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**INTIMACY AND ASSOCIATED RELATIONSHIP QUALITY
VARIABLES**
Abridged version

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1. OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH

The present research addresses theoretical and methodological aspects related to intimacy, together with connected constructs such as commitment, forgiveness, relationship satisfaction and supportive dyadic coping. It elaborates on the results already proposed by psychological literature, which underline that commitment, considering the model constructed by Rusbult, is determined by three main factors: marital satisfaction, investment in the relationship and the lack of alternatives to the relationship. Furthermore, marital commitment, at its turn, as part of an interpersonal process, which determines partners' interdependence, might be influenced by the intimacy felt by couples and by the forgiveness practiced within the relationship and also the level of dyadic coping the partners experience.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. INTIMACY

Among the relationships that involve a high degree of intimacy, couple relationships are, for many researchers, the closest relationships an adult will develop during their lifetime (Levinger & Huston, 1990), becoming the ideal microclimate for studying intimacy, with its peculiarities. The interest for this dyadic space is increased by the possible repercussions of lack of intimacy: when the couple fails to develop or maintain a high degree of intimacy, its dissolution is probable, as lack of closeness has been identified as the most common reason for divorce and separation (Horowitz, 1979).

Couples can experience intimacy in different spheres of their life together -parental, physical, religious and the list could go on. Priorities in intimacy tend to change throughout the lifespan, so that the focus on sexual connection in the initial phases of the relationship may be surpassed later by aspirations for effective collaboration during child rearing years, or by loyalty in situations of illness, disability and aging (Rolland, 2018; Scheinkman, 2019).

The IPM- Interpersonal model of intimacy

Consistent empirical studies were conducted for the interpersonal model (IPM) of Reis & Shaver (1988), which evolves from the premise that intimacy is built in interpersonal

relationships, through two fundamental processes: self-disclosure and an empathic response from one's partner (Mitchell et al., 2008).

The interpersonal model provides a detailed understanding of the concept of intimacy: it includes multiple components, has temporal characteristics and provides clear guidelines on the operationalization and measurement of intimacy (Laurenceau et al., 2004).

Intimacy begins with the verbalization, by one of the partners, of thoughts, feelings and information which they consider relevant, to which the listener must respond verbally, appropriately, understanding and properly contribute to the conversation. It is essential that the partner perceives the listener's interest and empathy, but also his/her care for the things revealed (Laurenceau et al., 2005). The basic mediating mechanism is the perceived partner response, which suggests to the speaker that he/she is appreciated and valued. Roles change constantly in the couple's interaction, and as the self of each partner is expressed and validated by the other, the experience of intimacy increases (Manbeck et al., 2020).

As individuals accumulate these experiences during their regular interactions, a global, general perception of the degree of intimacy that the partners feel in the relationship is created, intimacy being, therefore, a concept related to the repeated assessment of the interactions between the two partners, yet having the property of being particular and different in each individual interaction (Laurenceau et al., 1998). In a nutshell, there are two components of intimacy: self-disclosure and the perceived partner response.

2.2. COMMITMENT

The concept of commitment has its roots in the broader context of studies regarding the workplace and why employees choose to settle or leave companies and institutions. Social psychologists, mostly those interested in social exchanges, have expanded the area of research to the family micro-climate, which is defining for commitment because it analyzes one of the most important relationships that the individual can develop throughout his lifespan (Hsiao, 1998).

Relationship commitment is thus seen as a particular, special case of commitment that combines emotional, interpersonal, social, and even legal complications that other types of relationships easily circumvent (Byrd, 2009). It designates the probability that involvement in the relationship will persist (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001).

The investment model of commitment

Caryl Rusbult's model of marital commitment is perhaps the most well-known among the theoretical models of dissolution vs. marital persistence. Proposed in the early 1980s, the model combines defining elements of the theory of interdependence, but without remaining anchored in this framework. Rusbult has the merit of bringing new meanings and explanations regarding the factors that influence the persistence of the relationship and of providing an operational model of commitment.

In sum, the investment model states that higher levels of relationship satisfaction and investment alongside a lower quality of alternatives is related to higher levels of commitment. The investment model therefore extends interdependence theory by asserting that investments (time, resources etc.) are pertinent factors for predicting commitment to the relationship (Brooks et al., 2018; Sharabi & Timmermans, 2021). When partners are satisfied with their relationship, perceive poor quality of alternatives and have invested in the relationship, commitment to the relationship increases (Rusbult, et al., 1998).

