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Interpersonal Emotion Regulation as a Source of Positive Relationship Perceptions: The Role of Emotion Regulation Dependence

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The current research unveils a novel mechanism through which interpersonal emotion regulation enhances romantic relationship quality and affective experience. Across three studies, we tested the hypothesis that depending on interactions with a romantic partner for emotion regulation (emotion regulation dependence [ERD]) motivates people to see their partner as more supportive and responsive, and evaluate their partner's traits more positively. In turn, we expected these elevated perceptions to partially account for the positive effect of ERD on relationship satisfaction and affective experience. In Studies 1 and 2 ($N = 395$ and 397), experimental manipulations of subjective ERD increased perceived partner support provision, perceived partner responsiveness, and, in Study 2, evaluation of partner traits. In Study 3, a multimethod dyadic study ($N = 470$), ERD predicted greater perceived partner support provision, perceived partner responsiveness, and positive evaluation of the partner's traits independently of the partner's self-reports and objective observers' assessments of partner behavior. ERD also predicted change over time in these perceptions. These findings were replicated in terms of everyday experiences using daily diary methods (daily $n = 9{,}653$). Global and daily ERD indirectly predicted greater relationship satisfaction and mood through positive interpersonal perceptions. Results underscore the importance of intrapsychic processes in interpersonal emotion regulation and suggest that positively biased interpersonal perceptions may be a common pathway through which depending on interactions with romantic partners for emotion regulation improves relationship quality and affective experience.

Keywords: interpersonal emotion regulation, romantic relationships, perceived partner responsiveness, social support, relationship satisfaction

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When people try to influence how others feel or when they turn to others to regulate their own feelings, they are engaging in interpersonal emotion regulation (IER). IER is a goal-directed process in which people use social interactions to achieve a desired emotional state in themselves or others (Niven, 2017; Zaki & Williams, 2013). IER often has far-reaching consequences, not just in terms of changing immediate affective experiences but also for outcomes such as physical health and psychological well-being (Debrot et al., 2013; Niven, 2017).

Several investigations reveal that IER influences interpersonal relationships. For instance, people who try to improve others' feelings became more integrated into their social networks over 12 weeks (Niven et al., 2015). Similarly, incoming college students who were willing to express negative emotions to others, an indicator that they may rely on others for emotion regulation, expanded their social networks and experienced more intimacy during their first semester of college (Graham et al., 2008). IER also appears to benefit romantic relationships, which is the focus of the current research. For instance, using affectionate touch and humor to regulate a romantic partner's emotion is associated with greater intimacy for both members of the couple (Debrot et al., 2013; Horn et al., 2019), and people are more satisfied with their romantic relationships when they perceive their own and their partner's IER to be effective (Ruan et al., 2020).

The mechanisms accounting for the effects of IER on the quality of romantic relationships are not well studied, although several explanations seem possible (Niven et al., 2012). For instance, receiving effective IER from partners may elicit positive affect (Coan & Maresh, 2014; Debrot et al., 2013; Horn et al., 2019; Zaki & Williams, 2013). In turn, this positive affect may improve relationship evaluations when it is attributed to the relationship or partner, or when it triggers happy memories of the partner (Forgas, 1995; Goldring & Bolger, 2022; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). In addition, disclosing emotions can increase a sense of intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988), and partners who try to improve one's emotional experience may appear as caring and responsive (Niven et al., 2012; Reis et al., 2010), which can improve relationship evaluations given that most people desire such care and responsiveness in their close relationships (Clark & Mills, 2011; Reis et al., 2004).

In the current research, we examine another pathway through which IER may affect relationship quality. We focus on romantic relationships given that adults often rely on romantic partners to meet

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their needs, including emotion regulation needs (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Haase, 2023; Heffernan et al., 2012). We predict that depending on social interactions with a partner to regulate one's emotion often produces positive interpersonal perceptions, independently of the partner's behavioral responses, and these perceptions bolster relationship quality and improve one's affective state.

Emotion Regulation Dependence

People are not passive recipients of IER. Rather, they actively recruit social resources that could manage their emotions (W. C. Williams et al., 2018). For instance, they seek proximity to others when under stress (Lakey & Orehek, 2011; Schachter, 1959), disclose details about stressors to obtain support (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Parkinson et al., 2016), and share positive experiences to amplify their emotional impact (Reis et al., 2010; Rimé, 2009).

A person's dependence on interactions with others for emotion regulation, which we refer to as emotion regulation dependence (ERD), may often determine whether they solicit and accept IER. People typically express their emotions to others (Gable et al., 2004; Rimé, 2009; Zaki & Williams, 2013), which suggests that ERD may be quite common. However, this dependence varies across people, partners, and time. People vary in their tendencies to express emotion (Barr et al., 2008; Gross & John, 1997; Rimé, 2009), to seek emotional support (Carver et al., 1989; Hill, 1991), and to seek IER (Tran et al., 2024; W. C. Williams et al., 2018). In addition, people rely on some relationship partners to regulate their emotions more than others. For example, they disclose emotion to some partners more than others (Lemay & Clark, 2008a; Malloy & Kenny, 1986; Ruan et al., 2020) and feel more comfortable depending on some partners more than others (Cook, 2000). This between-partner variation in ERD is predicted by relationship characteristics such as the level of closeness (Clark & Finkel, 2005; Clark & Taraban, 1991; Liu et al., 2021) and the expectation of partner responsiveness to one's needs (Lemay & Clark, 2008a; Ruan et al., 2020; Von Culin et al., 2018). ERD also varies across time. For instance, reliance on others for emotion regulation (Tran et al., 2024), use of self-disclosure as an emotion regulation strategy (Brans et al., 2013), and expression of emotions to romantic partners (Cameron & Overall, 2018; Ruan et al., 2020) fluctuate across time.

In the current research, we examine the interpersonal and affective implications of relationship-specific ERD—depending on interactions with a specific relationship partner to regulate one's emotions. We expect that tendencies for ERD within romantic relationships and fluctuations over time in this ERD influence interpersonally important perceptions of romantic partners and that these perceptions have downstream effects on relationship satisfaction and affective experiences.

ERD as a Source of Positive Interpersonal Perceptions

People's perceptions of their relationship partners are partly accurate and partly biased (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001). Bias, in this context, refers to a tendency for judgments to be systematically influenced by some force other than the truth (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; West & Kenny, 2011). Motivated cognition, or wishful thinking, is a common type of bias in which perceptions are influenced by goals and desires. People often use a biased set of cognitive processes when accessing, constructing, and evaluating their beliefs to arrive at particular desired conclusions (Kunda, 1990). These motivated biases often distort interpersonal perceptions in romantic relationships (Lemay & Clark, 2015; Murray, 1999). For example, people tend to idealize their romantic partners, seeing their partners as possessing the qualities that they most want in a romantic partner (Murray et al., 1996). Those who strongly want warm, caring, and understanding partners, for instance, tend to see their partner as possessing such qualities, independently of their partner's self-views. Similarly, people who want to be valued by their partners perceive their partners as having care and positive regard for them (Lemay et al., 2021).

ERD indicates that people's emotional welfare rests on their partner's regulation of their emotions. Hence, those with high ERD may strongly hope that their partner is willing and able to regulate their emotions when needed and that depending on their partner for emotion regulation is safe—their partner can be trusted not to harm them during or after emotion-regulating interactions. Safety is an important consideration because regulating partners sometimes use strategies during IER interactions that harm targets' psychological well-being (Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015; Lemay et al., 2020; Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009), and they sometimes enact harmful behaviors following these interactions, such as when they use information obtained during these interactions to reject, manipulate, exploit, or punish targets (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Barasch et al., 2016; Salerno & Slepian, 2022).

