

## EMOTION REGULATION AND COGNITIVE COPING STRATEGIES FOR COUPLE PARTNERS. A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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### Abstract

**Objectives.** The present study aims to explore correlations between coping and emotion regulation strategies of the partners engaged in romantic relationships and to identify the emotional and cognitive coping patterns that occur most frequently within the couple.

**Material and methods.** The correlational design of the study has used data provided by two dependent samples of 50 male and 50 female participants, partners in heterosexual couples. The instruments used for data gathering were: the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) and the Strategic Approach to Coping Scale (SACS), translated and adapted for Romanian population. An omnibus survey has been used to gather information on demographic variables (such as age, gender, education level etc.) as well as the relationship history.

**Results.** On a first level, the statistical analysis of the data provided by the participants has established several emotional and cognitive coping strategies for female and male partners in the couple. As a group, women report significantly higher ( $p < .05$ ) mean scores in rumination and catastrophizing as emotion regulation strategies. A second level of analysis has explored the correlations between the main coping strategies and emotion regulation measures of partners within the couple, revealing significant associations for avoidance, indirect action and social joining.

**Conclusions.** The correlations between partners' coping strategies suggest that there are patterns of processing and reaction specific to the couple, but these patterns do not necessarily rely on similarity and covariance. Further studies are necessary in order to establish whether these patterns are a result of learned behaviors and roles or a matter of inherent complementarity.

**Keywords:** emotional coping, cognitive coping, couple conflict, coping strategies.

### Introduction

Chronic stress and conflict afflicting couple relationships have proved to be aggravating factors that lead to deterioration of marital interaction (Bodenmann et al., 2010; Bodenmann, 1995), increase the probability of separation and divorce (Bodenmann, Pihet and Kayser, 2006). Because of all the strains on couple relationships, it is vital for the partners to employ and develop functional coping strategies that are able to help them face both internal and external adversities, such as illness (Schokker et al., 2010; Green, Wells and Laakso, 2011), domestic violence (Rada, 2014; Ronan et al, 2004) or immigration (Falconier, Nussbeck and Bodenmann, 2013).

Studies aiming to understand how couples cope with different stressful situations (individually and as a dyad) are valuable since functional coping skills have proved to have a valuable impact on relationship quality (Papp and Witt, 2010) which, in its turn, is positively

associated with secure attachment patterns, greater satisfaction with life, emotional wellbeing and physical health (Waldinger et al., 2015), especially for long-term relationships (Landis et al., 2013). Some studies suggest that these correlations are stronger for women than men (Bodenmann, Pihet and Kayser, 2006). Still, both men and women, who are partners in a securely attached couple, report less negative affect and less depressive symptomatology (Waldinger et al., 2015). At large, the influence of the couples' coping strategies extend to the children's wellbeing and socializing skills (Rada and Turcu, 2012).

When facing with stressful situations, especially ones that generate conflict, both partners of a couple engage in different actions and responses meant to help them adapt, to reduce tension and to reach personal or shared objectives. Two relevant concepts for these actions are emotion regulations and coping strategies. A simple review of the relevant literature will show overlapping definitions of the two concepts. Still, there are specific differences that distinguish emotional and cognitive coping from emotion regulation.

Emotion regulation can be defined as the sum of conscious and subconscious processes through which people modify their emotions in order to adapt to the environment. They deploy regulatory strategies in order to change the intensity or the type of their emotion. This process is qualitatively different from the ones that initially generate the emotion (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema and Schweizer, 2010). The concept of emotion regulation includes, according to Gross' analysis (2014), three core features: activation of the goal to modify the emotion-generative process, engagement of the processes that are responsible for altering the emotion trajectory and the impact on emotion dynamics, which consists of latency, rise time, magnitude, duration, and offset of experiential, behavioral, or physiological responses.

Over time, the most often deployed strategies become part of the emotion – regulatory style of an individual. The more adaptive the strategies that comprise individuals' style, the greater their capacity to tolerate and manage negative affect while maintaining connection and intimacy in relevant relationship. On the other side, the strategies that result in repression and avoidance of negative emotions lead to a reduced capacity to ask for help and connect with people who can provide it (Waldinger and Schulz, 2016). More than that, some emotion regulation strategies, such as rumination, catastrophizing and self-blame correlate with psychological symptoms for depression and anxiety (Garnefski and Kraaij, 2007).

