the target has an incongruent instrumental goal, such as wanting to stay angry at a situation so they are motivated to change it, or simply because a hedonic goal is not seen as appropriate, such as not wanting to feel less sad while grieving during a culturally prescribed period of time. Likewise, when a regulator is pursuing instrumental goals behind their regulation attempts, these goals can be in sync with the goals of the target or at odds with the goals of the target. Moreover, temporal dynamics may come into play, such that the target's and regulator's goals may be at odds in the short term but congruent in the long term (or vice versa). These dynamics may be even more complex in committed relationships, where partners' goals are often interdependent and the long-term consequences of regulation attempts are more accessible to the regulator.

Regulation goals can also be about the relationship itself (Fitzsimons et al. 2015). Supporting the idea that interpersonal emotion regulation could be driven by a relational goal, Springstein et al. (2023) recently found that people engage in interpersonal emotion regulation primarily to build or maintain strong relationships by improving others' affect. This relational motive may also lead individuals to reconsider the strategies they use for affect improvement. For example, in Lepore et al.'s (2004) study, when participants' emotional responses were challenged by a confederate, participants exhibited reduced physiological reactivity upon re-exposure to the stressor but rated the confederates as less likable. In other words, it seems that while challenging may be effective in improving the target's affect, from an instrumental interpersonal emotion regulation perspective it could be considered ineffective if the regulator's goal was to be liked by the target.

Indeed, affect worsening may serve this instrumental purpose equally well. Although Tran et al.'s (2025) findings suggest that affect worsening is relatively rare, participants in their study reported worsening another person's affect to make them "understand their feelings" or "get them to apologize." Given that empathy fosters closeness and apologies facilitate forgiveness, these findings suggest that affect worsening may also function as a tool for relationship maintenance. Supporting evidence for this idea comes from a study by Parkinson et al. (2016), which revealed that romantic partners engaged in interpersonal alerting, drawing their partner's attention to a relationship concern and increasing their worry, to encourage collaboration in resolving problems. This recent work underscores the importance of adopting a close relationship perspective to extend our view of interpersonal emotion regulation, which is what we review next.

FROM THE LENS OF RELATIONSHIP SCIENCE

Close relationships profoundly shape human experience across the life span. Indeed, the quality of these relationships represents one of the most robust predictors of well-being and longevity (e.g., Holt-Lunstad 2018, Holt-Lunstad et al. 2010). Beyond their impact on well-being, close relationships provide the primary context in which emotions are aroused, experienced, expressed, and regulated, making them integral to emotional experience (e.g., Schoebi & Randall 2015, Shenhav

et al. 2018). As relationships deepen over time, partners' emotional lives become increasingly interconnected, transforming individual emotional experiences into fundamentally dyadic phenomena, as outlined in the emotion in relationships model (Berscheid & Ammazalorso 2003).

The interconnection between the emotional experiences of partners manifests in three crucial ways within close relationships. First, close-relationship partners serve as significant sources of both positive and negative emotions (e.g., Clark et al. 2001, Yee et al. 2014). Their actions also carry heightened emotional weight. For instance, a spouse's warm compliment may generate greater happiness than similar praise from an acquaintance, while their forgetting of a birthday likely produces more intense hurt than such negligence from a colleague. Second, expression of emotions occurs frequently within close relationships. People are more likely to disclose their feelings to their close others, especially to those who are perceived as being responsive to their needs (e.g., Ruan et al. 2020). Third, and most relevant to this article, close-relationship partners play a crucial role in regulating each other's emotions. As demonstrated across different literatures of relationship science (e.g., dyadic coping, social support), close-relationship partners typically serve as primary sources of comfort and emotional support during times of distress. However, paralleling the idea of hedonic and instrumental emotion regulation discussed in affective science, partners can also intentionally undermine each other's emotional well-being when motivated by self-focused goals or conflicting interests (e.g., arousing jealousy).

Relationship researchers have long examined how relationship partners influence each other's emotional states. Much of this work has revolved around affect-improving mechanisms. For example, a large body of work on dyadic coping investigates romantic partners' role in alleviating one another's negative emotions during a stressful event that is affecting both of them (e.g., chronic illness of one partner, financial difficulties; Falconier & Kuhn 2019). Extending the scope of dyadic coping, which has been mostly limited to coping with a stressor, social support research has focused on understanding people's supportive behaviors from a broader perspective, both in the presence and in the absence of a particular stressor (e.g., Taylor 2011), and on capitalization of good news (Gable & Reis 2010, Peters et al. 2018). Beyond affect-improving mechanisms, relationship researchers have also examined how close partners may intentionally amplify negative emotions in each other, often as a means of influencing behavior or reinforcing relationship dynamics. This work has often homed in on increasing specific negative emotions in others, such as guilt-induction strategies (e.g., Overall et al. 2014) or jealousy-producing tactics (e.g., Wegner et al. 2018).

Several key patterns emerge in the context of dyadic emotion regulation within close relationships. First, close partners share resources and challenges associated with life events, such as a child's illness or a family relocation. These events can simultaneously distress both partners and necessitate collaborative emotional management. Second, major life challenges primarily affecting one partner frequently end up having an impact on the other as well (e.g., Lyons et al. 1998). For instance, one partner's job loss can generate financial stress, which ultimately hinders both individuals' emotional well-being. These cases in which a problem is seen as a shared problem of the couple have been the main topic of interest in dyadic coping literature. Third, even in situations without direct consequences for the other partner, witnessing a partner's distress often creates an urge to intervene through heightened empathic concern (Batson et al. 2007, Grynberg & Konrath 2020). This motivation to help aligns with the broader framework of social support, which has been established as a cornerstone of relationship development and maintenance as well as a crucial mechanism for enhancing individual well-being (Cutrona & Suhr 1992, Cutrona 1996). Notably, unless constrained by conflicting motivations, close partners are typically inclined to improve each other's emotions through supportive behaviors.