These hopes engendered by ERD may serve as a source of positive bias in perceptions of the partner's provision of support, particularly emotional support that demonstrates the partner's willingness and ability to regulate emotion. These support behaviors would satisfy the desires harbored by people with high ERD, and they may see their partners as enacting them as a form of wishful thinking. For instance, they may overestimate their partner's empathy, attentiveness, or motivation to provide support. In addition, ERD may serve as a source of positive bias in related perceptions of partner responsiveness. Perceived partner responsiveness refers to beliefs that a particular partner cares for and understands one's needs, is motivated to support one's welfare, and has positive regard for oneself (Reis & Gable, 2015; Reis et al., 2004). Responsive partners care about one's welfare, and so they should be motivated to regulate one's emotional state in a desired direction. Moreover, responsiveness often constitutes effective emotion regulation. People who are targets of IER often want regulators to be responsive (Liu et al., 2021; Pauw et al., 2018), and they experience emotion regulation episodes as more beneficial when they perceive them as responsive (Swerdlow & Johnson, 2022; see also Maisel & Gable, 2009; Nils & Rimé, 2012). Perceived responsiveness may also signal that IER is safe, that the partner cares for one's welfare, and so is unlikely to use one's dependence and disclosure to inflict harm. Hence, ERD may typically increase implicit or explicit desires for a responsive partner, and, due to wishful thinking, this dependence may often serve as a source of positive bias in perceived partner responsiveness.

ERD may also bias evaluations of the partner's communal and agentic traits, as many of these traits have implications for the partner's willingness and ability to safely and effectively regulate emotion. Communal qualities, including warmth (i.e., qualities such as warm, friendly, and empathetic) and morality (i.e., qualities such as honest, trustworthy, and sincere), are thought to reflect others' intent to help (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Fiske, 2018), and so they

may be interpreted as indicative of the partner's willingness to provide desired IER. They may also be relevant to the partner's IER effectiveness. For instance, empathy may promote an understanding that facilitates partner responsiveness (Gregory et al., 2020; Winczewski et al., 2016), warmth may improve the partner's ability to regulate positive affect (Debrot et al., 2013), and honesty may improve the credibility of the partner's support attempts (Lemay & Clark, 2008b, 2008c). Partner morality may also promote confidence that the partner will not use one's dependence and disclosure to inflict harm. Hence, such qualities may be particularly desired by people with high ERD. Indeed, prior research suggests that people who report high levels of affiliative need, which includes a need for emotional support and positive stimulation, report a desire for warm interaction partners (Hill, 1991). These desires for communion may bias perception in romantic relationships. People with high ERD may construe their partner as warmer and more virtuous because these characteristics bode well for their ability to obtain the effective and safe emotion regulation they desire.

ERD may also bias perceptions of a partner's agency, which includes competence-related qualities such as capability and intelligence as well as assertiveness-related qualities such as determination and ambition (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Fiske, 2018). IER is a goal-driven process (Niven, 2017), requires skills that vary across people (Hofmann et al., 2016; Niven, 2022; Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), and is considered to be an important feature of social competence (Kwon & López-Pérez, 2022). Given that agency reflects a person's ability and motivation to pursue goals (Abele et al., 2016), it should facilitate IER. As such, people who depend on their partners for emotion regulation should desire agentic partners, and they may construe their partners as more agentic as a result of motivated distortion.

Implications for Relationship Quality and Affective Outcomes

The effects of ERD on interpersonal perceptions described above may have implications for relationship satisfaction. Perceiving partners as responsive and supportive is associated with more positive relationship evaluations (Clark & Mills, 2011; Feeney & Collins, 2015; Lemay et al., 2007, 2021; Murray et al., 2006). In addition, people are more satisfied in their relationships when they evaluate partners positively in communal and agentic domains (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Fletcher et al., 1999). Thus, through positive biases in perceptions of these qualities, ERD may increase relationship satisfaction. This prediction coheres with a number of findings indicating that positively biased interpersonal perceptions are associated with higher relationship satisfaction (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Lemay et al., 2007; Murray et al., 1996).

ERD may also predict more positive affective experience through similar mechanisms. Given that perceived partner responsiveness is rewarding and fulfills needs to be valued and cared for, it elicits positive emotion (Maisel & Gable, 2009; Selcuk et al., 2016, 2017; Tasfiliz et al., 2018). Similarly, partner warmth has been shown to improve mood (Debrot et al., 2013; Jakubiak, 2022), whereas immoral and incompetent behaviors trigger negative emotions (Hutcherson & Gross, 2011). Hence, biased interpersonal perceptions accompanying ERD may shape the perceiver's emotional experience, partially explaining the hedonic benefits of emotionally depending on partners. This prediction follows evidence that perceived partner responsiveness mediates the effects of specific IER strategies on positive affect, such as having partners who use affectionate touch and humor to regulate emotion (Debrot et al., 2013; Horn et al., 2019). It also converges with evidence suggesting that illusory perceptions of responsiveness influence emotional well-being (Lemay & Neal, 2013, 2014). We contribute to this literature by examining the role of biased interpersonal perceptions in mediating the effects of ERD on relationship quality and affective experience.

The Current Research

In the current research, we test the predictions that (a) ERD in romantic relationships causes and predicts perceived partner responsiveness, perceived partner support provision, and positive evaluation of the partner's traits; and (b) ERD indirectly predicts greater relationship satisfaction and affective experience through these perceptions.

These predictions are tested in three studies. In Studies 1 and 2, we manipulate subjective dependence on partners for emotion regulation to examine its causal effect on interpersonal perception. Study 3 is a multimethod dyadic study. Predictions are tested with regard to participants' typical tendencies, day-to-day fluctuations, and change over 6 months and in the context of observed laboratory interactions.

Studies 1 and 2

In Studies 1 and 2, we attempted to manipulate subjective ERD in romantic relationships to examine its causal effects on perceived partner support provision and responsiveness. In Study 2, we examine evaluation of the partner's traits as an additional outcome. We expected that participants exposed to a manipulation intended to heighten subjective ERD would see their partners as more supportive and responsive and evaluate their partner's traits more positively, relative to participants exposed to a manipulation designed to lower subjective ERD (Hypothesis 1). Given random assignment to experimental conditions, actual partner behaviors and qualities should be the same across the two conditions. Thus, support for this hypothesis would suggest that ERD biases interpersonal perception. We also predicted that effects of the manipulation would be mediated by subjective ERD (Hypothesis 2).

In Study 1, participants were exposed to a manipulation that provided information about the frequency and interpersonal consequences of ERD. Given that information about interpersonal consequences could have elicited demand effects or socially desirable responding, we used a slightly modified manipulation in Study 2 that did not refer to interpersonal consequences of ERD. These hypotheses, the general design of these studies, and our approach to statistical analyses were preregistered.

Method

Participants

Participants involved in a romantic relationship were recruited from Prolific. Data from five participants in Study 1 and eight participants in Study 2 were eliminated from statistical analyses due to participants' failure of attention-check questions. See Table 1 for sample characteristics. The majority of our participants identified as White and were married. The samples provided 80% power to detect

a mean difference effect size of $d = .28$ ($\alpha = .05$). Sample sizes were determined by funding constraints.

Procedure

Study procedures were approved by the institutional review board at the University of Maryland. The experimental manipulations were informed by research suggesting that construct activation, motivated reasoning, and self-persuasion influence people's judgments (e.g., Aronson, 1999; Higgins, 1996; Kunda, 1990). In Study 1, participants randomly assigned to the high ERD condition ($n = 195$) read that people who depend on romantic partners to feel fewer negative emotions and more positive emotions experience better psychological adjustment and relationship quality, according to prior research, and were then asked to write an essay describing why it is beneficial to depend on a partner in these ways. Given research suggesting that people perceive that they possess desirable attributes (Ludeke et al., 2013), we expected that this manipulation would increase perceptions of ERD. To bolster the manipulation, participants then wrote a second essay describing a personal experience in which they depended on their partner in these ways. Participants in this condition were then asked to keep in mind the fact that they often depend on their partner to feel less negative emotion and more positive emotion, ostensibly to answer more questions about this dependence later.

Participants randomly assigned to the low ERD condition of Study 1 ($n = 196$) instead read that people who depend on romantic partners to feel less negative emotion and more positive emotion experience worse adjustment and relationships, according to prior research, and were then asked to write an essay describing why it is harmful to depend on a partner in these ways. Based on research suggesting that people tend to disavow negative attributes (Ludeke et al., 2013), we expected that this manipulation would decrease perceptions of ERD. To bolster this manipulation, participants then wrote a second essay describing a personal experience in which they did not depend on their partner in these ways and instead managed their emotions on their own. Participants in this condition were then asked to keep in mind the fact that they often manage their own emotions and often do not depend on their partner to manage their emotions, ostensibly to answer questions about this independence later.