The investment model has explanatory power regarding relationship commitment and predictive power for staying or leaving behavior. Accordingly, satisfaction, quality of alternatives, and investments have an indirect effect on relationship dissolution through their influence on relationship commitment (Schoebi et al., 2012).

2.3. FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is an ongoing process whenever the partners' expectations are not met. It involves an inner shift from negative behaviors, thoughts, and feelings to positive behaviors, thoughts, and feelings towards the transgressor (Laifa et al., 2018). Forgiveness is a choice and not a reaction to a traumatic event (Costa et al., 2006). Despite all the conceptual differences, most theorists/researchers agree with Enright's specifications, which argue that *forgiveness should be differentiated from the following related concepts* (Freedman & Zarifkar, 2016): pardon (legal term), justification (finding reasons to explain the mistake), pretense (the offender has good reason to do wrong), forgetfulness, denial (involving the individual's inability to accept the wounds suffered due to the wrongdoer), reconciliation (relationship restoration).

Forgiveness as a motivational process

Although many interpretations of forgiveness emphasize its uniqueness, theorists such as McCullough or Fincham have pointed out that forgiveness involves change (McCullough et al., 2006) and that change should be analyzed as a process, not as a singular act (Fincham, 2000). This is, in fact, the essential element of understanding forgiveness, as an inner and relational transformational process. Therefore, McCullough and his collaborators (2000) define forgiveness as an intraindividual process, because it involves the transformation of the victim in relation to the aggressor (motivations, thoughts, feelings, behavior). Subsequently, forgiveness becomes an interpersonal or systemic process, as it involves relating to another person (forgiving someone) and reflecting the psychological inner construct onto the relationship with him/her (Lichtenfeld et al., 2019).

3. ORIGINAL RESEARCH

The main theoretical model on which **our first study** is based refers to the Interpersonal Model of Intimacy (IPM, Reis & Shaver, 1988). The IPM is a theoretical framework which defines intimacy as an interpersonal process, constructed on one's self-disclosure and the perceived responsiveness from one's partner (Shelton et al., 2010). Intimacy determines how satisfied partners are with their relationship. Relationship satisfaction is, at its turn, one of the most solid and empirically significant predictors of positive relationship outcomes in family research (Le & Agnew, 2003). Additionally, in the first study, we explore the role of supportive dyadic coping as mediator between intimacy and relationship satisfaction, based on prior findings where dyadic coping was confirmed as a significant mediator for positive relationship outcomes (Levesque et al., 2014).

Furthermore, **in our second study**, we aim to explore the investment model, as proposed by Rusbult (1980), but also expand its original view of relationship satisfaction and commitment. We accordingly included forgiveness, as a moderator of the relationship between the two main variables. Forgiveness, with its deep spiritual roots, has reconstructed throughout the past few years in an important psychological predictor, that offers hopeful answers to relationship conflict and to relationship dissolution. More than that, we explore the role of religiousness as a mediator between satisfaction and commitment, hence enriching the investment model with two related constructs.

Both above-mentioned studies were conducted using a cross-sectional design. We used self-assessment scales with solid psychometric results for each of the variables. Participants were all involved in romantic relationships and their answers reflect part of the dyadic universe of close relationships.

However, as romantic relationships can also be explored using longitudinal designs, focusing on both between and within person differences, the remaining two studies have targeted dyadic relationships assessed through the means of an electronic daily diary. Accordingly, **our third study** explores the daily discussions reported by both partners in the couple, how their frequency fluctuates throughout the week and what is their connection, if any, to intimacy, also assessed every day. The research results have helped to create a map of dyadic mundane discussions, specific to Romanian couples. Furthermore, they have brought to our attention the importance of self-disclosure as part of the Interpersonal Model of Intimacy.

In the fourth and final study of the present thesis we continued our endeavors to underline the quotidian aspects of intimate relationships with yet another daily diary study. Our focus this time was to understand the positive and negative emotions partners experience day to day and what their connection to intimacy is, both for men and women. Using a between-within subjects approach, lagged effects and actor-partner modelling, our concluding study reveals numerous complex interactions in daily couple dynamics.