Richards, Butler and Gross (2003) distinguish between antecedent-focused emotion regulation, which is elicited in order to prevent undesired responses from arising and response-focused emotion regulation, aimed at reducing or tempering already triggered emotional responses. Another relevant distinction refers to intrinsic emotion regulation (in self) versus extrinsic emotion regulation, which consists in the efforts to regulate the emotion in another (Gross, 2014). The latter is often considered a part of emotion co-regulation, a process defined by the conscious and subconscious oscillating emotional patterns of interdependence that occur in a relationship (Butler and Randall, 2013). Co-regulation of emotions has been studied mostly in parent-child dyads, though the concept has been applied to couples as well. Touch, as a co-regulation strategy was associated with enhanced affect in the partner and long-term psychological wellbeing (Debrot et al., 2013).

Coping, in its widest meaning is considered a response to stress, a sum of actions and strategies meant to help the individual overcome troubling situations. Gross (2014) emphasizes two main differences between coping and emotion regulation: the former is focused on decreasing negative emotions, while spreading over larger periods of time. Because of that, the impact of different coping strategies over time is significant for individuals' emotional health. While maladaptive appraisal processes are thought to be at the core of depression and anxiety (Horn and Maercker, 2016), positive reappraisal and problem solving are two of the most adaptive coping strategies, that promote stress reduction and wellbeing (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema and Schweizer, 2010).

For couples engaged in romantic relationships, coping strategies can be analyzed from a dual perspective: dyadic coping and similarity of coping styles. Introduced by Bodenmann (1995), dyadic coping refers to partners' responses to stress and consists of both distress signals of one partner that elicit coping responses of the other partner, and joint efforts to reduce stress and negative effect. Dyadic coping strategies/styles include: stress communication, supportive, delegated, collaborative common, controlling, hostile/ambivalent, overprotection, protective buffering, and uninvolved (Falconier et al., 2015).

A meta-analysis conducted by Falconier et al. (2015) has revealed several theoretical models of coping strategies in the couple: the Congruence Model of functional coping, which focuses on the good fit between partners' coping styles; the Relationship-Focused Coping Model, that creates a typology of responses to a partner's stress experience (active engagement, empathic responding, overprotection, protective buffering); the Systemic-Transactional Model, that combines partners' communication of stress, their support actions and conjoint strategies used to face common stressors; the Developmental-Contextual Coping Model, that introduces developmental and contextual variables related to partners' coping styles.

Supporting the Congruence Model, research studies have shown that partners' coping strategies covary (Bodenmann et al., 2004) yet, their perceived similarity is just as relevant as the actual responses to stress (Iafate, Bertoni and Donato, 2012).

The present study examines the correlations between coping and emotion regulation strategies of the partners engaged in romantic relationships, in order to establish whether their respective individual styles are congruent and which emotional and cognitive coping patterns occur most frequently within the couple. Based on the Congruence Model, it was expected that measures of different emotion regulation factors as well as coping strategies would correlate significantly within the couple.

## Material and methods

The research was designed based on a quantitative correlational approach, using data provided by 50 couples, recruited through online and offline announcements in the capital and three adjacent Romanian counties. The selection criterion was that participants be in a committed romantic relationship for more than a year (so that the relationship would get past the dating phase and become stable). Informed written consent was obtained from each participant at the time of recruitment. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee.

The resulting sample of couples reported relationship lengths between 1 and 45 years, with an average of 16.28 years. Most of the couples were married (N=44), residing in urban areas (N=32) and had at least one child (N=36). Male and female participants' ages averaged 44.58 years and 40.48 years respectively. Most participants were high school graduates (N male =46, N female = 44); N male = 23 and N female = 27 participants reported having additionally a university degree (bachelor or higher).

Each partner has completed a set of surveys and psychological tests regarding their coping and emotion regulating behaviors and an omnibus survey designed to gather information on demographic variables (such as age, gender, education level, family size, housing situation etc.) as well as the relationship history. The instruments used for assessing emotion regulation and coping strategies were: the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ) and the Strategic Approach to Coping Scale (SACS), both translated and adapted for Romanian population (Perte and Miclea, 2011; Budău et al., 2011). Both instruments consist of items describing reactions to negative emotions and stressful situations. Participants were required to rate them on a scale from 1 (never/strongly disagree) to 5 (always/strongly agree). Negatively-worded items were rescored, then items were summed to calculate males' and females' scores of cognitive emotion regulation (CERQ) subscales (self-blame, acceptance, rumination, positive refocusing, refocus on planning,

positive reappraisal, putting into perspective, catastrophizing, blaming others) and strategic approach to coping (SACS) factors (assertive action, social joining, seeking social support, cautious action, instinctive action, avoidance, indirect action, antisocial action, aggressive action).

