

## Marital Adjustment and Emotion Regulation between Personal Choices and Family Legacy

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Marital adjustment is a facet of the perceived quality of the couple relationship along with marital happiness. Johnson (2020) argues that if partners are able to communicate, to depend on a trusted person and to internalize a clear sense of secure connection with their partner, they discover an important resource that helps them build healthy and lasting relationships. In these relationships, shared vulnerability creates connections, not only because it encourages efforts to communicate with the other, but especially because it values each partner's need for attachment to fulfil the desire for connection and comfort. The feeling of secure attachment changes when new experiences are present, that allow the revision of the cognitive attachment patterns and the associated emotion regulation strategies (Davila, Karney & Bradbury, 1999).

**Objectives:** The present research aimed to study the relationship between the partners' marital adjustment and emotion regulation, as well as to identify the partners' ways to adapt to married life and their emotion regulation strategies taking into consideration the transmission of patterns from their ancestors.

**Methods:** The participants individually completed two psychological tests: the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) and the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS).

**Results:** The statistical results obtained show that there is an association between marital adjustment and emotion regulation, as well as differences between couples of predecessors and those of descendants in terms of difficulties in regulating emotions and adjustment in couples.

**Conclusions:** The in-depth analysis of the aspects in which behavioral patterns are transmitted from generation to generation can lead to better knowledge and understanding, both personally and in the couple relationship. Also, the results can be capitalized in the design and implementation of therapeutic programmes focused on the partners' proper emotion regulation and easy adjustment to married life.

**Keywords:** quality of the relationship, strategies for regulating emotions, transgenerational transmission

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## **I. Introduction**

Adaptation, happiness or marital satisfaction are dimensions of the marital relationship frequently studied by researchers because they are considered important factors that ensure the stability over time of a marriage (Kamo, 2000). According to Spanier, Lewis and Cole (1975) adjustment in the couple and in the normative dyads is considered a primary relationship between adults living together without being relatives. Spanier (1976) conceptualized adjustment as a dynamic process, whose result is determined by: divergences between partners in the couple, interpersonal tensions and personal anxieties, satisfaction with the couple relationship, cohesion between partners and consensus on issues of major importance for the functioning of the couple. Marital adjustment is an expression of how each partner in the couple relates to the reality of the relationship with the other; as a result, the quality of the marital relationship reflects the two partners' subjective assessment of their relationship (Larson & Holman, 1994). Glenn (2003) suggests that it is more appropriate for marital adjustment to be conceived as a variable that can influence the quality of the marital relationship, as it refers to how each partner acts, gets involved and coexists in the marital relationship, rather than their perception about the functionality of their own relationship or their feelings. Indicators of marital adjustment (conflicts between partners, communication patterns, joint activities and consensus on important issues concerning married life) may relate differently to their satisfaction with the marital relationship, as well as to the feelings experienced by the partners.

In Johnson's (2020) view, emotion regulation refers to a person's ability to access and manage various emotions, to identify them, to modify them (by diminishing or amplifying) and to use them later to guide their thinking or actions in a way that suits their own priorities and to confirm their meaning in different contexts. Neuro-cognitive theories argue that emotion regulation can occur through two important mechanisms: cognitive re-evaluation of the event, that reduces emotional impact and suppresses or inhibits the intensity of expression, and emotional reaction (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Cognitive methods modify negative emotion, but do not involve memorizing and they decrease sympathetic activity, while behavioral methods do not alter the unpleasant experience of negative emotion, involve memory and cause hyperactivity of the sympathetic system (Ochsner & Gross, 2005). According to the modal model of emotions, there are five ways in which a person can adjust their emotions:

(1) The selection of the situation requires an understanding of the components of the situation and the emotional expectations. The choices are related to previous experiences, memories and memory distortions, expectations and previous cognitive patterns, and the balance between short-term and long-term benefits. (2) Changing the situation involves the person's action to change the external context that generates the emotional process so as to minimize or maximize the expected emotions. (3) The shift of attention allows the person to focus only on certain components or features of the situation, in order to influence their emotion. (4) Cognitive change involves altering the meaning of what is perceived, in re-evaluating the emotional stimulus. (5) Modulation of the response, which tries to influence the subjective, behavioral, physiological and expressive-emotional response, as directly as possible. For example, the person uses relaxation exercises, takes beta-blockers or tries to hide an emotion by controlling their facial expression or motor behavior (Gross, 1998). The first four can be considered as focused on the antecedent and act before the emergence of response trends, and the fifth is focused on the response and takes place after it is generated (Gross & Munoz, 1995).