In Study 2, participants randomly assigned to the high ERD condition ($n = 195$) wrote an essay describing a time they depended on their romantic partner to feel more positive emotion or less negative emotion and explaining why they depended on their partner. Then they were asked to write a persuasive essay describing ways that people can depend on their partners and why they should depend on their partners to feel more positive emotion and less negative emotion. Participants in this condition were then asked to keep in mind the fact that they often depend on their partner to feel less negative emotions and more positive emotions, ostensibly to answer more questions about this dependence later. Participants randomly assigned to the low ERD condition of Study 2 ($n = 194$) instead wrote an essay describing a time when they did not depend on their partner to manage their emotions and instead managed their emotions on their own, explaining why they did so. Then they were asked to write a persuasive essay describing ways that people can manage their own emotions and why they should do so. Participants in this condition were then asked to keep in mind the fact that they often manage their own emotions and often do not depend on their partner to manage their emotions, ostensibly to answer questions about this independence later.

Measures

Subjective ERD—Manipulation Check. To assess ERD, participants completed an eight-item adaptation of the tendency subscale of the Interpersonal Regulation Questionnaire (W. C. Williams et al., 2018). Items were reworded to assess subjective dependence on interaction with one's romantic partner, rather than with people in general, when experiencing positive and negative events (e.g., "When something bad happens, my first impulse is to seek out [partner name]"; "When something good happens, my first impulse is to tell [partner name] about it"). Items were completed using 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*; Study 1 $\alpha = .94$; Study 2 $\alpha = .93$).

Table 1
Sample Characteristics Across Studies

Variable	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
N	395	389	470
Gender			
% Men	44	47	46
% Women	54	52	51
% Nonbinary/not listed/unreported	2	1	2
Age *M* (*SD*)	41.09 (13.02)	41.61 (13.12)	30.03 (9.64)
Ethnicity			
% Black/African American	10.4	9.8	8.4
% Asian/Asian American	8.6	5.4	17.4
% Hispanic/Latino/a	5.8	5.9	12
% White	81.8	85.6	55.7
% Not listed	2.9	3.6	6.5
Relationship type			
% Dating	19.3	17.9	58.7
% Married	58.5	61.9	32.8
% Long-term partnership/engaged	20.1	19.2	8.3
% Casual relationships	.8	.8	0

Perceived Partner Support Provision. Participants completed six items from the social support subscale of the Quality of Relationships Inventory (Pierce et al., 1991) to assess perceived partner provision of support (e.g., "How often does [partner name] provide advice about problems?"; "How often does [partner name] listen to you when you are very angry at someone else?" Study 1 $\alpha = .89$; Study 2 $\alpha = .89$). Items were completed using 5-point response scales (1 = *never*; 5 = *all the time*).

Perceived Partner Responsiveness. Participants completed a nine-item adaptation of the Perceived Partner Responsiveness Scale (Crasta et al., 2021) to assess perception of the partner's responsiveness (e.g., "[partner name] really listens to me"). An item was added to the scale to assess perceived partner care for one's welfare (i.e., "[partner name] cares about my welfare"). Items were completed using 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*; Study 1 $\alpha = .97$; Study 2 $\alpha = .97$).

Evaluation of Partner Traits. Participants in Study 2 completed a measure assessing evaluation of partner traits (Abele et al., 2016, 2021), which required them to rate the extent to which 8 qualities (i.e., caring, warm, trustworthy, reliable, self-confident, determined, capable, intelligent) were characteristic of their partner using 5-point response scales (1 = *not at all characteristic of [partner name]*; 5 = *extremely characteristic of [partner name]*; $\alpha = .89$).

Transparency and Openness

We report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions and manipulations, missing data, and all relevant measures in the study following the *Journal Article Reporting Standards* (Kazak, 2018). Copies of data, syntax, questionnaires, and the preregistrations can be found on the Open Science Framework at https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/DYCMJ (Lemay, 2024).

Results and Discussion

As shown in Table 2, participants in the high ERD conditions reported greater subjective ERD relative to those in the low ERD conditions, indicating that the manipulations were effective in both studies. In addition, participants in the high ERD conditions of both studies perceived greater partner support provision and partner responsiveness relative to those in the low ERD conditions, consistent with our prediction that ERD would increase perceptions of partner support provision and responsiveness (Hypothesis 1). However, the effect of the manipulation on evaluation of partner traits in Study 2 was not significant.

Regression analyses tested whether subjective ERD (the manipulation check) mediated the effect of condition on perceived partner support provision, perceived partner responsiveness, and evaluation of partner traits. Results, which are presented in Figures 1 and 2, suggest that subjective ERD predicted each of these outcomes across both studies. Indirect effects of the manipulation on these outcomes via subjective ERD were tested using 5,000 bootstrap samples. These indirect effects were significant across both studies, consistent with our prediction that subjective ERD mediates the effects of the experimental manipulations (Hypothesis 2).[1]

These results support our predictions. Participants who were exposed to manipulations that increased their subjective dependence on their partners for emotion regulation perceived their partners as more supportive and responsive relative to participants exposed to manipulations that lowered subjective dependence, and manipulated subjective ERD indirectly predicted greater perceived partner responsiveness, perceived partner support provision, and positive evaluation of the partner's traits via elevated perceptions of ERD.

A limitation of these studies is that the blatant experimental manipulations may have caused participants to discern our hypotheses, which may have biased their responses. In Study 3, we test our predictions using methods that minimize potential demand effects.

Study 3

In Study 3, we tested our predictions using a dyadic study of romantic couples. We expected that higher ERD would predict greater perceived partner support provision and responsiveness and more positive evaluation of the partner's traits while controlling for the partner's self-reported support provision, responsiveness, and self-views (Hypothesis 3). We control for the partner's self-reports to account for the possibility that ERD is associated with having partners who actually report more support provision, responsiveness, or positive self-views. In other words, consistent with prior research on bias in interpersonal perception (West & Kenny, 2011), bias by ERD is suggested by an effect of ERD on interpersonal perceptions while statistically controlling for an indicator of the partner's actual qualities or behavior, which was the partner's self-report in this test. Hence, support for Hypothesis 3 would suggest that ERD has a biasing effect on these perceptions.

Using daily diary methods, we also examined effects of daily fluctuation in ERD on perceived partner support provision and responsiveness, again while controlling for the partner's self-reports. We expected that participants would see their partners as more supportive and responsive on days when ERD was especially high and that this effect would be independent of the partner's self-reports, suggesting bias (Hypothesis 4). In addition to testing these within-person change processes, testing our model using daily methods is useful given that these methods tend to be ecologically valid (Bolger et al., 2003) and global measures of emotion regulation tend to be only weakly correlated with daily emotion regulation (Koval et al., 2023).

Given that the partner's self-reported support provision may be an inaccurate and thus flawed indicator of their actual behavior, we supplemented these analyses with an analysis using behavioral observation data. Participants were asked to discuss a personal goal with their partner while being recorded. We expected that ERD would predict perceptions of the partner's support provision

[1] Gender did not have a consistent moderating effect across studies. Hence, the role of gender is not discussed further. Participants were asked to guess the purpose of the study. Five participants in Study 1 and two participants in Study 2 provided an answer suggesting that they may have guessed the hypothesis, and exclusion of these participants did not alter the results or conclusions in a notable way. All statistically significant effects remained significant after excluding data from these participants. The measure of partner evaluation administered in Study 2 included four dimensions—warmth, morality, assertiveness, and competence. We tested the indirect effect for each of the four dimensions. Through subjective ERD, the ERD manipulation indirectly predicted greater evaluation of partner warmth, 95% CI [.27, .55], evaluation of partner morality, 95% CI [.27, .52], evaluation of partner assertiveness, 95% CI [.23, .47], and evaluation of partner competence, 95% CI [.21, .44].