There are times in close relationships, however, when one's instrumental goals lead to heightening negative emotions of the partner. For example, individuals may induce jealousy to test their partner's commitment or elicit guilt to encourage corrective behaviors. In relationship-threatening situations, particularly during conflicts, individuals' goals significantly influence their approach to managing their partner's emotions. Sometimes relationship preservation may be prioritized by encouraging emotional suppression and avoiding conflict that might risk relationship dissolution (e.g., English et al. 2018), whereas leveraging emotional experiences like anger and sadness may enable confrontation to work toward solutions (e.g., Sanford 2007). These divergent behaviors emphasize how different motivations can lead to distinct patterns of dyadic emotion regulation strategies in close relationships. As discussed in more detail below, attachment theory, a dominant framework in relationship research, also helps explain individual differences in the use of these kinds of affect-worsening strategies (e.g., Overall et al. 2014).

Dyadic Coping

Thus far, interpersonal emotion regulation has been discussed as a unidirectional process in which there is a target who is regulated and a regulator who performs the regulation. However, as discussed above, close-relationship partners' emotions are interconnected. Stressors affecting one partner often reverberate through the relationship, making coping a shared rather than an individual process (Revenson & Lepore 2012). Dyadic coping refers to this broader process, in which both members of a dyad, particularly romantic partners, jointly handle a stressor.

According to the stress and coping literature (Lazarus 1981, Lazarus & Folkman 1984), stress emerges when a situation is evaluated as harmful and exceeds one's perceived available resources. Individuals can cope with stress by either eliminating the source of it (problem-focused coping) or managing its emotional consequences (emotion-focused coping). Initially, research on coping primarily examined individual responses to stress, particularly in the context of chronic illness. However, Revenson & Majerovitz (1990) put forward that stress often extends beyond the individual, spilling over to partners and family members as well. They argued that coping is inherently dyadic, as stress and emotional responses become intertwined within close relationships (e.g., Revenson 1994, 2003).

The systemic-transactional model (STM), a pioneering conceptualization of dyadic coping, argues that dyadic coping may take different forms (Bodenmann 1997, 2005). First, one partner may support the other in their individual coping efforts (i.e., supportive dyadic coping), especially in scenarios where one partner is in need and the other is better equipped with resources to help. Supportive dyadic coping encompasses both problem-focused dyadic coping strategies, such as giving advice, and emotion-focused dyadic coping strategies, such as validation and reappraising the situation (Bodenmann 1997). Another form, delegated dyadic coping, refers to instances where one partner reduces the other's stress by taking over specific responsibilities or tasks, such as managing household duties or childcare. On the other hand, both partners might contribute to coping symmetrically when they have shared goals and resources. This form of coping is called common dyadic coping and it involves the joint efforts of partners in navigating an individual or shared stressor together (Bodenmann et al. 2016; for a review, see Falconier & Kuhn 2019).

The STM considers these coping behaviors (i.e., supportive, delegated, and common coping; for a review, see Falconier et al. 2015, Falconier & Kuhn 2019) as positive dyadic coping. In contrast, distancing, ambivalent coping (when support feels burdensome to the provider), and superficial coping (marked by disengaged or uninvolved behaviors) are classified as negative dyadic coping (e.g., Bodenmann 2005; for a review, see Landolt et al. 2023). In line with previous work discussed in the section titled Interpersonal Emotion Regulation, the different dyadic coping behaviors introduced above have also been studied in terms of their contribution to personal

Supportive dyadic coping:

a dyadic coping strategy in which one romantic partner provides necessary resources to the other in response to their experience of stress

Delegated dyadic coping:

a dyadic coping strategy in which one romantic partner takes over certain tasks or responsibilities of the other partner who is experiencing stress, thereby easing their burden

Common dyadic coping:

dyadic coping strategy where both romantic partners perceive the stressor as a shared issue ("our problem") and collaborate to manage or resolve it together

adjustment to stress, especially for the person who experiences the stress firsthand (e.g., Chen et al. 2021).

However, extending this target-focused approach, dyadic coping also takes the outcomes for the regulator and the relationship into account (for a meta-analysis, see Staff et al. 2017). For example, for couples dealing with a health-related stressor, the lower use of common negative coping is associated with lower distress for both partners (e.g., Badr et al. 2010, Rottmann et al. 2015). Besides predicting quality of life (Meier et al. 2011), relationship quality has been found to be linked to use of dyadic coping (Bodenmann et al. 2006, Regan et al. 2014, Sim et al. 2017), and higher use of positive dyadic coping predicted the stability of the relationship over 5 years (Bodenmann & Cina 2006; for a review, see Staff et al. 2017). While seemingly intuitive, this pattern is supported by two large meta-analyses linking positive dyadic coping to relationship quality, lower distress, and greater adjustment across diverse contexts (Falconier et al. 2015, Landolt et al. 2023).