Emotion regulation involves the emotional response to a particular situation and the person's voluntary or automatic effort to decide the emotions and the context in which they are allowed to be lived, but especially how they are expressed (Mauss, Bunge & Gross, 2007). While internalizing behavioral norms and standards, people learn to inhibit their emotional impulses and delay the reward (Denham, 2007). In most cases, they learn to regulate their emotions and behavior by discovering various ways to cope with anxiety, to defend themselves, to tolerate frustration or loneliness, and to negotiate the quality of interpersonal relationships. This process is learned through experiences that involve human interaction, behavior modelling and through various learning contexts in life. The most commonly used emotion regulation strategies are: avoidance, expressive suppression (effort to inhibit or reduce the behavioral manifestation of emotions), distraction of the attention, rumination (repetitive negative thoughts), or worry, acceptance, mindfulness, problem solving, cognitive re-evaluation (changing emotional meaning by reinterpreting a lived experience). The way people experience and regulate their emotions represents the attachment that is shaped from early childhood to adulthood when it becomes relatively stable. Thus, the source of resilience (secure

attachment), the pattern of mistrust (avoidant attachment), or the restless search for the other in order to receive support (anxious attachment) provide clues about how the person lives and expresses emotions. These major attachment styles are associated with the following patterns:

(1) Secure people have learned since childhood that emotional expression is acceptable to those around them. As a result, they express themselves directly and openly, trust that the other can be loved and is supportive of their own needs. They are more optimistic, make fewer catastrophic assessments of dangers or threats, and are more confident in their ability to cope with the difficulties inherent to daily life. They are also more resilient to life's challenges because their attachment helps them survive negative emotions, adapt socially, and maintain mental health. They tend to use constructive emotion regulation strategies (problem solving, re-evaluation, seeking support) and freely express their feelings without distorting them (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016a,b).

(2) Avoidants tend to have a history of repeated rejection of their emotional expressions and associate negative emotions with their own vulnerability. Thus, they have developed a strategy to hide emotional expression so as not to be ignored or despised. In the process of emotion regulation, they strive to block or inhibit their emotional reactions related to the availability of the attachment figure (rejection, betrayal, separation), because they are perceived as a threat, which can reactivate unwanted attachment needs and which predispose them to vulnerability. For the same reason, they avoid taking into account their own emotional reactions (by suppressing, distracting, suppressing tendencies to act related to emotions). They make every effort to protect themselves from experiencing and consciously expressing unpleasant emotions. These defenses decrease the likelihood that the emotional experience will be integrated into existing cognitive-affective structures that will lead to a change in the pattern learned throughout life and then allow the use of information in a social context.

(3) Anxious people have learned that their emotional expressions are responded to inconsistently and have developed a strategy of exaggerated emotional expression. For them, negative emotions are congruent with their goals of seeking closeness and hyperactivating the need for attachment, consequently they will focus on their exacerbation. In addition, they exaggerate the seriousness of threats and intensify the feeling of vulnerability and helplessness to make others pay more

attention, offer support and protection. They underestimate their own resources, while overestimating the danger and intensify their negative emotions, which lead to hyperactivation of their own anxiety. Thus, a vicious circle is created and it maintains the perception of the threat even after it has ended and the other is desired because otherwise, they could not cope with the threat.