Table 2
Results of Independent Samples t Tests Comparing Outcomes Across Conditions (Studies 1 and 2)

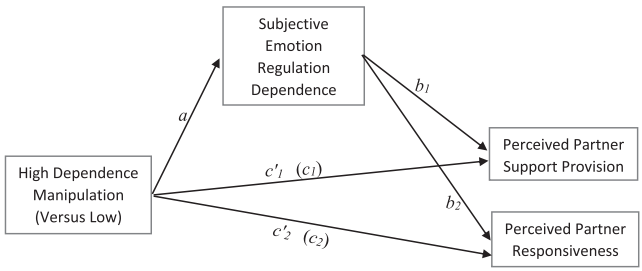
Dependent variable	High ERD condition *M* (*SD*)	Low ERD condition *M* (*SD*)	*t*	*d*	*p*
Study 1					
Subjective ERD	5.75 (1.09)	4.24 (1.24)	12.91	1.3	<.001
Perceived partner support provision	3.97 (0.71)	3.32 (0.77)	8.78	.88	<.001
Perceived partner responsiveness	6.08 (1.03)	5.5 (1.29)	4.96	.50	<.001
Study 2					
Subjective ERD	5.86 (0.98)	4.59 (1.26)	11.16	1.13	<.001
Perceived partner support provision	4.09 (0.70)	3.55 (0.79)	7.14	.72	<.001
Perceived partner responsiveness	6.05 (1.06)	5.70 (1.25)	3.04	.31	.003
Evaluation of partner traits	4.33 (0.63)	4.20 (0.73)	1.89	.19	.059

Note. $df = 393$ for Study 1 and 387 for Study 2. ERD = emotion regulation dependence.

during these conversations independently of objectively observed assessments of partner support provision, suggesting bias by ERD (Hypothesis 5).

We also sought to test these predictions over time. Using a 6-month follow-up assessment to assess relatively long-term change and the daily diary data to assess relatively short-term change, we examined whether ERD was associated with more positive perceptions of partner support provision and responsiveness later in time. These prospective models are useful because results cannot be explained by reverse causation. We expected that ERD would predict more positive interpersonal perceptions over 6 months (Hypothesis 6) and daily ERD would predict more positive interpersonal perceptions the following day (Hypothesis 7) while controlling for partners' self-reports, suggesting bias by ERD over time.

Figure 1
Results of Mediation Analysis (Study 1)



Path *a*: $b = 1.52$, 95% CI (1.29, 1.75), $\beta = .55$, $t = 12.91$, $p < .001$

Path b_1: $b = .42$, 95% CI (.38, .47), $\beta = .73$, $t = 17.78$, $p < .001$

Path b_2: $b = .49$, 95% CI (.40, .57), $\beta = .56$, $t = 10.98$, $p < .001$

Path c'_1: $b = .01$, 95% CI (-.12, .14), $\beta = .01$, $t = .17$, $p = .866$

Path c'_2: $b = -.15$, 95% CI (-.39, .09), $\beta = -.06$, $t = -1.24$, $p = .216$

Path c_1: $b = .66$, 95% CI (.51, .80), $\beta = .41$, $t = 8.78$, $p < .001$

Path c_2: $b = .58$, 95% CI (.35, .82), $\beta = .24$, $t = 4.96$, $p < .001$

Indirect effect ab_1 95% CI: .53, .77

Indirect effect ab_2 95% CI: .53, .95

Note. 95% CIs for indirect effects are based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. Paths in parentheses are total effects, and paths adjacent to parentheses are direct effects.

We also tested our prediction that relatively enduring ERD (Hypothesis 8) and momentary fluctuations in ERD (Hypothesis 9) would indirectly predict greater daily relationship satisfaction and more positive daily mood via positive interpersonal perceptions.

Method

Participants

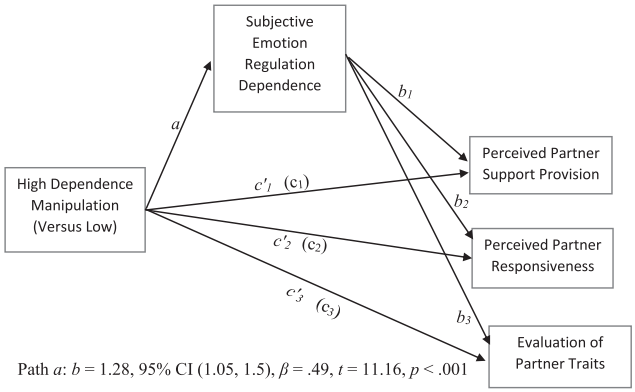
Both members of 235 romantic couples were recruited through advertisements posted in an undergraduate subject pool and on websites, flyers placed within and around a university campus, and recruitment emails to faculty and staff at the university. See Table 1 for sample characteristics. The majority of our participants identified as White and were dating. The sample provided 80% power to detect a Level 1 (i.e., within-dyad) effect size of $\beta = .17$ or greater in a model treating the two partners as nested within dyads ($\alpha = .05$) and power to detect a Level 2 (i.e., between-person) effect of $\beta = .15$ or greater in a model treating days as nested within person ($\alpha = .05$). Sample size was determined by funding constraints.

Procedure

Study procedures were approved by the local institutional review board. Participants first completed the T1 (baseline) measures described below. Participants then identified a personal goal they were pursuing that does not involve their relationship and that they would be willing to discuss with their partner. Participants then spent 7 min discussing this goal and another 7 min discussing their partner's goal while being recorded. Following these interactions, participants reported on their perceptions of their partner's support provision while they discussed their goal. Starting the day following the laboratory session, participants were asked to begin the daily report phase, which involved completing online questionnaires containing the daily measures described below at the end of each day (between 7 p.m. and midnight) for 14 consecutive days. Three months later, participants were asked to complete a second set of 14 daily questionnaires, identical to the first set. After removing invalid entries (i.e., those completed at inappropriate times or more than one time per day), a total of 9,653 daily observations remained for data analysis ($M = 22.61$ daily reports per person for the 427 participants who completed the daily survey). Six months following the laboratory session, participants ($n = 275$) completed an additional

Figure 2

Results of Mediation Analysis (Study 2)



Path *a*: $b = 1.28$, 95% CI (1.05, 1.5), $\beta = .49$, $t = 11.16$, $p < .001$

Path b_1: $b = .42$, 95% CI (.37, .47), $\beta = .68$, $t = 15.97$, $p < .001$

Path b_2: $b = .55$, 95% CI (.46, .63), $\beta = .60$, $t = 12.29$, $p < .001$

Path b_3: $b = .28$, 95% CI (.23, .34), $\beta = .53$, $t = 10.38$, $p < .001$

Path c'_1: $b = .01$, 95% CI (-.13, .14), $\beta = .01$, $t = .11$, $p = .912$

Path c'_2: $b = -.34$, 95% CI (-.56, -.11), $\beta = -.14$, $t = -2.95$, $p = .003$

Path c'_3: $b = -.23$, 95% CI (-.37, -.09), $\beta = -.17$, $t = -3.26$, $p = .001$

Path c_1: $b = .54$, 95% CI (.39, .69), $\beta = .34$, $t = 7.14$, $p < .001$

Path c_2: $b = .36$, 95% CI (.13, .59), $\beta = .15$, $t = 3.04$, $p = .003$

Path c_3: $b = .13$, 95% CI (-.005, .27), $\beta = .10$, $t = 1.89$, $p = .059$

Indirect effect ab_1 95% CI:.42, .66

Indirect effect ab_2 95% CI: .52, .88

Indirect effect ab_3 95% CI: .26, .47

Note. 95% CIs for indirect effects are based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. Paths in parentheses are total effects, and paths adjacent to parentheses are direct effects.

online questionnaire containing the T2 measures described below.[2] Only measures related to this investigation are described below. Additional measures used in ancillary analyses are described in online Supplemental Materials.

Baseline (T1) Measures

ERD. Participants completed a revised version of the tendency subscale of the Interpersonal Regulation Questionnaire (W. C. Williams et al., 2018) to assess ERD. Items were adapted to assess dependence on one's specific romantic partner, rather than people in general, for emotion regulation (ERD) and were completed using 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Four items assessed dependence for regulating negative emotions (e.g., "When something bad happens, my first impulse is to seek out [partner name]"; α = .86) and four items assessed dependence for regulating positive emotions (e.g., "When something good happens, my first impulse is to tell [partner name] about it"; α = .89). Responses on negative and positive emotion subscale scores were averaged.