Whilst much of the literature has examined how these dyadic coping patterns relate to individual or relational outcomes, recent studies have begun to explore the factors that predict who is most likely to engage in effective dyadic coping (for a review, see Chen et al. 2021). Among individual-level predictors, mental health appears to play a crucial role in shaping dyadic coping patterns. Pregnant women with high levels of depressive symptoms reported using and perceiving more negative dyadic coping (Alves et al. 2018). Consistently, individual efforts to reduce one's negative mood predict the use of more positive and less negative dyadic coping with romantic partners as well (Papp & Witt 2010). Likewise, attachment security contributes to dyadic coping dynamics, as women with higher attachment anxiety benefit less from positive dyadic coping strategies (Meuwly et al. 2012), and for those with high attachment avoidance, common coping is even related to lower relationship quality and higher distress (Van Vleet & Helgeson 2019). These findings linking attachment and the outcomes of dyadic coping have been a focus of interest also in social support research, which suggests that people perceive support interactions through the lens of their expectations from a close other (e.g., internal working models) and their relational motivations (e.g., independence; e.g., Collins & Feeney 2004), a point we return to in the next section.

In addition to individual factors, relationship-specific characteristics are also linked to dyadic coping patterns. Couples in committed relationships tend to engage in more frequent and effective dyadic coping, likely due to their established history of mutual support and trust (Landis et al. 2014, Kuppler & Wagner 2023). Relatedly, higher relationship quality predicts the greater use of dyadic coping (e.g., Relvas et al. 2023). These findings highlight the extent to which dyadic coping is not merely a function of individual characteristics but is instead deeply embedded within the relational context in which it unfolds. The results presented here also suggest that relationship characteristics, such as relationship satisfaction and commitment, may have a dual role by acting as an antecedent and an outcome of dyadic coping in close personal relationships (e.g., Weitkamp et al. 2021).

Unlike the deliberate behaviors studied in dyadic coping and interpersonal emotion regulation frameworks, a closely related construct—coregulation—emphasizes the dynamic nature of emotional and physiological synchronization between partners (Butler & Randall 2013). Although coregulation cultivates emotional stability and strengthens relational bonds, it can also become maladaptive when partners are entrained in dysfunctional patterns, potentially increasing rather than reducing distress. Operating at a foundational level, coregulation may serve as a mechanism through which conscious coping efforts are initiated and executed. In other words, the effectiveness of explicit dyadic coping strategies may partly depend on the quality of this moment-to-moment emotional attunement.

Altogether, dyadic coping differs from interpersonal emotion regulation in its relational specificity, reflecting the ways in which close partners regulate each other's emotions as part of their shared experiences. This transition from broader interpersonal emotion regulation models to dyadic coping underscores how relation-specific dynamics may shape the ways individuals manage stress as a dyad rather than as individual entities, as well as how jointly improved emotions may strengthen the relationship in return.

Social Support

Unlike the dyadic coping literature, which focuses nearly exclusively on romantic relationship partners facing mutual challenges, social support frameworks study the affect-improving roles of numerous others across different contexts. A supportive social network that includes not only romantic partners but also close friends and family might help in ways that go beyond just easing stress and negative emotions. In their pioneering work, Cohen & Wills (1985) hypothesized two possible routes through which social support could affect well-being. First, it can fulfill basic human needs like belonging and self-esteem and contribute to success with everyday tasks, such as paying bills (Kaplan et al. 1977). This approach assigns a direct role to social support (i.e., as a main effect), rain or shine, on well-being. That is, social support exerts benefits to one's physical and mental health, irrespective of whether a stressor is present. Second, and in line with the dyadic coping literature, social support has been shown to enhance individuals' ability to manage stressors effectively. The stress-buffering hypothesis suggests that social support protects against the harmful effects of stress from negative life events on both mental and physical health (e.g., Cobb 1976, Cohen & Wills 1985, Szkody et al. 2021). According to this hypothesis, social support serves as a buffer against stress, but in the absence of stress, it does not significantly affect well-being.

Another aspect of social support is whether it is received or perceived. Received social support involves the receipt of concrete words and actions from others that are aimed at addressing a challenge. There has been general agreement on three main types of received social support: emotional, informational, and instrumental (e.g., Collins et al. 1993, Taylor 2011). Emotional support encompasses words and actions that attempt to convey listening, show care, and make one feel valued and loved in a time of need (e.g., telling a friend they are a rock star despite being passed over for a job). Informational support is guidance or advice aimed at helping people understand and cope with life challenges (e.g., a colleague offering advice for a job interview). Lastly, instrumental support is tangible assistance that helps people with specific tasks (e.g., lending a friend a suit for a job interview). Perceived social support refers to one's belief that support will be available when needed (Lakey & Cassady 1990, Sarason et al. 1991).

Perceived availability of social support has been consistently associated with favorable outcomes such as better physical and mental health (e.g., Uchino 2009; for a review, see Wang et al. 2018). However, evidence on the link between enacted support and emotional outcomes has been inconclusive (e.g., Chen & Feeley 2012). While some studies revealed that receiving support in a relationship is linked to higher relationship quality (Overall et al. 2010) and closeness (Gleason et al. 2008), received social support may sometimes be unhelpful or backfire and even lead to detrimental emotional outcomes in the recipient (e.g., Bolger et al. 1996, Gleason et al. 2008, Eagle et al. 2019).

Bolger et al. (2000) proposed that overt support could negatively affect self-esteem by drawing attention to the recipient's struggles, whereas invisible support, or assistance that goes unrecognized by the recipient, might still be effective without this drawback. Supporting this hypothesis, in a daily-diary study, Bolger and colleagues found depressive symptoms to decline on days when people did not perceive support, even though their partners reported providing it. Conversely,

Received social support: the actual exchange of psychological and material resources between individuals

Perceived social support: an individual's belief in the availability of psychological and material support from others when needed

Perceived responsiveness: the extent to which individuals feel that others understand, validate, and care for them during supportive interactions

symptoms worsened on days when both partners acknowledged the support (Bolger et al. 2000). Further studies found converging evidence and concluded that support may be more beneficial when it is provided without making the recipient feel dependent or aware of their need for help (Shrout et al. 2006, Bolger & Amarel 2007, Howland & Simpson 2010). Indeed, ample evidence indicates that especially Asians and Asian Americans tend to report that social support is unhelpful (Kim et al. 2008) unless it is provided implicitly, without overt support-seeking behaviors (Mojaverian & Kim 2013).