Statistical analyses of the data provided by the participants have been conducted on two levels. The first one, a preliminary descriptive level, was focused on emotion regulation measures and coping strategies for the male and female participants, considered individually. Additionally, a comparison (using Paired Samples T- tests) between gender based groups has completed the analysis at this level. The second level has explored the correlations between all measures for emotion regulation and coping strategies of partners within the couple.

**Results**

Means and standard deviations for emotion regulation measures (CERQ scores) are presented in of Table 1 for both male and female partners. As a group, women reported significantly higher mean scores in rumination ( $t(98)=2.35$   $p=.020$ ) and catastrophizing ( $t(98)=2.26$   $p=.026$ ). The significance threshold was set at .05.

**Table 1. Emotion regulation measures – descriptive statistics (N=50)**

CERQ Scores	Male partners			Female partners		
	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Self-blame	10.68	11.00	3.347	10.40	10.00	2.587
Acceptance	11.92	12.00	3.225	12.06	12.00	2.917
Rumination	11.90	12.00	3.507	13.62	14.50	3.784
Positive refocusing	11.42	11.00	4.371	11.68	11.00	4.414
Refocus on planning	15.62	16.00	3.410	15.96	17.00	3.270
Positive reappraisal	14.66	15.00	3.734	14.90	14.00	3.105
Putting into perspective	13.20	13.50	3.546	14.00	14.00	3.709
Catastrophizing	8.02	8.00	3.605	9.60	9.00	3.870
Blaming others	7.32	7.00	2.903	7.84	8.00	2.652

Means and standard deviations for coping strategies (SACS scores) are presented in Table 2 for both male and female partners. There were no significant differences between average scores of men and women for any of the coping strategies measures.

**Table 2. Coping strategies – descriptive statistics (N=50)**

SACS Scores	Male partners			Female partners		
	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Assertive Action	31.86	31.00	4.721	32.62	33.00	5.050
Social Joining	18.66	19.00	4.104	18.08	18.00	4.095
Seeking Social Support	21.64	22.50	5.539	23.48	24.00	5.104
Cautious Action	17.66	18.00	4.168	18.04	18.00	3.374

SACS Scores	Male partners			Female partners		
	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Instinctive Action	19.90	21.00	5.354	18.98	18.00	4.996
Avoidance	16.30	16.00	5.076	15.82	15.50	4.601
Indirect Action	10.44	10.50	3.944	9.24	9.00	3.384
Antisocial Action	11.36	10.50	5.158	10.54	10.00	4.282
Aggressive Action	13.10	13.00	3.604	12.82	12.00	3.249

The second level of analysis has revealed only three of the eighteen variable included in the analysis correlate significantly with the same measures of the couple partner: avoidance ( $r(50)=.299$   $p=.035$ ), indirect action ( $r(50)=.408$   $p=.003$ ) and social joining ( $r(50)=.323$   $p=.022$ ).

Additional significant positive correlations were observed between women’s positive reappraisal and men’s acceptance ( $r(50)=.323$   $p(50)=.022$ ), women’s blaming others scores and men’s catastrophizing ( $r(50)=.299$   $p=.035$ ), and women’s instinctive action and men’s catastrophizing ( $r(50)=.296$   $p=.037$ ). Women’s social joining correlates positively with men’s positive refocusing ( $r(50)=.317$   $p=.025$ ) and refocus on planning ( $r(50)=.341$   $p=.015$ ). Also, female partners’ cautious action positively correlates with their male partners’ rumination ( $r(50)=.357$   $p=.011$ ), refocus on planning ( $r(50)=.312$   $p=.028$ ), and social joining ( $r(50)=.353$   $p=.012$ ). Another set of positive correlations associate women’s instinctive action with men’s catastrophizing ( $r(50)=.296$   $p=.037$ ) and avoidance ( $r(50)=.288$   $p=.043$ ). Another set of positive correlations associate female partners’ avoidance with their male partners’ positive reappraisal ( $r(50)=.281$   $p=.048$ ) and catastrophizing ( $r(50)=.390$   $p=.005$ ). Only three sets of variables correlated negatively: men’s putting into perspective with women’s self-blame ( $r(50)=-.318$   $p=.024$ ), men’s social joining and women’s self-blame ( $r(50)=-.333$   $p=.018$ ), as well as men’s avoidance with women’s rumination ( $r(50)=-.296$   $p=.037$ ).