Study 1¹.

Intimacy and dyadic satisfaction. The mediating role of supportive dyadic coping

- **Overview**

The literature we reviewed for the present research highlights the key associations between a) intimacy (seen as an interpersonal process where perceived response/ support from the partner is crucial) and relationship satisfaction; b) dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction. Our study aims at exploring whether and how dyadic coping plays a role in the interaction of intimacy and relationship satisfaction, considering the following arguments.

¹ An adapted version of the study has been accepted for publication with the title *Intimacy and couple satisfaction in emerging adulthood. The mediating role of supportive dyadic coping*, in Revista de Psihologie, 2021, nr.3 (Journal of Psychology 2021, no.3).

First, previous research suggests that dyadic coping is an important predictor for relationship satisfaction. More specifically supportive dyadic coping (SDC) seems to have one of the most powerful predictive effects of dyadic satisfaction compared to other forms of coping (Bodenmann et al., 2019).

Second, dyadic coping is closely connected through its own conceptual definition and purpose to an interpersonal model of intimacy. More than that, dyadic coping has been shown empirically to be a mediator for relationship satisfaction, but, to our knowledge, there are presently scarce research endeavors to understand how it mediates the interaction between intimacy and relationship satisfaction.

To our knowledge, there are few research endeavors that have tried to understand how SDC mediates the relationship between intimacy and relationship satisfaction. Drawing from existing research and previous theoretical contributions, it was hypothesized that:

H1 Intimacy is positively associated with relationship satisfaction.

H2 The link between intimacy and relationship satisfaction is mediated by supportive dyadic coping.

- **Measures**

We used the following instruments for assessment of the main variables: *Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976)*, *The Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (Van den Broucke, 1995)*, *Dyadic Coping Inventory (Bodenmann, 2008)*.

- **Participants**

Students enrolled in graduate and post-graduate courses and their partners were recruited to take part in the study. We analyzed data from 105 participants, 31 men (29,5 %) and 74 women (70,5 %), with ages between 18 and 55, with a mostly urban background (74,3 % urban vs 25,7 % rural). Most couples (63 %) were consensual and not married. 72,4 % of the sample had graduate studies and 21,9 % were undergraduates. The participants living in consensual couple relationships had a mean duration of their relationship of 3,14 years (\pm 2,28 years). For the married couples, the length of the relationship ranged from 2 to 25 years with a mean of 10,58 years (\pm 6,11 years), significantly higher than that of the consensual couples ($p=0,001$).

- **Results**

Correlations: Relationship satisfaction positively and moderately correlated with intimacy ($r= 0,39$; $p \leq 0,001$), thus confirming our first hypothesis (H1). Furthermore, there is a positive strong correlation between intimacy and SDC ($r= 0,52$; $p = 0,001$). All the subscales of intimacy correlate positively both with relationship satisfaction and SDC, except for intimacy problems (which negatively correlates with relationship satisfaction, but not with supportive dyadic coping). SDC also correlates with relationship satisfaction in a moderate, positive way ($r= 0,46$; $p= 0,001$), thus conducting us further in our mediation analysis of the three variables.

In our mediation analysis, we used intimacy as an overall variable and also checked the specific subscales for effects on relationship satisfaction. SDC mediates the relationship between intimacy and relationship satisfaction. Mediation is total for overall intimacy and for commitment and partial for openness and affection, as dimensions of intimacy. The results are consistent with previous research results, where DC has been empirically shown to be a mediator for relationship satisfaction (Levesque et al., 2014).

More than that, when commitment is considered, the mediation of SDC is in line with the long-established empirical link between commitment and relationship satisfaction (Le & Agnew, 2003).

- **Discussions and conclusions**

Other consistent findings in past research indicate that affection and expressing affection promote relationship satisfaction, a result the present study also endorses, through the mediational effect of SDC (Floyd et al., 2005). Nonetheless SDC does not mediate the relation between all dimensions of intimacy and relationship satisfaction, results which could also be explained by variables other than SDC. For instance, other individual and relationship-level variables have been associated both with relationship satisfaction and intimacy, including patterns of dyadic interactions and attachment style (Gottman & Notarius, 2000).