Support Provision and Perceived Partner Support Provision. Participants completed the seven-item social support subscale of the Quality of Relationships Inventory (Pierce et al., 1991) to assess provision of support to partners (e.g., "To what extent would you distract [partner name] from his/her worries when he/she is under stress?"; α = .60). They also completed a modified version of this scale to assess perceived partner support provision (e.g., "To what extent can you count on [partner name] to listen to you when you are very angry at someone else?"; α = .73). Items were completed using 4-point response scales (1 = *not at all*; 4 = *very much*).

Perceived Partner Responsiveness and Own Responsiveness. Participants completed a five-item adaption of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) to assess perception of the partner's positive regard (e.g., "He/she feels that I have a number of good qualities"; α = .73) and another five-item adaption to assess own regard for the partner (e.g., "He/she has a number of good qualities"; α = .83). Items were completed using 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). They also completed the 10-item Communal Strength Scale (Mills et al., 2004) to assess care for the partner's welfare (e.g., "How far would you be willing to go to visit [partner name]?"; α = .77) and an adaptation of this scale assessing perceived partner care for one's welfare (e.g., "How far would [partner name] be willing to go to visit you?"; α = .78). Items were completed using 5-point response scales (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *extremely*). Based on definitions of responsiveness that include validation and care as central aspects of responsiveness (Reis et al., 2004), we standardized and averaged scores on perceived partner regard and perceived partner care to create an index of perceived partner responsiveness and averaged scores on own regard and care to index responsiveness toward partners.

Evaluation of Partner's Traits and Self-Evaluation. Participants evaluated themselves and their partners on eight traits reflecting communion and agency (i.e., caring, warm, trustworthy, reliable, self-confident, determined, capable, intelligent) based on prior research (Abele et al., 2016, 2021) using 5-point response scales (1 = *not at all descriptive of me/[partner name]*; 5 = *extremely descriptive of me/[partner name]*; self-evaluation α = .78; partner evaluation α = .73).

Perception of Partner's Support Provision During Laboratory Interactions. Following the laboratory interaction, participants completed 10 items assessing perceptions of their partner's support provision during the interaction, which were based on prior research examining goal support in relationships (Brunstein et al., 1996; Feeney, 2004). The measure included items assessing encouraging goal commitment, encouraging goal effort, suggesting strategies for goal attainment, expressing appreciation of the goal, expressing praise for one's motivation (three items), and expressing praise for one's ability (three items). Items were completed using 5-point response scales (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *extremely*). Scores on these six subscales were averaged to create an index of perceived partner responsive support provision during the laboratory interactions (α = .87). Items are provided in online Supplemental Materials.

Six-Month Follow-Up (T2) Measures

Participants completed the measures of support provision (α = .76), perceived partner support provision (α = .80), and perceived regard (α = .85) again at the 6-month follow-up.

[2] Participants who dropped out of the study reported lower commitment at T1 ($b = -.26$, $p = .008$) and lower ERD at T1 ($b = -.26$, $p = .008$) relative to those who remained in the study. Attrition was not related to any of the other T1 variables, $p > .19$.

Daily Measures

In each of the daily surveys, participants completed the following measures using 7-point response scales: (a) a four-item measure assessing daily ERD (e.g., "Today, I sought help from [partner name] to help me feel less negative emotion"; "Today, I tried to get [partner name] to help me feel more positive emotion"; ω = .96); (b) a nine-item measure assessing daily provision of emotional support (e.g., "Today, I tried to help [partner name] feel happy"; ω = .96); (c) a four-item measure of perceived partner support provision (e.g., "Today, [partner name] helped me feel less stressed"; ω = .94); (d) a four-item measure of perceived partner responsiveness (e.g., "Today, to what extent did [partner name] care about your needs?"; ω = .92); (e) an analogous four-item measure of own responsiveness (e.g., "Today, how rejecting or accepting were you of [partner name]?"; ω = .89); and (f) a single-item measures assessing relationship satisfaction ("Today, how satisfied did you feel in your relationship with [partner name]"). They also completed a six-item measure of daily affect (e.g., "Today, how happy did you feel?") using 5-point response scales (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *extremely*; ω = .80). Items are provided in online Supplemental Materials.

Coding Behavioral Data

A panel of eight raters rated participants' responsive support provision behavior during the laboratory interactions using modified versions of the items assessing perceptions of the partner's responsive support behavior using the same 5-point response scales. The items were adapted to reflect a third party's perspective. The raters exhibited adequate reliability (average intraclass correlation coefficient, ICC = .76; ICC ranged from .67 to .83).[3] Items assessed six interrelated support constructs, including a single item assessing encouraging goal commitment, a single item assessing encouraging goal effort, a single item suggesting strategies for goal attainment, a single item assessing expression of goal value, three items assessing praise for partner's motivation, and three items assessing praise for partner's ability. After averaging ratings across the raters and across items assessing the same construct, scores on these six subscales were averaged to create a single index of observed responsive support behavior during the laboratory interactions (α = .94).

Results and Discussion

Analysis Strategy

Predictions were tested using multilevel models to account for the nested data structure. In analyses predicting person-level criterion variables, the two couple members were modeled as nested within dyads, and a compound symmetry structure modeled the association among their residuals. In analyses predicting daily criterion variables, days and people were modeled as crossed and nested within dyads, and a compound symmetry error structure modeled the associations among couple members' intercepts and residuals (Kenny et al., 2006). Analyses examining effects of ERD on perceptions of romantic partners controlled for accuracy benchmarks, including partners' self-reports or, in analyses predicting perceptions of support in laboratory interactions, objective observers' assessments of partner support provision. Prospective analyses examined effects of predictors on perceptions assessed later in time while controlling for the lagged criterion. Daily ERD was centered on person means, and thus effects of daily ERD are interpreted as within-person effects (Enders & Tofighi, 2007).

Biasing Effects of Global ERD

The first set of analyses examined the effects of ERD assessed in the baseline (T1) survey on interpersonal perceptions measured at the same time. As the variables used in these analyses assess general tendencies, we refer to them as *global* to contrast them from the daily assessments. These analyses examined the effect of global ERD, as assessed in the baseline survey, on concurrent perceptions of partners' support provision, responsiveness, and traits while controlling for analogous partner-reported support provision, responsiveness, or traits, which served as accuracy benchmarks. In a fourth model, we examined the effect of global ERD on perceptions of partners' support provision in observed laboratory interactions while using objectively observed assessments of partners' support provision in these interactions as the accuracy benchmark. In additional models, we examined the effect of global ERD measured at baseline (T1) on perceived partner support provision and perceived regard measured 6 months later (T2) while controlling for the T1 assessment of the criterion variable and an accuracy benchmark (partner-reported support provision at T2 and partner-reported regard at T1).

Results are presented in Table 3. Consistent with predictions (Hypotheses 3 and 5), global ERD predicted greater perceived partner support provision, perceived partner responsiveness, evaluation of partner traits, and perception of partner support provision in observed interactions while controlling for an accuracy benchmark.[4] In each analysis, perceptions were also predicted by the accuracy benchmark, suggesting both accuracy and bias by ERD. Consistent with Hypothesis 6, global ERD also predicted greater perceived partner support provision and perceived regard 6 months later.[5] These results support predictions regarding biasing effects of global ERD.

[3] We used the ICC(*C*, *k*) formula, which is appropriate when consistency (*C*) among (*k*) multiple raters is of importance, when each participant is rated by multiple raters, and when the ratings are averaged across the raters to create a score for each participant to be used in data analysis (McGraw & Wong, 1996). Ratings from the two raters with the lowest item-total correlations on the one item with a reliability ICC less than .70 were dropped when calculating the average for that particular item, which improved the ICC for this item (ICC = .69).