The theory of optimal matching (Cutrona 1990, Cutrona & Russell 1990) argues that support is most effective when it specifically addresses the coping needs triggered by a stressor (e.g., Thoits 1995). This model emphasizes the controllability of a situation as a key factor in matching stressors with appropriate support, such that emotional support is deemed most effective for uncontrollable events, whereas controllable events are better managed with instrumental support (Cutrona & Suhr 1992). This model also aligns with Folkman & Lazarus's (1980) concept of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, where problem-focused coping is suited for controllable events, and emotion-focused coping is appropriate for uncontrollable ones (Rafaeli & Gleason 2009). In their discussion of what makes for skillful support, Rafaeli & Gleason (2009) define support effectiveness as support that fits well with situational needs and matches the needs of the support recipient. This same idea is further highlighted by Rini & Dunkel Schetter (2010), who argue that the quality and quantity of social support should match what is needed by the recipient for it to be effective.

For instance, attachment security has been conceptualized as a motivational system guiding the relational needs of support recipients. Attachment has been linked to whether recipients benefit from supportive behaviors, such that those with high attachment avoidance and anxiety are more likely to interpret support in a negative manner (Collins & Feeney 2004, Stanton & Campbell 2014, McLeod et al. 2020). Relatedly, emotional intimacy experienced in a romantic relationship predicts the perceived effectiveness of social support one receives from their partner (Rini et al. 2006). While discussing a relational conflict, those with higher attachment security are rated as calmer when they are provided with emotional care; in contrast, those with higher insecurity benefit more from instrumental support (Simpson et al. 2007). Moreover, for those with higher attachment anxiety, greater emotion-focused coping (i.e., affection and intimacy) protected their relationship satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas problem-focused coping (i.e., instrumental support provision) buffered those with higher attachment avoidance against a decline in relationship satisfaction (Vedelago et al. 2023). These results underline the importance of matching supportive behaviors to a partner's attachment style during stressful periods to maintain both emotional well-being and relationship quality.

Maisel & Gable (2009) found that both visible and invisible support are associated with lower levels of anxiety and sadness only when the interaction is perceived as responsive (i.e., conveying understanding, caring, and validation; Reis et al. 2004), highlighting the importance of responsiveness in the effectiveness of social support (for reviews, see Arican-Dinc & Gable 2023, Refoua & Rafaeli 2023). Consistent with the optimal matching framework discussed above, responsive support is that which meets the recipient's needs. Given the evidence showing that responsiveness is a strong indicator of effective social support, later studies have explored what predicts perceived responsiveness in interactions. Findings suggest that a combination of emotion perception accuracy and empathic concern toward one's partner can be significant predictors of support provision being perceived as responsive (Winczewski et al. 2016, Gregory et al. 2020).

Although much social support research has traditionally focused on effectiveness during times of stress, paralleling the dyadic coping literature, recent research has shifted to understanding how social support functions when individuals share positive experiences, known as capitalization (Gable et al. 2004, 2006; Gable & Reis 2010). Since people tend to experience more positive than

negative emotions, it is promising that both enacted and perceived support in response to positive event disclosures are consistently linked to favorable outcomes for individual and relational well-being (Gable et al. 2012, Pagani et al. 2020). Along these lines, according to the thriving through relationships model, in which social support not only serves as a source of strength but also acts as a relational catalyst that encourages engagement in life opportunities during nonadverse times, it has been argued that unresponsive and insensitive support behaviors can hinder thriving by fostering either excessive reliance on others for tasks one can handle themselves or defensive self-reliance (Feeney & Collins 2015). Supporting this perspective, gratitude as a key positive emotion has been shown to be most beneficial when it is perceived as responsive by the recipient (Algoe & Zhaoyang 2016). In line with this affect-improvement function of social support through increasing positive affect, the interpersonal emotion regulation literature also recognizes increasing positive affect as a path for affect improvement, although this aspect has not received much attention as of yet.

Guilt and Jealousy Induction

The dyadic coping and social support literatures differ from the interpersonal emotion regulation literature on a key dimension: The former two almost exclusively focus on affect improvement (e.g., reducing stress, increasing joy), whereas interpersonal emotion regulation entails affect worsening as well. Although not typically discussed in the social support or dyadic coping literatures, but similar to the affect-worsening branch of the interpersonal emotion regulation literature, research on close relationships has also examined the induction of negative social emotions, namely guilt and jealousy, particularly in the face of conflict or perceived threats. In the context of affect worsening, we argue that understanding how these emotions are deliberately upregulated in a partner can provide deeper insight into the strategic use of affect worsening with an instrumental goal of relationship maintenance or distancing.