Consequently, the partner with anxious attachment is worried that the other will not be available when they need them and constantly seeks their love and support, while the one with avoidant attachment is distrustful of the partner's intentions and has a compulsive trust only in himself/herself. These patterns of attachment are maladaptive because they do not help them seek the support and interdependence that would bring them rewards, maintain their well-being and promote couple adjustment. Attachment vulnerabilities make it difficult for partners to feel safe, causing repeated activation and suppression of negative emotions, maintaining distorted representations of oneself and others in couple relationship. While anxious people have an increased commitment to ruminating, which exacerbates distress, avoiders tend to distance themselves cognitively and emotionally (Goldberg, 2000; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). When couples encounter negative emotional events, such as anger caused by disagreements, disappointments, and perceived betrayals, they often fall into a primitive, survival-oriented mode of interaction. In these interactions, the partners repeatedly try to justify their own behavior or criticize their partner in harsh and contemptuous ways (Gottman & Levenson, 2002), make negative attributions (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990), and engage in unproductive behavioral cycles (Christensen, 1988).

## **II. Method**

The considerations presented previously led to the shaping of the theme, and then to the birth of this research, that investigates quantitatively and qualitatively the relationship between couple adjustment and the partners' emotion regulation. The study also aims to identify ways to adapt to married life and strategies for regulating the emotions of the two partners given the transgenerational psychic transmission. The aim was to obtain answers to the following two questions: (1) How do the partners adapt in the couple relationship considering the transmission of the models from their predecessors? and (2) How do partners regulate their emotions taking into consideration the transmission of models from predecessors? The design

of the quantitative research is a correlational one and the hypotheses from which we started were:

1. Couple satisfaction negatively correlates with the lack of emotional awareness.
2. Dyadic adjustment is negatively associated with difficulties in emotion regulation.
3. Couple cohesion negatively correlates with difficulties in emotion regulation.
4. There are significant differences between the predecessor and descendant couples in terms of couple adjustment.
5. There are significant differences between predecessor and descendant couples in terms of partners' difficulties in emotion regulation.

The qualitative research meant interviewing five relatives by filiation: the maternal grandmother (83 years old and 68 years of marriage), the mother (54 years old) and the father (62 years old) married for 36 years and the son (29 years old) and his wife (25 years old) who have completed 2 years of marriage. The interview guide was designed around the key concepts of the topic addressed and the specific objectives. The questions regarding the adjustment in the couple relationship focused both on the aspects of adaptation (behaviors, habits, feelings) but also on the models taken from their predecessors. Those related to emotion regulation in the couple focused on the feelings and emotions in the couple, as well as on the management of conflicting situations and the efforts to improve the couple's relationship.

For the quantitative study, there were involved 94 subjects, married couples or couples living together and the predecessors of one of the partners, chosen at random. They were invited to fill in individually the following two psychological tests:

- *The Dyadic Adjustment Scale* – DAS aims at the quality of adaptation between partners in dyadic marital or consensual relationships. Measuring the perceptions of both partners of the relationship makes it possible to obtain several different perspectives on the relationship. The scale contains 32 items and can be completed by either one or both partners in a relationship. DAS contains four subscales: (1) *Dyadic Consensus*, which assesses the degree of understanding between partners on the factors important to the relationship (money, religion, leisure time activities, friendships, household chores, and time spent together); (2) *Dyadic Satisfaction*, which measures the level of tension, frustration in the relationship and the level from which the person considers the relationship as finished (high scores indicate satisfaction with the current state of the relationship and commitment to its continuation);

(3) *Affectional Expression*, which measures a person's satisfaction with the expression of affectivity and sexuality in a relationship; (4) *Dyadic Cohesion*, which assesses the common interests and activities shared by the couple. Subscale scores are reported to the appropriate standards. Also, a total adjustment score is calculated by adding the scores of the four subscales (*Dyadic Adjustment*). The standard scores are computed separately for divorced and married couples. The original version of the scale has a very good internal consistency  $\alpha = .96$  (Spanier, 1976) and  $\alpha = .89$  (Iliescu & Petre, 2009). DAS has good psychometric properties in the present research ( $\alpha = .89$ ). The components of the scale vary from a high level of the  $\alpha$  Cronbach coefficient ( $\alpha = .87$  for dyadic cohesion) to a low level ( $\alpha = .30$  for affective expression).