[4] The measures of partner evaluation and self-evaluation administered in Study 3 included four dimensions—warmth, morality, assertiveness, and competence. We examined the effect of global ERD on perceptions of the partner in each dimension while controlling for the partner's analogous self-evaluations. Global ERD predicted evaluation of the partner's warmth, b = .12, 95% CI [.06, .19], β = .17, t = 3.65, p < .001; evaluation of the partner's morality, b = .09, 95% CI [.03, .15], β = .14, t = 3, p = .003; evaluation of the partner's assertiveness, b = .19, 95% CI [.12, .26], β = .21, t = 5.23, p < .001; and evaluation of the partner's competence, b = .12, 95% CI [.07, .17], β = .21, t = 4.73, p < .001.

[5] We predicted T2 perceived regard rather than the responsiveness composite index used in the cross-sectional analyses because participants did not complete a measure of perceived partner care in the abbreviated T2 questionnaire. In addition, they did not report on their own regard for their partner in the T2 questionnaire, and so T1 partner-reported regard is used as a control variable.

Table 3
Results of Analyses Predicting T1 and T2 Perceptions of Partner (Study 3)

Predictor	*b* (95% CI)	*t*	β	*p*
Predicting T1 perceived partner support provision				
T1 ERD	.15 [.11, .18]	8.15	.36	<.001
T1 Partner-reported support provision	.17 [.05, .30]	2.67	.12	.008
Predicting T1 perceived partner responsiveness				
T1 ERD	.21 [.13, .29]	5.35	.23	<.001
T1 Partner-reported responsiveness	.23 [.14, .31]	5.21	.23	<.001
Predicting T1 evaluation of partner traits				
T1 ERD	.13 [.09, .18]	6.19	.28	<.001
T1 Partner self-views	.19 [.11, .26]	5.04	.23	<.001
Predicting T1 perceived partner support provision in laboratory interactions				
T1 ERD	.24 [.15, .33]	5.01	.23	<.001
T1 Objectively observed support	.51 [.31, .72]	4.97	.24	<.001
Predicting T2 perceived partner support provision				
T1 ERD	.12 [.06, .18]	3.76	.24	<.001
T1 Perceived partner support provision	.46 [.32, .59]	6.75	.39	<.001
T2 Partner-reported support provision	.02 [−.13, .17]	.27	.02	<.001
Predicting T2 perceived regard				
T1 ERD	.13 [.02, .23]	2.39	.13	.018
T1 Perceived regard	.62 [.51, .73]	11.18	.55	<.001
T1 Partner-reported regard	.11 [−.05, .27]	1.37	.07	.172

Note. CI = confidence interval; ERD = emotion regulation dependence.

Biasing Effects of Daily ERD

The next set of analyses examined the biasing effects of daily ERD. Concurrent models examined whether participants who experienced heighted ERD on a particular day saw their partners as more supportive and responsive that day. These analyses controlled for partner-reported support provision and responsiveness on the same day. Prospective models predicted the next day's perceptions of partner support and responsiveness from daily ERD while controlling for the lagged criterion (i.e., perceived partner support or responsiveness assessed on the same day as ERD) and partner-reported support or responsiveness the next day.

As shown in Table 4, independent of partner-reported accuracy benchmarks, daily ERD predicted same-day perceptions of partner support provision and responsiveness and next-day perceptions of partner support provision, but not next-day perceptions of partner responsiveness. Thus, these results support Hypothesis 4 and partially support Hypothesis 7. Partners' self-reports also predicted participants' perceptions, suggesting coexistence of accuracy and bias.

Mediation Models Predicting Daily Relationship Satisfaction and Mood

The next set of analyses tested our prediction that positive interpersonal perceptions partially explain the effects of ERD on daily relationship satisfaction and mood. Global ERD predicted greater daily relationship satisfaction, $b = .21$, 95% CI [.14, .27], $\beta = .17$, $t = 6.55$, $p < .001$; and more positive daily mood, $b = .06$, 95% CI [.02, .11], $\beta = .08$, $t = 2.69$, $p = .007$. As shown in Table 5, perceived partner support provision, perceived partner responsiveness, and evaluation of partner traits predicted daily relationship satisfaction and mood, and ERD indirectly predicted

Table 4
Results of Analyses Predicting Daily Perceptions of Partner (Study 3)

Predictor	*b* (95% CI)	*t*	β	*p*
Predicting same-day perceived partner support provision (day *d*)				
Daily ERD (day *d*)	.39 [.37, .41]	43.05	.33	<.001
Daily partner-reported support provision (day *d*)	.12 [.09, .14]	9.93	.07	<.001
Predicting same-day perceived partner responsiveness (day *d*)				
Daily ERD (day *d*)	.12 [.11, .14]	19.66	.13	<.001
Daily partner-reported responsiveness (day *d*)	.56 [.54, .59]	53.84	.35	<.001
Predicting next-day perceived partner support provision (day *d* + 1)				
Daily ERD (day *d*)	.03 [.01, .05]	2.58	.03	.010
Next day's partner-reported support provision (day *d* + 1)	.20 [.17, .22]	13.71	.12	<.001
Daily perceived partner support provision (day *d*)	.12 [.10, .15]	9.08	.09	<.001
Predicting next-day perceived partner responsiveness (day *d* + 1)				
Daily ERD (day *d*)	.004 [−.01, .02]	.57	.004	.57
Next day's partner-reported responsiveness (day *d* + 1)	.56 [.54, .58]	47.05	.34	<.001
Daily perceived partner responsiveness (day *d*)	.13 [.10, .15]	11.85	.09	<.001

Note. CI = confidence interval; ERD = emotion regulation dependence.

Table 5
Results of Analyses Predicting Daily Satisfaction and Mood From Global Predictors (Study 3)

Predictor	*b* (95% CI)	*t*	β	*p*
Mediator: Global perceived partner support provision; Outcome: Daily satisfaction				
Global ERD	.13 [.07, .20]	4.07	.11	<.001
Partner-reported provision	.11 [−.11, .32]	.97	.03	.332
Perceived partner support provision	.65 [.49, .80]	8.00	.23	<.001
95% CI for Global ERD → Mediator → Satisfaction Indirect Effect: .06, .13				
Mediator: Global perceived partner responsiveness; Outcome: Daily satisfaction				
Global ERD	.15 [.09, .21]	4.89	.13	<.001
Partner-reported responsiveness	.03 [−.03, .10]	.94	.02	.351
Perceived partner responsiveness	.38 [.31, .45]	10.39	.29	<.001
95% CI for Global ERD → Mediator → Satisfaction Indirect Effect: .05, .11				
Mediator: Global evaluation of partner traits; Outcome: Daily satisfaction				
Global ERD	.15 [.08, .21]	4.61	.12	<.001
Partner self-views	−.14 [−.25, −.03]	−2.53	−.07	.012
Evaluation of partner traits	.41 [.28, .54]	6.22	.17	<.001
95% CI for Global ERD → Mediator → Satisfaction Indirect Effect: .03, .08				
Mediator: Global perceived partner support provision; Outcome: Mood				
Global ERD	.03 [−.03, .08]	1.12	.04	.263
Partner-reported provision	.13 [−.04, .29]	1.52	.05	.130
Perceived partner support provision	.27 [.15, .39]	4.51	.15	<.001
95% CI for Global ERD → Mediator → Mood Indirect Effect: .02, .06				
Mediator: Global perceived partner responsiveness; Outcome: Mood				
Global ERD	.04 [−.004, .09]	1.79	.06	.074
Partner-reported responsiveness	.03 [−.02, .08]	1.15	.04	.251
Perceived partner responsiveness	.12 [.06, .17]	4.12	.14	<.001
95% CI for Global ERD → Mediator → Mood Indirect Effect: .01, .04				
Mediator: Global evaluation of partner traits; Outcome: Mood				
Global ERD	.05 [−.0005, .09]	1.95	.06	.052
Partner self-views	.08 [.002, .16]	2.01	.06	.045
Evaluation of partner traits	.19 [.08, .29]	3.62	.12	<.001
95% CI for Global ERD → Mediator → Mood Indirect Effect: .01, .04				

Note. CI = confidence interval; ERD = emotion regulation dependence.

greater daily relationship satisfaction and mood through each of these variables while controlling for partners' self-reported support provision, responsiveness, and self-views. Thus, bias in global interpersonal perceptions appeared to mediate the effects of global ERD on daily relationship satisfaction and mood, supporting Hypothesis 8.