All things considered, our research points out that intimacy influences relationship satisfaction through the mediation of SDC, hence underlying how relevant feeling connected to one's partner is for the outcome of the relationship (Reis, 2017). The present study contributes to comprehension on intimacy and its link to SDC and relationship satisfaction. From a therapeutic standpoint, the findings of the present study suggest working directly on

tangible variables in order to improve one's own relationship satisfaction, respectively intimacy and supportive dyadic coping. Couple therapy approaches have become increasingly focused on such variables to gain insight into how coping and intimacy impact the quality and stability of romantic relationships (Bodenmann & Randall, 2012).

Study 2.²

Three cords twisted together. The investment model, religiousness and forgiveness

- **Overview**

The major purpose of the present research is, on one hand, to illuminate understanding on how religiousness, commitment and relationship satisfaction interact and whether relationship satisfaction is a mediator between religiousness and commitment.

On the other hand, considering the previously mentioned theoretical and empirical framework, we aim to explore a possible model of investment that not only refers to satisfaction and commitment, but also includes forgiveness, as a moderating factor influencing the link between satisfaction and commitment and leading to positive marital outcomes. Our main hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Relationship satisfaction mediates the effect of religiousness on commitment to a relationship.

Hypothesis 2: Positive forgiveness moderates the effect of relationship satisfaction on commitment to a relationship.

- **Measures**

We used the following four instruments to assess the main concepts of the study: *the Investment Model Scale (IMS, Rusbult, 1998)*, *Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976)*, *the Family Religiosity Questionnaire (Rusu & Turliuc, 2011)*, *Marital Offence-Specific Forgiveness Scale (MOFS, Paleari et al., 2009)*.

² A shorter version of the present study has been presented at the poster session of World Lumen Congress, May 2021 and has been accepted for inclusion in the Proceedings volume of the conference, with the title *Three cords twisted together. The investment model, religiousness and forgiveness.*

- **Participants**

We recruited heterosexual students enrolled in post-graduate courses and their partners to take part in the study. All participants consented to attending and were given course credits for participation, as at least one of the partners was enrolled in university/post-university studies. The sample consisted of 115 individuals, 36 men (31,3%) and 79 women (68,7%), with ages between 18 and 55 and having mostly an urban vs. a rural background (75,7% urban vs 24,3% rural). The mean duration of the couple relationship they were involved at the time of the study was 4.71 years for men (SD=5,03) and 5.74 years for women (SD=5,41). Of the entire sample, 67% of couples were living in consensual unions, whereas 33% were married. 59 participants (51,3%) were aged 25 or less, 45 (39,1%) were aged 26 to 40 years and 11(9,6%) were aged 41 to 55.

- **Results**

Results show a series of other *significant correlations*. Commitment positively correlates to relationship satisfaction ($r= 0.342$, $p < 0.01$) and to forgiveness ($r=0.262$, $p < 0.01$), respectively positive forgiveness ($r= 0.245$, $p < 0.01$), although the correlation has a low to medium intensity. Satisfaction, at its turn, positively correlates to religiosity ($r= 0.387$, $p < 0.01$).

In our *mediation analysis* we explored whether religiousness is associated with commitment through the mediating role of relationship satisfaction. Also, we controlled for the effect of covariates in the model. Results suggest that religiousness does not have a direct association with commitment ($b = .06$, $p = .08$). However, religiousness is positively associated with relationship satisfaction ($b = .24$, $p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction is positively associated with commitment ($b = .18$, $p = .002$). The indirect effect is also significant ($b = .04$, [01; 08]). Thus, although we did not find a direct effect of religiousness on commitment, the existence of an indirect effect through relationship satisfaction points to an indirect effect-only mediation (Zhao et al., 2010).

Further in our analysis, we were interested to verify *the moderating effect* of positive vs. negative forgiveness on the association between relationship satisfaction and commitment (Figure 2). Given the rather low number of participants, we decided to use a simple moderation analysis instead of a more complex, mediated moderation model (which would have required a larger sample for our study).

Neither positive forgiveness towards a partner ($b = .32, p = .06$) nor negative forgiveness ($b = -.01, p = .93$) were associated with commitment. However, the interaction between the positive aspects of forgiveness and relationship satisfaction had an effect on commitment ($b = -.02, p = .04$), thus moderating the link between satisfaction and commitment.