The complete set of correlations between female and male couple partners’ scores for all variables included in the analysis is presented in Table 3a and Table 3b.

**Table 3a. Correlations between female couple partners’ emotion regulation strategies and male couple partners’ measures for emotion regulation and coping strategies (N=50)**

MAN		WOMAN								
		Self-blame	Acceptance	Rumination	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Blaming others
Self-blame	r	0.070	0.153	0.048	0.061	-0.135	0.103	0.028	-0.062	0.084
	p	0.633	0.290	0.740	0.676	0.348	0.477	0.847	0.668	0.563
Acceptance	r	-0.162	0.189	-0.001	0.014	0.071	.323*	0.089	-0.194	0.001
	p	0.260	0.188	0.995	0.923	0.623	0.022	0.540	0.177	0.995
Rumination	r	0.040	0.232	0.222	0.200	0.169	0.196	0.171	-0.197	0.009
	p	0.780	0.105	0.122	0.165	0.241	0.173	0.235	0.170	0.949
Positive refocusing	r	-0.107	-0.084	-0.213	0.225	0.057	0.224	0.097	-0.113	-0.087
	p	0.459	0.564	0.137	0.116	0.695	0.118	0.503	0.435	0.546
Refocus on planning	r	-0.080	-0.067	-0.029	0.073	0.121	0.216	-0.013	0.053	0.198
	p	0.583	0.642	0.843	0.614	0.402	0.132	0.929	0.714	0.167
Positive reappraisal	r	-0.144	-0.058	-0.086	-0.045	0.004	0.145	-0.019	0.086	0.071
	p	0.318	0.689	0.553	0.756	0.979	0.316	0.895	0.551	0.626

MAN		WOMAN								
		Self-blame	Acceptance	Rumination	Positive refocusing	Refocus on planning	Positive reappraisal	Putting into perspective	Catastrophizing	Blaming others
Putting into perspective	r	-.318*	0.019	-0.218	-0.108	-0.096	-0.054	0.037	0.260	0.181
	p	0.024	0.898	0.129	0.456	0.507	0.711	0.797	0.068	0.207
Catastrophizing	r	-0.187	0.050	-0.074	0.023	0.140	-0.069	0.136	0.195	.299*
	p	0.194	0.728	0.609	0.871	0.331	0.634	0.347	0.175	0.035
Blaming others	r	0.113	0.080	0.058	0.069	0.004	0.210	0.106	-0.007	0.161
	p	0.434	0.582	0.690	0.636	0.981	0.144	0.463	0.964	0.265
Assertive Action	r	-0.045	-0.038	0.128	0.215	0.177	0.184	0.233	0.144	0.088
	p	0.754	0.794	0.374	0.133	0.219	0.200	0.103	0.317	0.544
Social Joining	r	-.333*	-0.176	-0.227	-0.004	0.004	-0.012	-0.099	-0.033	0.021
	p	0.018	0.223	0.114	0.979	0.981	0.932	0.493	0.819	0.884
Seeking Social Support	r	-0.051	-0.030	-0.094	-0.120	0.061	-0.223	0.009	0.082	0.024
	p	0.725	0.835	0.515	0.407	0.673	0.120	0.951	0.573	0.870
Cautious Action	r	-0.127	-0.087	-0.055	-0.002	-0.079	-0.041	0.021	0.053	-0.101
	p	0.379	0.547	0.705	0.991	0.586	0.780	0.884	0.713	0.485
Instinctive Action	r	-0.094	0.025	-0.035	0.028	0.155	0.061	0.078	-0.061	0.066
	p	0.515	0.862	0.809	0.847	0.283	0.675	0.590	0.674	0.647
Avoidance	r	-0.278	-0.244	-.296*	-0.157	-0.152	-0.124	-0.181	-0.058	-0.007
	p	0.050	0.088	0.037	0.277	0.293	0.392	0.208	0.688	0.962
Indirect Action	r	0.012	-0.109	-0.056	0.091	0.012	0.220	0.040	0.024	0.175
	p	0.932	0.452	0.702	0.528	0.932	0.124	0.780	0.870	0.225
Antisocial Action	r	-0.016	0.000	-0.037	0.016	0.067	0.098	0.203	0.025	0.236
	p	0.914	0.999	0.800	0.913	0.642	0.499	0.158	0.865	0.100
Aggressive Action	r	0.123	-0.022	-0.053	-0.084	-0.015	0.046	-0.002	-0.212	0.266
	p	0.396	0.880	0.717	0.562	0.916	0.748	0.992	0.139	0.061