Guilt is a social emotion that drives reparative behaviors when people commit transgressions (for reviews, see Graton & Ric 2017, Vaish 2018). Hence, it is central to the restoration of disrupted cooperative interactions, making it a key process of interest in close relationship research. When individuals perceive that they have hurt their partner or failed to meet relational expectations, guilt motivates them to apologize, adjust their behavior, and sustain relational harmony (e.g., Baumeister et al. 1994). Individuals seek reassurance through their partner's expressions of guilt in relational conflicts. In such cases, guilt often arises naturally. Notably, however, it can also be strategically induced as an affect-worsening strategy to achieve the intended relational outcomes. Guilt induction involves intentionally expressing negativity (e.g., crying or reminding the transgressor about the emotional harm they caused; Vangelisti et al. 1991), and it aims to change the partner's behavior. When employing guilt induction, the goal is often not to address specific problems. Instead, one tries to elicit reassurance from their partner about their commitment to the relationship (Overall et al. 2009; for a review, see Overall & McNulty 2017). This strategy is particularly common among individuals with high attachment anxiety, who use guilt induction to mitigate their relationship insecurities (Overall et al. 2014).

Although guilt induction may temporarily enhance feelings of security, it often leaves the underlying problems unresolved, which may eventually decrease partner satisfaction in the long term (Overall et al. 2009, 2014). These negative outcomes may be especially relevant when the target partners are high in attachment avoidance. Such individuals tend to not resolve relationship problems as a result of guilt-induction strategies (Jayamaha et al. 2016). An unexplored possibility, drawing from interpersonal emotion regulation's concept of instrumental affect worsening, is that individuals high in attachment avoidance may themselves strategically induce guilt to create emotional distance when their need for independence is threatened. Guilt induction as a specific form

of affect worsening can function as a tool for sustaining relational bonds, ensuring long-term emotional investment, and reaching personal goals such as distancing from or dissolving a relationship.

In addition to guilt, jealousy is a relationship-relevant emotion designed to alert individuals to potential threats in a valued relationship. It is activated by perceived competition from more desirable rivals. This is in part an evolved motivational mechanism that drives behavioral responses aimed at preventing infidelity and abandonment (Buss & Haselton 2005). Both men and women engage in jealousy-induction strategies, such as flirting with others, referencing past relationships, or even fabricating the existence of a rival, to test their partner's commitment or enhance their own sense of relational security (Mattingly et al. 2012). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that evoking jealousy, similar to guilt-induction, is an affect-worsening strategy.

The most commonly reported motives behind jealousy induction include reinforcing relationship stability, increasing partner investment, and reducing uncertainty about the partner's level of commitment. As in the case of guilt induction, individuals who use jealousy-induction tactics tend to view these behaviors as effective means of achieving relationship maintenance and retention (Fleischmann et al. 2005). In line with the findings in the guilt-induction literature, the extent to which jealousy strengthens a relationship depends on individual differences in attachment style. Specifically, Mattingly et al. (2012) found that undergraduates in committed relationships reported greater use of jealousy induction when they were high in attachment insecurity. While anxiously attached individuals may use jealousy to seek reassurance and deepen relational bonds, avoidantly attached individuals may employ it as a defensive strategy to control relational dynamics (Wegner et al. 2018). Overall, similar to guilt induction, studying jealousy within the context of relational factors as a specific form of affect worsening may present an interesting direction for future research.

POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

So far, we have reviewed the antecedents and consequences of changing another person's emotions for better or worse across two research traditions: affective science and close relationship research. Now, we shift our focus to delineate how interpersonal emotion regulation, dyadic coping, and social support are similar to and different from each other (see **Table 2**) and how they can map into the dyadic emotion regulation framework. By integrating theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence from both fields, we aim to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how emotion regulation unfolds within close relationships.

Table 2 Commonalities and distinctions across fields in the close relationship literature

	Dyadic coping	Social support	Interpersonal emotion regulation
Who?	■ Romantic partners	■ Social network	■ Everyone
What?	■ Coping with a common stressor with a partner	■ Providing support to another person	■ Modifying another person's emotions
When?	■ In stressful situations (e.g., prolonged illness)	■ In stressful situations ■ In life opportunities	■ When there is a goal of changing an emotion
Why?	■ To remove stressor ■ To enhance resources for coping	■ To buffer negative effects of stress ■ To promote thriving	■ To improve affect ■ To worsen affect
How?	■ Emotion-focused coping ■ Problem-focused coping	■ Instrumental support ■ Informational support ■ Emotional support	■ Engagement strategies ■ Relationship-focused strategies

Dyadic coping, social support, and interpersonal emotion regulation converge on the question of how emotions are managed in social contexts. However, at the same time, each construct has distinct features. Social support broadly refers to the psychological and material resources exchanged between people to improve the well-being of the recipient, extending beyond close relationships (Shumaker & Brownell 1984, Cohen 2004, Gariépy et al. 2016). Dyadic coping, though related to social support, differs in that it describes a more collaborative process that occurs specifically within romantic relationships, where both partners actively engage in stress management, often in response to chronic illness or health-related problems (e.g., Bodenmann 2005, Badr & Acitelli 2017). Unlike social support, which can take place in the absence of a stressor (i.e., main effect), dyadic coping requires an initial stress experience, and both partners are involved in a reciprocal exchange of support, making it fundamentally different from the one-way flow of support typical in social support studies (Bodenmann 2005, Marroquín et al. 2017).

The dyadic coping literature also acknowledges that a stressor mostly impacts the couple as a unit and it is viewed as a task demanding both partners' joint actions (Cutrona & Gardner 2006, Weitkamp & Bodenmann 2022). The recognition of the interdependent nature of the unit as a dyad is also key to the concept of emotional contagion, which posits that close partners tend to converge in their emotional states by mirroring each other's expressions and vocalizations (Hatfield et al. 1993, Mazzuca et al. 2019). Although it seems intuitively convincing that, especially in close relationships, one partner's emotional state can spill over into the other's emotions, the social support and interpersonal emotion regulation literatures have largely overlooked regulators' own affect while providing social support or during interpersonal emotion regulation. That is, they may feel better themselves simply by making their partner feel better, or they may feel worse after inducing guilt in their partner.