- **Discussions and conclusion**

As other consistent studies and meta-analysis confirm (Tran et al., 2019) relationship satisfaction positively correlates with commitment. In our study the correlation has a moderate intensity ($r = +0,342; p = 0,001$), thus endorsing the investment model proposed by Rusbult (1980). More than that, our mediation analysis confirms that relationship satisfaction is positively associated with commitment, whereas religiousness is positively associated with relationship satisfaction, thus having an indirect effect on commitment (and partially confirming our first hypothesis).

The positive relationship between forgiveness and commitment demonstrates a link between intrapsychic and relational processes: the reduction of intrapsychic motivations to avoid and harm one's offender, together with the restoration of goodwill towards him/ her may facilitate the relational process, when paired with overall satisfaction levels of the relationship. Relationship satisfaction has a positive and high intensity connection with commitment, which becomes secondary to the outcome of the relationship when individuals express a higher degree of positive forgiveness (Paleari et al., 2005).

It is, somehow, intuitive. If a transgression is "solved" by leaning on the overall or baseline satisfaction levels of the relationship, then commitment will be dependent on how satisfying the relationship was. If, however, the transgression is addressed through a more or less conscious effort to restore the relationship in the present, then the positive behaviors the partners express will be salient and will influence their commitment levels, shadowing the baseline satisfaction of the dyad (Braithwaite et al., 2011).

Study 3.³

Intimacy in Romanian couples. Implications for the psychological health of the family

- **Overview**

The study we conducted aims at understanding marital intimacy, according to the model of Reis & Shaver (1988) from the larger palette of definitions and conceptual models. For the two authors intimacy is an interpersonal process, based on interactions in which an individual shares information about himself to another person, who responds empathically. Going from all sorts of relationships to very specific ones, shared information is in this context one of the most important factors of intimacy in general and more specifically of marital intimacy (Shelton et al., 2010; Laurenceau et al., 1998)

The current study allows a qualitative exploration of intimacy in the marital dyad, from the perspective of both partners, as we aim to understand what happens on a daily basis in the interaction of spouses. Considering the model of intimacy mentioned above and the importance of communication (through which self-disclosure and responsiveness develop) as a precursor of intimacy, our research investigates what couples talk about every day, through an electronic daily diary.

- **Measures**

In the first and last day of the study participants filled in a series of questions referring to **commitment** (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) (Investment Model Scale, IMS) and **satisfaction** (Dyadic Adjustment Scale, DAS) (Spanier, 1976). At the end of the study, we also assessed **the influence** of participating upon couple relationship through a series of open questions referring to intimacy, the global relationship of the dyad, sexual interactions, communication, tenderness. The daily self-report scales and final questions were adapted from the questionnaires used by Dominik Schoebi in his diary studies (Schoebi & Randall, 2015).

More specific, the daily diary comprised a series of items referring to the couple relationship: *the map of daily discussions, how pleasant or unpleasant each topic has been, intimacy, communication.*

³ An earlier, preliminary version of the study has been published in Logos Universalitate Mentalitate Educatie Nouata - Sectiunea Stiinte Sociale/ Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty - Section: Social Sciences, Editura Lumen, Department of Economics, vol. 6(1), pages 63-72, June, 2017.

- **Participants**

We recruited participants with ages between 25 and 45 years, students at a large Romanian university, enrolled in post-graduate studies, and their partners. Students were offered course credits for completing an electronic daily diary for seven consecutive days. All selected participants were involved in a romantic relationship at the time of the research and had a partner who was willing to also participate. We had a final sample of 64 participants, respectively 32 couples. The average duration of couple relationship was 12,8 years, with the longest relationship of 26 years and the shortest of 12 months. 50 responders were involved in marital couples and only 14, that is 21,9%, in consensual couples. Regarding the level of education, 33 participants are university graduates, 17 post-university graduates and 14 high-school graduates. 75% of the participants come from an urban environment and only 25 % from a rural area.

- **Results**

Discussion topics:

The most frequently discussed topics by men *are money, children and friends*, while the least approached issues are *religion, life in general and their own/ their partners' feelings*. For women the most discussed topics are *money, children and leisure activities*, while the topics least approached in daily conversations are *religion, their own/their partner's feelings and what is considered appropriate/ correct behavior*.