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

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

**Table 3b. Correlations between female couple partners' emotion regulation strategies and male couple partners' measures for emotion regulation and coping strategies (N=50)**

MAN		WOMAN								
		Assertive Action	Social Joining	Seeking Social Support	Cautious Action	Instinctive Action	Avoidance	Indirect Action	Antisocial Action	Aggressive Action
Self-blame	r	-0.041	0.140	0.063	0.095	-0.262	0.000	-0.069	-0.100	-0.082
	p	0.777	0.331	0.664	0.511	0.067	0.999	0.635	0.489	0.570
Acceptance	r	0.049	0.149	0.150	0.154	-0.104	0.150	0.011	0.062	-0.107
	p	0.733	0.302	0.299	0.285	0.472	0.298	0.939	0.667	0.461
Rumination	r	0.112	0.231	0.105	.357*	0.022	0.148	0.002	0.076	0.015

MAN		WOMAN								
		Assertive Action	Social Joining	Seeking Social Support	Cautious Action	Instinctive Action	Avoidance	Indirect Action	Antisocial Action	Aggressive Action
	p	0.439	0.107	0.466	0.011	0.879	0.305	0.989	0.601	0.920
Positive refocusing	r	0.093	.317*	-0.007	0.278	0.027	0.072	0.153	-0.048	0.013
	p	0.519	0.025	0.959	0.050	0.855	0.620	0.288	0.739	0.931
Refocus on planning	r	0.217	.341*	0.076	.312*	-0.035	0.089	-0.064	-0.099	-0.062
	p	0.131	0.015	0.598	0.028	0.808	0.538	0.657	0.495	0.671
Positive reappraisal	r	0.047	0.199	-0.107	0.145	0.141	.281*	0.024	0.076	-0.012
	p	0.745	0.165	0.460	0.314	0.330	0.048	0.867	0.602	0.935
Putting into perspective	r	-0.012	0.215	-0.065	-0.045	0.231	0.192	0.089	0.224	0.067
	p	0.936	0.133	0.653	0.756	0.107	0.181	0.537	0.118	0.644
Catastrophizing	r	-0.076	0.207	0.034	0.084	.296*	.390**	0.108	0.180	-0.015
	p	0.601	0.149	0.815	0.563	0.037	0.005	0.454	0.210	0.916
Blaming others	r	-0.150	0.235	0.120	0.070	0.061	0.102	0.204	0.063	0.175
	p	0.298	0.101	0.405	0.631	0.674	0.480	0.155	0.664	0.224
Assertive Action	r	0.138	0.221	0.124	0.191	-0.097	0.003	-0.143	-0.126	-0.107
	p	0.339	0.123	0.391	0.183	0.503	0.986	0.320	0.382	0.460
Social Joining	r	0.260	.323*	0.045	.353*	0.083	0.070	-0.103	-0.188	-0.044
	p	0.069	0.022	0.756	0.012	0.565	0.628	0.478	0.191	0.759
Seeking Social Support	r	0.109	0.188	0.236	0.274	0.169	0.037	-0.173	-0.083	-0.005
	p	0.452	0.190	0.099	0.054	0.242	0.796	0.230	0.567	0.974
Cautious Action	r	0.110	0.067	-0.109	0.184	0.086	0.145	-0.094	-0.006	-0.146
	p	0.447	0.642	0.450	0.201	0.553	0.316	0.516	0.970	0.311
Instinctive Action	r	0.053	0.153	0.031	0.145	0.258	0.256	0.276	0.158	0.119
	p	0.715	0.289	0.831	0.316	0.071	0.073	0.052	0.273	0.412
Avoidance	r	0.047	0.084	-0.044	0.109	.288*	.299*	0.117	0.146	0.094
	p	0.747	0.561	0.760	0.452	0.043	0.035	0.419	0.310	0.518
Indirect Action	r	0.027	0.012	-0.071	-0.047	-0.039	0.098	.408**	0.244	0.084
	p	0.852	0.936	0.627	0.744	0.789	0.499	0.003	0.087	0.560
Antisocial Action	r	-0.148	0.223	0.253	-0.015	0.046	0.123	0.191	0.109	0.090
	p	0.304	0.120	0.076	0.918	0.750	0.394	0.183	0.450	0.532
Aggressive Action	r	-0.038	0.172	0.182	0.122	-0.026	0.156	0.231	0.134	0.083
	p	0.792	0.232	0.207	0.398	0.858	0.279	0.107	0.354	0.564