The next set of analyses examined daily mediators of the effects of daily ERD on daily relationship satisfaction and mood. Daily ERD

Table 6
Results of Analyses Predicting Daily Satisfaction and Mood From Daily Predictors (Study 3)

Predictor	*b* (95% CI)	*t*	β	*p*
Mediator: Daily perceived partner support provision; Outcome: Daily satisfaction				
Daily ERD	0 [−.01, .02]	.18	0	.824
Daily partner-reported provision	.03 [.008, .04]	2.82	.02	.011
Daily perceived partner support provision	.34 [.32, .35]	37.74	.31	<.001
95% CI for Daily ERD → Mediator → Satisfaction Indirect Effect:.12, .14				
Mediator: Daily perceived partner responsiveness; Outcome: Daily satisfaction				
Daily ERD	.03 [.01, .04]	4.32	.03	<.001
Daily partner-reported responsiveness	.10 [.08, .12]	9.44	.06	<.001
Daily perceived partner responsiveness	.67 [.65, .69]	69.39	.46	<.001
95% CI for Daily ERD → Mediator → Satisfaction Indirect Effect: .07, .09				
Mediator: Daily perceived partner support provision; Outcome: Daily mood				
Daily ERD	−.08 [−.09, −.06]	−13.16	−.12	<.001
Daily partner-reported provision	−.03 [−.04, −.02]	−4.25	−.04	<.001
Daily perceived partner support provision	.15 [.14, .17]	23.70	.22	<.001
95% CI for Daily ERD → Mediator → Mood Indirect Effect: .05, .07				
Mediator: Daily perceived partner responsiveness; Outcome: Daily mood				
Daily ERD	−.06 [−.07, −.05]	−11.77	−.09	<.001
Daily partner-reported responsiveness	.05 [.03, .06]	5.30	.04	<.001
Daily perceived partner responsiveness	.24 [.22, .25]	29.65	.25	<.001
95% CI for Daily ERD → Mediator → Mood Indirect Effect: .03, .03				

Note. CI = confidence interval; ERD = emotion regulation dependence.

predicted greater daily relationship satisfaction, $b = .14$, 95% CI [.13, .15], $\beta = .14$, $t = 19.88$, $p < .001$; and more negative daily mood, $b = -.01$, 95% CI [−.02, −.003], $\beta = -.02$, $t = -2.63$, $p = .008$. As shown in Table 6, daily perceived partner support provision and daily perceived partner responsiveness predicted greater daily relationship satisfaction and mood, and ERD predicted greater daily relationship satisfaction and mood through each of these variables while controlling for partner-reported support and responsiveness, supporting Hypothesis 9. In fact, the effect of daily ERD on daily satisfaction was rendered nonsignificant after controlling for daily perceived support provision. The effect of daily ERD on mood became more negative after controlling for daily perceptions. These results suggest a statistical suppression pattern in which ERD is directly related to more negative mood (perhaps because people seek more IER on more affectively negative days) but indirectly related to more positive mood through more positive interpersonal perceptions.

Ancillary Analyses

As shown in online Supplemental Materials, ERD predicted perceptions of partner support provision, perceptions of partner responsiveness, evaluation of partner traits, and perceived partner support provision in laboratory interactions even after controlling for relationship-general ERD (i.e., tendencies to depend on people in general for emotion regulation), relationship commitment (an index of more general relationship dependence and a predictor of positive relationship illusions in prior research; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993), and global and daily cognitive reappraisal (an intrapersonal emotion regulation strategy; Gross & John, 2003). ERD also predicted perceived partner support provision and perceived regard assessed 6 months later after including these control variables, and these control variables did not predict later perceptions.

Summary

Results from Study 3 supported predictions. Global ERD predicted more positive perceptions of partner support provision, responsiveness, and traits while controlling for partners' self-reports and objective observers' assessments of partner support provision. Likewise, daily ERD predicted more positive daily perceptions of partner support provision and responsiveness while controlling for partners' daily reports of these variables. Global and daily ERD also predicted more positive perceptions of partners later in time, and positive perceptions mediated the effects of global and daily ERD on daily relationship satisfaction and mood. Ancillary analyses demonstrated that these effects of ERD were independent of relationship-general ERD, relationship commitment, and cognitive reappraisal.

General Discussion

People depend on their close relationship partners to meet their various needs (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Feeney, 2007; Tan et al., 2018). ERD refers to relying on interactions with a relationship partner to regulate one's emotion. In the current research, we examine the implications of ERD for relationship quality and affective experience. We tested the predictions that (a) ERD within the context of specific romantic relationships causes and predicts greater perceived partner responsiveness, perceived partner support provision, and more positive evaluations of the partner's traits; and (b) ERD indirectly predicts greater relationship satisfaction and emotional experience through these perceptions. We found support for these predictions across three studies.

In Studies 1 and 2, we manipulated participants' subjective sense of ERD. Participants in the high ERD conditions were asked to write essays designed to foster a sense of dependence on their partner for emotion regulation. Those in the low ERD conditions instead wrote essays intended to activate perceptions of independence in their emotion regulation. Participants then completed measures assessing perceived partner responsiveness and perceived partner support provision and, in Study 2, evaluation of the partner's traits. As expected, participants in the high ERD conditions perceived their partners as more responsive and supportive relative to participants in the low ERD conditions, and the experimental manipulations indirectly predicted greater perceived partner responsiveness, perceived partner support provision, and evaluation of the partner's traits through a subjective sense of dependence on the partner for emotion regulation. These experimental studies demonstrate causal effects of subjective ERD on interpersonal perception, and they provide a stringent control for accuracy. That is, given that participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions in both studies, it is highly unlikely that these findings could be explained by participants in the high ERD conditions actually having partners who are more responsive, supportive, or virtuous relative to those in the low ERD conditions.

Study 3 was a multimethod dyadic study. Participants who were more dependent on their partner for emotion regulation saw their partner as more responsive and supportive, and they evaluated their partner's traits more positively. These effects were not explained by partners actually reporting greater responsiveness, support provision, or positive traits. In addition, participants who were more dependent on their partner for emotion regulation saw their partner as enacting more responsive and supportive behaviors during laboratory interactions, and these effects were not explained by objective observers' assessments of the partner's behavior. The accuracy benchmarks (i.e., the partner's self-reported responsiveness, support provision, and self-views, and objectively observed partner support provision) also predicted participants' perceptions of their partners, suggesting coexistence of accuracy and bias by ERD.

Predictions were also supported using daily diary methods. Participants saw their partners as especially supportive and responsive on days when they were particularly dependent on their partners for emotion regulation, and these effects were not explained by partner-reported support and responsiveness on those days.

A limitation of the concurrent analyses described above is that the findings are potentially explained by reverse causation (i.e., participants depending on partners they see as supportive). To address this issue, we conducted prospective analyses in which we examined the predictive effect of ERD on interpersonal perceptions measured at a later point in time while controlling for the lagged assessment of interpersonal perceptions. ERD predicted perceived partner support provision and perceived regard from partners 6 months later, controlling for partner-reported support provision and regard. Similarly, daily ERD predicted the next day's perceptions of the partner's support provision, controlling for the partner's self-reported support provision. These prospective findings provide further support for our predictions that ERD shapes interpersonal perception, and, along with the experimental studies, they reduce the viability of reversed causal processes as rival explanations.

Mediation analyses suggested that positive interpersonal perceptions helped explain the effects of global and daily ERD on relationship satisfaction and mood. That is, global ERD indirectly predicted higher relationship satisfaction and more positive affect across the days through perceiving partners as supportive, responsive, and possessing desirable traits. In addition, heightened ERD on specific days (relative to participants' typical tendencies) indirectly predicted higher satisfaction and more positive affect on those days through perceiving partners as more supportive and responsive on those days.

Additional analyses of data from Study 3 presented in online Supplemental Materials suggest that the effects of ERD on interpersonal perceptions were independent of several other variables, including relationship-general ERD, relationship commitment, and cognitive reappraisal. These findings make several important theoretical contributions.