Two of the three most discussed topics are common for both male and female participants, suggesting that instrumental and family topics are fundamental in the everyday interactions of couples, since they consist the basis of family organization and activity planning. The third top ranked issue approached in daily conversations is *friends* for men and *leisure activities* for women, both part of the social activities larger category.

Moreover, two of the least discussed topics are common for both male and female participants- religion and expressing feelings- as part of the larger category of life topics and respectively intimacy between partners. Another seldomly approached topic for men – life in general and for women- correct behavior are both part of the same category of life topics.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between gender and the daily discussion topics. The relation between these variables was marginally

significant $\chi^2 (14, 115) = 9.49, p = 0.49$. Women discuss more frequently than men part of the topics included in our analysis.

Intimacy

One of the main research topics in our study was daily intimacy, as reported by participants throughout the seven days of the study. Data analysis suggests that the lowest level of intimacy was experienced and reported on Thursday ($M = 3.81$), whereas the highest was reported both on Wednesday ($M = 4.06$) and Friday ($M = 4.06$), as shown in the following chart. Instrumental discussions tend to be prevalent throughout the work days, whereas emotional self-disclosure topics and important discussions are aggregated towards the weekend, when the mundane aspects of life are less pressing and couples do not have to be present at work, or school. Furthermore, we conducted a One-Way ANOVA Analysis to determine whether there are significant differences in the level of intimacy based on the topic of daily conversation. The result ($F(15) = 10.40, p \geq .005$) shows that the differences are not significant.

- **Discussions and conclusion**

In light of the information gathered throughout the present study we consider communication, as the interpersonal model of Reis & Shaver (1988) suggests, an important part of dyadic life and a most important ally of intimacy, because it brings individuals close to one another through self-disclosure (be it instrumental or emotional).

Overviewing the current status of family interactions, which we have assessed in the present pilot study, we can draw some basic important conclusions. First, factual self-disclosures are recurrent in daily interactions and are associated with a mixture of positive and negative emotions (Reis & Shaver, 1988; Imami et al., 2018). Time being scarce, couples focus on important, urgent tasks and, as responses tend to show, rarely discuss their own feelings and deeper levels of life aspects, religious beliefs and correct behavior. Second, the content of these conversations is not directly associated with the daily level of intimacy, which varies throughout the days of the week.

Reis and Shaver hypothesized that different types of disclosure would differentially influence intimacy, with personal disclosure being associated with higher intimacy levels than factual disclosure (Mitchell et al., 2008), yet our current analysis does not detect such a dichotomy and daily levels of intimacy are not different according to the topic of discussion.

The lack of association could be due to a stable understanding of intimacy, which would mean that a longer period of time is needed to assess this construct with daily diary studies.

Study 4.

Positive but not negative emotions predict intimacy in couple relationships: a daily diary study

- **Overview**

Few studies investigated emotions as predictors of intimacy in couple relationships. Specifically, partners' skills to identify and communicate emotions were positively related to intimate safety (Cordova et al., 2005). Another study revealed that partners with higher interpersonal emotional competences reported greater relational intimacy in terms of connection, communication and sharing social activities with mutual friends.

While some of the existing studies investigated the associations of the mean level of clusters of positive emotions in association with intimacy, other studies considered the relationship between specific, discrete positive emotions (such as joy, interest, gratitude, amusement, love and pride) and intimacy (see for review Ramsey & Gentzler, 2015). Thus, gratitude and love were positively related to intimacy in close relationships.

The association between positive emotions, negative emotions and intimacy has mostly been analyzed on the between-person level and less on the within-person level, with a focus on how negative emotions (such as anger, fear, anxiety) influence relationship outcomes (Fredrickson, 2001).

Based on the theoretical and empirical findings reviewed above, we proposed the following hypotheses:

Between-persons

H1. Actor effects. On the between-persons level we hypothesized that individuals who experience higher levels of negative emotions on average will report lower levels of intimacy (H1a), whereas those experiencing higher levels of positive emotions on average will report higher levels of intimacy (H1b).