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

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

**Discussions**

The research results presented in this study have been focused on individual emotion regulation and coping strategies frequently used by couple partners. Although, as a group, women reported a higher mean score for rumination and catastrophizing, no other differences were significant between women and men in order to justify gender profiling of cognitive and emotional responses to stress.

All variables included in the analysis have been approached as individual, self-reported measures, but the correlational data has been applied to the couple. Very few results from the correlational analysis have supported the Congruence Model of Functional Coping within the couple. Avoidance, indirect action and social joining are the three coping strategies that correlate between couple partners. It is noteworthy that the three strategies correspond to the most common and widespread studied coping mechanisms: avoidance, passive-aggressive behaviors and connection. In-depth, longitudinal research is needed in order to understand whether these correlated coping strategies result from the initial attraction of individuals who already have these coping styles or, the congruence of coping strategies is a result of long-term interaction within couple relationships.

No such correlations resulted between similar emotion regulating strategies. One possible explanation is that, in order for emotion co-regulation to occur, partners need to play different roles, so that they can support each other and offer the mirroring and validation they need. Activating similar emotion regulation strategies might lead to the escalation of negative emotions and conflict.

The correlations between different emotional regulation and coping strategies variable corresponding to couple partners reveal a pattern of association based on complementarity rather than congruence, while the functional/dysfunctional core of the dyads of variables remains the same. Thus, functional emotion regulation responses, such as women's positive reappraisal and men's acceptance or women's social joining and men's positive refocusing significantly correlate. Such results support other studies emphasizing the value of dyadic coping strategies as a prime indicator of functional adaptation to daily stress in marital context (Landis et al., 2013)

The same correlational pattern has emerged for dysfunctional coping strategies and/or emotional regulation responses. For example, women's blaming others and men's catastrophizing significantly correlate. The same significant correlations appear between female partners' avoidance and their male partners' catastrophizing. These types of emotion regulation strategies can contribute to marital conflict escalation.

An interesting set of results negatively correlates women's self-blame with men's putting into perspective and men's social joining. The more engaged are male partners into functional coping strategies that offer and receive support, the less likely are their female partners to manifest self-blame when confronted with stressful situations. These results are aligned with Gottman's model (2015) of emotion interaction within the couple that emphasizes men's role in couples' emotion regulation by exposure and support for their partner's negative feelings.

While providing valuable insights on correlation between actual couple partners rather than comparisons between unrelated samples of men and women, the study presents some limitations that require consideration. The research design has relied on a small convenience sample of couples. Self-reported data on coping strategies and emotion regulation requires a level of introspection that not all participants are used to and it relies on subjective self-evaluations rather than measures taken during the process. Future studies including more comprehensive views of individual coping, longitudinal methods and larger samples of participants will expand the research topic beyond its present limits.

## **Conclusions**

The study has explored couple partners' coping and emotion regulation strategies, in order to establish whether their respective individual styles correlate and which emotional and cognitive coping patterns occur most frequently within the couple. The correlations between partners' coping strategies suggest that there are patterns of processing and reaction to stress specific to the couple, but these patterns do not necessarily relay on similarity and covariance. Positive correlations were recorded between male and female couple partners' scores regarding avoidance, indirect action and social joining as coping strategies. No such correlations resulted between similar emotion



regulating strategies.

Correlations between different emotion regulating and coping strategies of couple partners have revealed that complementary functional strategies associate within the couple. The same applies to dysfunctional emotion regulation and coping strategies. Each of those associations is relevant for a pattern of coping that can be related to co-regulation or dyadic coping strategies. Further research is needed in order to better understand how individual coping strategies and emotion regulation responses interact within the couple.

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