Theoretical Contributions and Future Directions

IER refers to the regulation of one's own or others' emotions during social interaction (Zaki & Williams, 2013). The current research unveils a novel pathway through which IER shapes close relationships and affective experience. Prior research examining the impact of IER on relationships emphasized interpersonal processes that depend on behavioral responses enacted by regulators (i.e., people trying to influence another person's emotions). For example, when regulators use affectionate touch and humor to regulate their romantic partner's negative affect, their romantic partner experiences more intimacy in the relationship and more positive affect (Debrot et al., 2013; Horn et al., 2019). However, Zaki and Williams (2013) argued that interpersonal emotional regulation may also involve processes that are independent of responses from interaction partners, and the current research suggests that IER shapes relationship quality and affective experience through response-independent pathways involving ERD. Specifically, when people depend on interactions with their partner for emotion regulation, they may be motivated to see their partner as responsive, supportive, communal, and competent, qualities that would render their partner a willing, effective, and safe emotion regulator. In turn, because people typically engage in wishful thinking in their close relationships (Lemay & Clark, 2015; Murray, 1999), they may often believe that their partner possesses these desired qualities, and these beliefs may promote relationship satisfaction and enhance affective experience. In other words, apart from the partner's behavioral response, merely depending on social interaction with the partner to regulate one's emotions may typically foster positive interpersonal perceptions that subjectively fulfill the desires engendered by this dependence, and these perceptions serve as a source of personal and interpersonal happiness.

The support perceptions examined in this research concern behaviors that overlap with extrinsic emotion regulation tactics, which are behaviors intended to influence another person's emotional experience (Zaki & Williams, 2013). Hence, the current findings suggest that ERD biases people into perceiving that their partners enact such tactics. However, it is important to note that social support and IER can be distinguished. Unlike social support, which may be motivated by a variety of factors (Feeney & Collins, 2003), extrinsic IER is motivated by a desire to modify another person's emotional state (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015). Moreover, whereas social support is usually conceptualized as reducing stress, IER sometimes aims to increase or sustain negative emotions (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015).

W. C. Williams et al. (2018) developed a measure of individual differences in tendencies to rely on others for emotion regulation, and they demonstrated that this tendency is associated with lower loneliness and greater interpersonal closeness, perceived receipt of social support, and viewing others as effective at regulating one's emotions. The current research makes important contributions to this literature. First, our findings demonstrate that the tendency to rely on others for emotion regulation may be specific to particular partners. As shown in online Supplemental Materials, partner-specific ERD predicted perceived partner support and responsiveness and evaluation of partner traits independently of relationship-general tendencies to seek IER, which did not predict these outcomes once partner-specific dependence was controlled. Such findings suggest the usefulness of considering IER as a process that varies across relationships. Second, our findings suggest an additional interpretation of findings suggesting that people who rely on others for emotion regulation perceive others to be more supportive and effective at regulating their emotion (W. C. Williams et al., 2018). These prior findings may reflect the fact that people who seek emotion regulation elicit more supportive behaviors from others that satisfy their emotion regulation goals, or they may reflect a response-independent process in which such people are biased to see others as supportive and effective. Of course, these alternatives are not mutually exclusive. People who depend on their partners for emotion regulation may have more supportive partners, and they may have an independent proclivity to see them as supportive.

Our supplemental analyses indicated that effects of ERD were independent of relationship commitment and cognitive reappraisal. Relationship commitment is thought to summarize the many ways that people depend on their partners and relationships, and it is associated with positive biases in relationship evaluations, such as perceiving one's relationship as superior to others' relationships (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Martz et al., 1998; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult et al., 2000). Committed people may have these positive perceptions because, given their attachment to their partners and dependence on their relationships, they need to see their relationships in a positive light (Rusbult et al., 2000). Cognitive reappraisal involves viewing emotional events in a different way to change one's emotional experience, and it tends to be an effective intrapersonal emotion regulation strategy (Gross, 1998; Mauss et al., 2007). The current findings suggest that the biasing effect of ERD is distinct from effects of commitment and cognitive reappraisal, perhaps because ERD uniquely increases the need for partners who are available, effective, and safe emotion regulators. These findings also join several others in suggesting that interpersonal and intrapersonal emotion regulation involve different processes (e.g., Hofmann et al., 2016; Levy-Gigi & Shamay-Tsoory, 2017; W. C. Williams et al., 2018).

The current research is limited in that it did not investigate effects of ERD on partners. Based on prior research suggesting that seeking support typically results in partners providing support (Collins & Feeney, 2000), turning to partners for emotion regulation may often elicit support and responsiveness from partners. These partner responses to ERD may further increase relationship satisfaction and

happiness beyond the response-independent processes examined in the current research. However, in other cases, partners may respond to one's bids for emotion regulation in ways that exacerbate negative emotion, such as when they perseverate on negative emotions and events (Tudder et al., 2023) or respond with hostility (Swerdlow & Johnson, 2022). These behavioral responses may compete with the positive effects of ERD demonstrated in the current research. Moreover, the current research did not examine long-term consequences of ERD. Given that perceiving partners as responsive and supportive typically motivates behaviors that promote relationships (Lemay & Clark, 2008a; Murray et al., 2006; Reis et al., 2004), the interpersonal perceptions engendered by ERD may eventually increase relationship quality for both partners. These possibilities should be investigated in future research.

It is important to note that, in some cases, ERD may increase susceptibility to negative outcomes. For instance, when people have partners who are unwilling or unable to provide effective emotion regulation, ERD may elevate risk for emotion dysregulation. Moreover, disclosing to partners who are not motivated to provide safe ERD could make one the target of criticism, manipulation, or gossip. The positive illusions unveiled in the current research may increase people's willingness to depend on partners for emotion regulation over time, increasing vulnerability to these harms in subsequent interactions. In addition, frequent reliance on partners for emotion regulation may become burdensome to partners. Related research suggests that excessive seeking of partner reassurance, an indicator of high ERD, elicits rejection from partners (Starr & Davila, 2008; Stewart & Harkness, 2015), and frequently expressing negative emotion may increase the partner's desires to disengage from IER and reduce their responsiveness over time (Forest et al., 2014). In addition, some research suggests that high dependency in relationships confers risk for intimate partner violence (Kane & Bornstein, 2016). Future research should investigate the effects of positive illusions associated with ERD on susceptibility to these negative outcomes.

This research may provide counselors and practitioners with insights into developing effective relationship interventions. As shown here, depending on partners for emotion regulation often promotes relationship quality, and this dependence may help improve interpersonal perceptions that shape later decisions to depend on partners. Therefore, interventions that increase ERD may sometimes have durable positive effects on relationships, particularly among people who do not typically exhibit ERD.

Constraints on Generality

Participants in the current research were primarily White, residing in the United States, and young, which limits the generalizability of our findings. Within the United States, reliance on friends and family for support varies across major racial and ethnic groups (Chang et al., 2014). In addition, IER varies across cultures. One study found that IER strategies provided greater short-term benefits for East Asian participants than North American participants because of East Asian people's emphasis on social interconnectedness (Liddell & Williams, 2019). Other studies suggest that people from East Asian cultures sometimes refrain from seeking IER due to fear of burdening others (Kim et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2004). In addition, older people may be better regulators of others' feelings (Niven, 2022), which may suggest the ERD is more beneficial in relationships between older adults. Hence, future studies should examine the role of sociodemographic variables such as race, culture, and age in moderating the effects described in the current research. It is also important to acknowledge that the current research examined the impact of ERD on participants and couples who were, on average, well-adjusted. The impact of ERD on interpersonal perceptions, relationship satisfaction, and affective experience may look quite different in samples characterized by intense discomfort with dependence, emotional instability, insecurity, and relationship abuse or neglect (see Kane & Bornstein, 2016).

Conclusion

The current research demonstrates that dependence on romantic partners to regulate emotion serves as a source of positive bias in interpersonal perception, eliciting perceptions of partner supportiveness and responsiveness, and favorable evaluation of the partner's traits. People who depend on interactions with partners to regulate their emotion may see the responsive, supportive, communal, and competent partners that this dependence demands, which may improve their relationship satisfaction and regulate their emotions. This research underscores the importance of dependence and the biased interpersonal perceptions that often follow in understanding the interpersonal and affective impact of IER.

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