H1. Partner-effects. In addition, we hypothesized that each partner's experience of negative emotions on average will negatively influence his/her partner average level of

intimacy (H1c), while each partner's experience of positive emotions on average will positively influence his/her partner average level of intimacy (H1d).

Further we will explore gender differences in the association of positive and negative emotions with intimacy at the between-level (actor and partner effects).

Within-persons

H2. Actor effects. On the within person level, we hypothesize that individuals will report lower levels of intimacy with their partner on days when they feel more negative emotions (H2a) and higher levels of intimacy with their partner on days when they feel more positive emotions than usual (H2b).

H2. Partner effects. Furthermore, considering partner effects in dyadic relationships, we hypothesize that individuals will feel less intimate on days when their partner feels more negative emotions than usual (H2c). On the other hand, individuals will feel more intimate on days when the partner feels more positive emotions than usual (H2d).

• Measures

We used the following instruments within the diary to assess daily levels of intimacy and emotions:

- Three items from Walker and Thompson's Intimacy scale (1983), to assess today's level of relationship intimacy: "I am lucky to have my partner", "My partner is important for me" and "I am certain about this relationship"
- PANAS (Watson, et al., 1988) to assess the positive and negative emotions of participants.

• Participants

We recruited heterosexual students from graduate and post-graduate courses, together with their partners, to enroll in the current daily diary study. The data from the present study was collected from a sample of 81 Romanian couples, 59.3% were married partners, while 40.7% were cohabiting couples. Men's mean age was 32.28 (SD = 5.63; range: 25–45) and women's mean age was 32.51 years (SD = 4.87; range: 25–45). Most participants were living in an urban area (60.5%), whereas 39.5% were from a rural area. On average, the marriage duration was 10.7 years (SD = 9.16; range: 1-30 years) and couples had on average of 0.80 children (SD = 0.93; range: 0–4 children). Regarding the educational level of the sample,

34.6% of women and 27.2% of men had finished high school; 52.6% of women and 58% of men had a graduate diploma; 14.8% of both men and women had postgraduate education. More than half of participants (53.1%) had an above average individual income, as reported to the medium wage in Romania, whereas 46.9% had below average individual income.

- **Results**

On the within-person level, we hypothesised that today's positive and negative emotions affect how intimate men and women feel with their partner. Results show that on days where men and women experience more positive emotions, they tend to report significantly higher levels of intimacy ($\gamma_{10\text{men}} = .09, p < .000$; $\gamma_{30\text{women}} = .06, p = .005$), whereas no effect was found for negative emotions (Table 1), confirming our assumptions partially. On the between-person level, we find basically the same effect. Only average positive emotions predicted daily level of intimacy ($\gamma_{10\text{men}} = .13, p = .001$; $\gamma_{03\text{women}} = .14, p = .003$). Finally, we found only two significant interaction effects for women. On the between-person level, we found that the link between average positive emotions and intimacy is buffered by more negative emotions ($\gamma_{60\text{men}} = -.03, p = .007$). Finally, we found that the link between today's positive emotions and intimacy is buffered by the average level of positive emotions ($\gamma_{60\text{men}} = -.01, p = .020$).

Comparing how the emotions of one person affects the intimacy level of the partner, we only found two significant effects. Men's positive and negative emotions today influence women's level of intimacy on the same day ($\gamma_{60\text{men-women_PE}} = .03, p = .049$; $\gamma_{60\text{men-women_NE}} = -.06, p = .028$), indicating that women's happiness with the relationship on a particular day can be affected by their partners' emotions. No effects were found for women affecting men, not on the within-person level, the between-person level, or for the interactions.

- **Discussions and conclusion**

First, our results indicate that negative emotions do not influence dyadic intimacy, a conclusion consistent with prior studies suggesting that self-reported negative emotions did not predict emotional closeness and intimacy (Mehta et al., 2016). These studies indicate that the absence of negative emotions does not simultaneously mean the presence of positive processes in couple relationships. However, other studies showed significant negative associations of negative emotions with relationship quality, relationship satisfaction,

constructive communication between partners (Ogolsky & Gray, 2016) and intimacy (Costa et al., 2020).