Nevertheless, there is an overlap in the classification of the strategies used to achieve these processes (i.e., dyadic coping and social support). Problem-focused coping as described in the dyadic coping literature (Bodenmann 2005), which aims to remove an existing problem, roughly corresponds to the instrumental and informational support (e.g., advice, tangible assistance) discussed in the social support literature. Similarly, emotion-focused coping can often be substituted with emotional support from the social support literature. These types of coping and support can also be considered parallel to the engagement (e.g., allowing the target to vent; Niven et al. 2009) and relationship-oriented (e.g., valuing; Niven et al. 2009) strategies outlined in interpersonal emotion regulation research. Although there are other classifications available for all three of these domains, there seems to be a division between the strategies focusing on solving the problems that trigger emotions and those focusing on communicating affection to and caring for the target (e.g., Liu et al. 2021).

An important distinction between social support, dyadic coping, and interpersonal emotion regulation lies in the fact that the latter one, in contrast to the close relationship literature, offers a well-structured, unified perspective on affect worsening in addition to affect improvement (Niven et al. 2009, 2011). While research on close relationships has extensively examined affect improvement, it falls short on conceptualizing affect worsening in the context of close relationships. In particular, interpersonal emotion regulation frameworks acknowledge that individuals may deliberately worsen a partner's emotions to achieve specific outcomes. This model situates strategies within a broader goal-directed framework and emphasizes the instrumental role of affect worsening (e.g., helping the target to reach their goals; Springstein et al. 2023, Tran et al. 2025).

However, close relationship research views affect worsening as primarily limited to cases of guilt and jealousy induction and as a tool to maintain the relationship by appealing to a partner's commitment to the relationship (e.g., Murray et al. 1998, Overall et al. 2014). Close relationship research could benefit from a more explicit distinction between unintentional affect worsening

(e.g., stemming from personal insecurities) and deliberate, strategic attempts to regulate a partner's emotions. Indeed, these altruistic and paternalistic affect-worsening attempts benefiting the target in the long run may, in return, contribute to favorable relationship outcomes. Again, it is reasonable to expect that when one partner reaches their goals with the help of the other (e.g., completing a project on time thanks to partner pressure), this achievement likely creates a spiral effect that influences both the relationship itself and the regulator.

Unlike close relationship research, which emphasizes relational factors (e.g., attachment) as the primary drivers of regulation, interpersonal emotion regulation provides a complementary perspective by highlighting the importance of situational variables such as intensity and controllability in determining regulatory choices (e.g., Aldao 2013). For instance, drawing from close relationship research, guilt induction might be more effective in low-intensity relational conflicts where the partner is receptive to emotional influence, whereas high-intensity situations may provoke defensiveness rather than cooperation. A deeper integration of these contextual factors could enhance relational theories of emotion regulation and account for how the immediate demands of an emotional situation may interact with more stable relational habits.

Conversely, interpersonal emotion regulation theory often falls short of recognizing the unique relationship between the target and the regulator. Instead, it treats the "other" as an interchangeable entity, disregarding the fact that the motivations and strategies of the regulator may be influenced by relationship dynamics. Social support and dyadic coping models also explicitly acknowledge the reciprocal processes that are exchanged between the dyads in multiple ways.

Inherent in an interdependent relationship is the expectation of continued interaction. Thus, processes that unfold in an instance of interpersonal emotion regulation have implications for both parties and their relationship with one another. These factors are then carried forward and influence how interpersonal emotion regulation interactions unfold in future interactions. Interpersonal emotion regulation theories would be enhanced by explicitly modeling how the processes involved influence and change the nature of the dyadic relationship as well as the implications of those dynamics for future instances of regulation.

Finally, interpersonal emotion regulation research emphasizes the importance of regulatory flexibility, that is, the ability to adapt strategies based on shifting contextual demands (Aldao et al. 2015, Battaglini et al. 2023). While close relationship research acknowledges that effective regulation depends on relational goals and partner responsiveness, it has yet to fully incorporate dynamical flexibility as a key predictor of relational outcomes. Transferring this insight from interpersonal emotion regulation, close relationship research could explore how partners flexibly adjust between affect-improving and affect-worsening strategies depending on the evolving dynamics of a relationship. For example, a partner may initially heighten jealousy to test commitment but later engage in reassurance strategies to restore relational security. By incorporating flexibility as a central construct, relationship science could develop a more nuanced understanding of how partners regulate each other's emotions over time.

In short, while all three lines of inquiry (i.e., dyadic coping, social support, and interpersonal emotion regulation) focus on interpersonal processes, dyadic coping is distinct in its bidirectional and stress-specific nature within romantic relationships, social support is broader and more unidirectional, and interpersonal emotion regulation is more targeted toward the change in the other's emotions for both altruistic and instrumental motives. In addition, the social support and dyadic coping literatures place an emphasis on relationship processes, such as closeness (e.g., Campos et al. 2014), trust (e.g., Grace & Schill 1986), and attachment (e.g., Vedelago et al. 2023); examine outcomes for both the well-being of the individual and the quality of the relationship; and model the reciprocal processes inherent in ongoing interdependent relationships. On the other hand, the interpersonal emotion regulation literature places an emphasis on the strategies used to

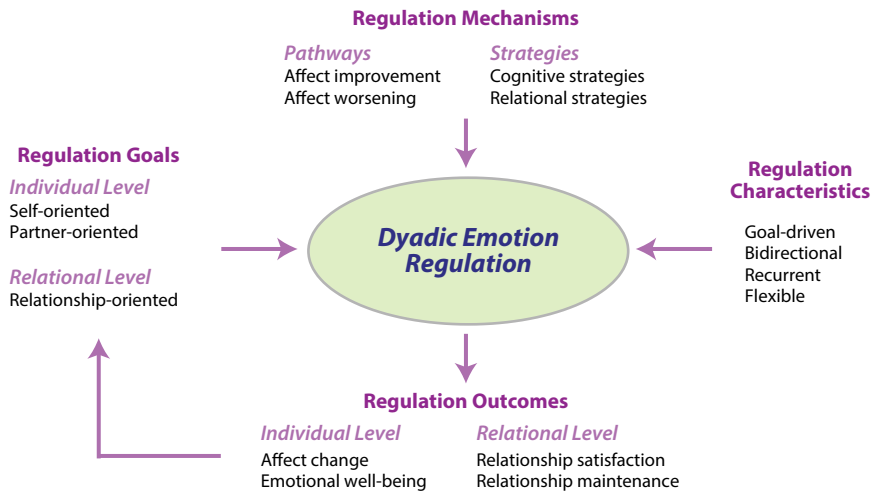


Figure 1

The dyadic emotion regulation framework.

regulate emotion, the way regulation unfolds, and the motivations that underlie the process. The outcome of interest lies mostly in the success of managing the affective state itself. Consolidating these two approaches into a single framework that can guide future research at the intersection of these fields would be beneficial for keeping researchers from both areas engaged and informed about recent findings, while also expanding the range of questions that could be answered more systematically.

DYADIC EMOTION REGULATION

Theoretical Framework

Driven by the theoretical conceptualizations and empirical findings coming from different research traditions and, more recently, their intersection, we propose a comprehensive, unified framework that incorporates the critical antecedents and consequences of changing emotions within the context of close relationships. We refer to this framework as dyadic emotion regulation and depict it in **Figure 1**. Dyadic emotion regulation is characterized by several defining features. First, it starts by acknowledging that once an attempt to change a close other's emotion is made, it is rarely a one-directional or one-time process. Rather, it is likely that the person who tries to change the other's emotion also experiences a change themselves (e.g., Petrova & Gross 2023). Thus, dyadic emotion regulation is bidirectional. Furthermore, dyadic emotion regulation is recurrent, in the sense that it is perpetuated throughout the lifespan of a relationship, rather than being episodic. Dyadic emotion regulation is also dynamic and reflects adaptation to shifting individual needs, relational contexts, and emotional feedback from one's partner. Ongoing feedback from partners dynamically informs and reshapes regulatory goals, pathways, strategies, and outcomes, creating a continuous and reciprocal regulatory process within relationships. It is also inherently goal-driven, meaning that regulatory efforts are purposeful and consciously oriented toward desired emotional or relational outcomes.

The goals of dyadic emotion regulation operate at two interconnected levels: individual and relational. On the individual level, goals can be self-oriented, such as making oneself better-off, or they can be partner-oriented, such as alleviating a partner's distress. On the relational level, the goal

can be aimed at the relationship between the two parties (e.g., improving closeness). Nevertheless, these goals are driven by a nuanced interplay between individual, situational, and relational factors (see also Fitzsimons et al. 2015). For instance, a person with high attachment avoidance may be motivated to maintain their independence while having a conflict about their relationship with their partner but not when their partner is distressed and venting about a conflict they had with a coworker in the office. Taken together, regulatory goals dynamically adapt to the complexities of relational context and individual motivations, guiding partners toward specific pathways and strategies for effective dyadic emotion regulation.

Recognition of the complexity of the motivations that underlie dyadic emotion regulation also implies recognizing that it unfolds through distinct mechanisms. Regulation pathways involve the broad direction of emotional change, including both affect-improving and affect-worsening routes. Specifically, these pathways can be categorized into four distinct forms. On the affect-improving side are increasing positive affect (e.g., capitalization) and decreasing negative affect (e.g., dyadic coping); on the affect-worsening side are increasing negative affect (e.g., altruistic affect worsening) and decreasing positive affect (e.g., paternalistic affect worsening). To achieve these emotional changes, partners employ specific regulation strategies, which can be broadly categorized as either cognitive strategies (e.g., reappraisal, providing advice, distraction) or relational strategies (e.g., expressing validation, providing affection, showing care through touch). Thus, dyadic emotion regulation involves pathways and strategies that are tailored to the specific goals being pursued.

The effectiveness of any dyadic emotion regulation strategy can be evaluated at both the individual and the relational level. At the individual level, the primary outcome is the extent to which targeted emotions are changed in the intended direction. For instance, if the goal is to make a person worry about their upcoming deadline, an increase in their worry level would mean an effective attempt was made. The dyadic emotion regulation framework also acknowledges that perceived responsiveness is a key moderator linking a regulation strategy to actual emotional change, especially within affect-improving pathways. Any dyadic emotion regulation attempt is likely to have consequences on the relationship itself as well. Thus, at the relational level, dyadic emotion regulation outcomes include broader interpersonal benefits, such as increased relationship satisfaction, greater closeness, or overall relationship maintenance and stability. All in all, dyadic emotion regulation effectiveness must be understood as multifaceted—shaping not only the immediate emotional states of individuals but also the long-term quality of their relationships.