The lack of association between negative emotions and intimacy in the present study may be explained by the intensity of the analyzed emotions. Previous studies focused on more intense negative emotions (depression, anxiety), in mostly clinical samples, whereas we investigated less intense daily negative emotions (i.e., upset, scared, irritable, nervous, afraid) in a non-clinical sample of couples.

Second, findings supporting a positive association of intimacy and positive emotions, both at intraindividual and interindividual level, are in line with the broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), which emphasizes that positive emotions build positive interpersonal resources. The present study extends past research by considering not individuals, but couples and by investigating both between- and within- effects. Our results are consistent with existing findings showing that positive, but not negative emotions predict closeness and social connectedness.

Third, results support a distinctive approach of emotions and relationship outcome depending on gender. Women's happiness with the relationship on a particular day can be affected by their partners' emotions, to which they are sensitive and open. These findings are supported by another study which suggests that women are more receptive to their partners' positive emotions and that women's feelings of intimacy on the following day are positively predicted by men's daily positive affect on the prior day (Mehta et al., 2016)

4. CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

From a theoretical standpoint, our literature review chapters contribute to the psychological research field with a synthesis of models and information about the central concept of the thesis- intimacy. From earlier definitions to current endeavors of understanding intimacy, but also from general models about romantic relationships to more refined and accurate ones about the processes involved in dyadic intimacy, we analyze intimacy from different perspectives, with a focus on the interpersonal model. Moreover, the theoretical aspects of the thesis draw light on what the connection of intimacy to other variables is, variables such as relationship satisfaction, commitment, forgiveness, religiousness. Pointing out direct and indirect connections between intimacy and these

associated constructs expands the comprehension of dyadic relationships and family dynamics.

From the standpoint of our original research, the four studies hereby presented contribute with an important cross-sectional and longitudinal perspective on intimacy and associated variables. To begin with, we identify supportive dyadic coping as a mediator between intimacy and relationship satisfaction throughout our first study, a result which expands the scarce research existing on the subject. Furthermore, in our third study, we focus on intimacy from an interpersonal perspective, identifying the mundane topics which define communication in Romanian couples and their association with intimacy. A very important outcome is provided by our fourth and last study, which extends past research referring to emotions and intimacy. It yet again confirms a conclusive association between positive emotions and intimacy. A major contribution is the investigation of both between- and within- effects, with a focus on couples. In addition to understanding how intimacy and relationship satisfaction are connected, mapping the daily discussions and their impact on couples and understanding how positive and negative emotions influence intimacy, we also explored the role of religiousness and forgiveness in the context of the investment model of commitment. Results focusing on these constructs in a centrally secular society contribute to redefining their role from a psychological point of view and to underlining their influence on relationship satisfaction and commitment.

From a practical standpoint, the present results, focusing on the importance of everyday experienced intimacy, are an essential contribution as they open the path for clinical interventions focused on intimacy. The practical aspects embedded in the studies shed light on the variables that contribute to relationship satisfaction and the persistence of relationships, such as intimacy, dyadic coping, positive emotions, religiousness and forgiveness. They could be valid arguments in sustaining intimacy focused education and therapies. Since intimacy plays such a crucial role for the quality of a relationship, marriage educational programs or individual skills programs could also be of help. Communication skills, self-disclosure and empathetic responses are directly associated to increases in intimacy and could be essential in family programs.

A series of theoretical forgiveness models have been developed to promote forgiveness (Enright, 2001). Research groups headed by Enright and Worthington have

advanced investigating the efficacy of these interventions, with the conclusion that they indeed effectively promote forgiveness (Wade et al., 2005). In one of the first meta-analyses conducted about the efficacy of forgiveness interventions, Baskin and Enright analyzed nine studies of individual and group therapy with a total sample of 330 participants. Their results suggest that explicit forgiveness interventions increased forgiveness, and self-esteem, but also reduced anxiety and depression in participants. A more recent meta-analysis (Wade et al., 2014) on the efficacy of forgiveness interventions in individual therapy and family therapy, has several conclusions and implications, which revolve around the benefits of forgiveness therapies, regardless of the program which is employed.

All in all, understanding the mechanisms of intimacy, forgiveness, relationship satisfaction, commitment and other associated variables in couple research and therapy can benefit the individual and the couple. Further research is needed in analyzing different concepts in couple well-being, with advanced methodological and statistic instruments.

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