Open Questions

Despite the numerous advances in our understanding of emotion regulation in the context of relationships that have been made in the affective and relationship science literatures, there are several open questions that would particularly benefit from a dyadic emotion regulation framework. For example, although theoretical developments have sparked interest in positive emotions, relatively few studies have explored how emotional well-being can be enhanced by capitalizing on positive experiences (Gable & Reis 2010) or have studied the upregulation of positive emotions (e.g., Livingstone & Srivastava 2012) more broadly. We know less about the specific strategies used to boost others' positive emotions and which relationship partners people choose to turn to for emotional uplift. These questions warrant further attention from researchers.

Additionally, although someone else's negative emotions may evoke prosocial tendencies to help, positive emotions may lead to envy or simply a lack of interest in others. Thus, upregulating positive emotions, even among close partners, may be complicated. Future research would also benefit from examining the similarities and differences between upregulation of positive emotions and downregulation of negative emotions (e.g., Bryant 1989). Moreover, although gratitude

appears to be one positive emotion that has captured the attention of researchers (e.g., Emmons et al. 2019), not all positive emotions are examined in terms of their role in boosting emotional well-being, especially in the context of close relationships. Thus, further research is needed on different positive emotions, such as joy, pride, contentment, or excitement and how they are regulated in and through relationships. And, of course, love and its related emotional states can only be understood in a relational context (e.g., Shaver et al. 1996).

As discussed in the dyadic coping literature and social support literature, receipt of unnecessarily high levels of support (i.e., overprotection) may be detrimental to emotional well-being through undermining one's autonomy (Thompson & Sobolew-Shubin 1993, Joekeas et al. 2007, Brock & Lawrence 2009, Girme et al. 2013). Although converging evidence suggests that exceeding the needs of the recipient while providing support is associated with undesired outcomes, the interpersonal emotion regulation literature has yet to address this process despite its huge potential for clarifying the reasons behind overprotection. Hence, future research informed by a dyadic emotion regulation framework would benefit from understanding who is more prone to be over-involved in their partner's emotion regulation and the potential consequences this may have on the effectiveness of regulation.

In addition to affect improvement, researchers studying interpersonal emotion regulation have been recently highlighting the presence of self-oriented instrumental goals by regulators engaged in altruistic affect-worsening attempts. When defining the effectiveness of interpersonal emotion regulation, many studies focus on the extent to which the regulator reaches their goals in terms of the target's after-regulation emotional state (for a review, see Dixon-Gordon et al. 2015). However, when the goals of the target and of the regulator differ or there are multiple goals at play, other measures of effectiveness may be more appropriate. For instance, successfully decreasing one's partner's sadness over a transgression may be seen as effective if the target's goal was to improve their affect, whereas if this leads them to repeat the transgression in the long run, it should not be considered an effective regulation from a relational perspective. This balance is particularly difficult to manage in close relationships, where the goals of improving a partner's affect and maintaining the relationship harmony may be in conflict. Future research informed by the dyadic emotion regulation framework could focus on understanding which factors may contribute to such decisions in the face of competing goals. Similarly, when it comes to altruistic affect worsening, while close relationship partners are more likely to appreciate it, strangers may be less inclined to prioritize the long-term well-being of their interaction partner. Therefore, future research should also explore the prevalence of altruistic affect worsening in close relationships and its effects on both partners' well-being as well as relationship satisfaction.

In their conceptualization of dyadic coping, Revenson (2003) suggested that the dyadic coping strategies used by two partners can complement each other, effectively filling a coping gap. By interpersonally employing different but complementary strategies, both partners gain access to a wider range of coping mechanisms. Recently, the idea of having a wider repertoire of strategies has been discussed under the concept of interpersonal emotion regulation flexibility, which has been linked to improved well-being outcomes (Battaglini et al. 2023). For instance, one partner's consistent use of distraction might be complemented by the other's use of interpersonal reappraisal, potentially leading to the former's adoption of reappraisal strategies over time. As their emotion regulation repertoire expands, the individual may no longer rely solely on their partner for emotional regulation but instead use reappraisal on their own. Future research should explore whether partners' emotion regulation strategies converge over time, leading to an expanded repertoire and, ultimately, to decreased negative and increased positive emotions. This line of research would expand the flexibility account of interpersonal emotion while incorporating the unique position of close partners in complementing each other's preferred emotion regulation strategies.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Moving forward, it is our position that a robust approach to understanding dyadic emotion regulation should incorporate insights from affective science and relationship science. Our hope is that two key directions will emerge for advancing our understanding of emotion regulation in relationships. First, research on social support and dyadic coping needs to recognize that these processes fundamentally involve emotion regulation. As such, this work would benefit from incorporating emotion theory and examining regulatory effectiveness as a key outcome.

Second, research on interpersonal emotion regulation should acknowledge that relationship processes such as closeness, relationship satisfaction, and attachment are not merely contextual factors but critical components that shape both strategy selection and regulatory outcomes. This perspective becomes particularly relevant when considering how interpersonal emotion regulation may serve as a tool for relationship maintenance, encompassing both affect-improving and affect-worsening strategies. By integrating these perspectives and recognizing the complex interplay between emotion regulation and relationship processes, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of dyadic emotion regulation.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The fields of affective science and close relationship research have largely developed in parallel, with limited interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Recently, interest has grown in the study of social emotion regulation, which lies at the intersection of these two traditions.
- Classical frameworks in emotion regulation offer structured approaches to identifying regulation goals, strategies, and outcomes, often emphasizing individual-level and situational processes.
- Close relationship research highlights the relational context in which regulation occurs, emphasizing how relationship-specific variables shape goals, behaviors, and outcomes and are shaped by them.
- Integrating insights from both traditions may offer a more comprehensive understanding of dyadic emotion regulation within close relationships that treats the relationship itself as central to the regulatory process.

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