- *The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale* – DERS investigates the relative absence of the following abilities, which indicate the presence of difficulties in regulating emotions: awareness and understanding the emotion, accepting it, the ability to change it according to the proposed goal, the ability to control one's behavior in the face of negative emotions, as well as the ability to flexibly use emotion regulation strategies appropriate to the context in order to modulate emotional responses. The scale comprises 36 items (Gratz & Roemer, 2004) and includes six analytically derived scales: (a) lack of awareness of emotional responses (*Awareness*) highlights the lack of attention to emotional responses, (b) lack of emotional clarity (*Clarity*) reflects the extent to which the person is no longer clear and precise about the nature of the emotions experienced, (c) non-acceptance of emotional responses (*Non-acceptance*) indicates a tendency towards negative secondary responses to negative emotions and/or denial of distress, (d) limited access to effective emotion regulation strategies (*Strategies*) assesses a person's beliefs that they can do little to effectively regulate their emotions after becoming upset or anxious or moody, (e) difficulty to engage in goal-oriented activities (*Goals*) captures problems regarding concentration and achievement of tasks while experiencing negative emotions and (f) the difficulty to manage impulses during negative emotions (*Impulse*) reflects the person's struggle to control their behavior when they are disappointed or worried (Kaufman et al., 2016). The short version contains 18 items, preserves the six scales, fidelity, validity and structure of the factors, while reducing the burden on participants. High values reflect greater difficulty in emotion regulation and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is .91, which indicates excellent internal consistency

(Victor & Klonsky, 2016). For this research, we used only the results for the Awareness, Impulse and Strategies sub-scales of this instrument and for computing the global score (*Difficulties in Emotion Regulation*) we used the sum of all its scales, including those not detailed in the present study. Regarding the psychometric qualities of the instrument, the results of the study show a good internal consistency both for the total score ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and for each sub-scale (the Cronbach's alpha coefficient has values between .70 for lack of emotion awareness and .87 for lack of the ability to manage impulses during negative emotions).

In order to comply with the norms of professional ethics, the written consent of each participant was requested and the results are confidential and used only in the present study.

### III. Results

The research began with conducting semi-structured interviews focused on highlighting the fact that marital adjustment and emotion regulation in the couple relationship are influenced by the transmission of models from ancestors. The method used for interpreting the data was thematic analysis. Following this, three main themes were generated:

(1) *Dyadic Adjustment*, with the sub-themes:

- *Dyadic Satisfaction* – occupies 0.55% of all content units, showing that this family's members place less emphasis on marital satisfaction in terms of couple adjustment.

- *Dyadic Consensus* – strengthens the cohesion of the couple and we find it as a transmission that comes from generation to generation. For the item "*Tell me what a satisfying couple relationship means to you*" the participants' answers were: "*feeling understood by the spouse*", "*I was understood by him*", "*to understand yourself*", "*to understand each other*". Understanding comes with improving communication skills and with the help of communication it is passed on. The keywords strengthen the sub-theme of family introjection, in which understanding occurs with a frequency of 28%. So we can say that the need for understanding is passed down from generation to generation: "*both Father and Mother were trying to understand each other and that's what I took from them*", "*let's stay together*", "*they got along well*", "*we saw understanding between them/ in their relation*", "*we are looking for understanding and negotiation*", "*to hold on to each other*". The keyword communication, part of the family introjection sub-theme, is found with a frequency of 44% within the sub-theme, which confirms the transmission of the dyadic

adjustment model, from generation to generation, consensus through communications being an important aspect for the members of this family.

- *Dyadic Consensus* – has the highest percentage, so we are entitled to say that the members of this extended family place special emphasis on collaboration, work and activities done together: "*collaborate with each other in what you do*", "*work brings us together, because we work together*", "*to spend more time together, the two of us*". Work occupies a central place for the couples in this family, so work brings them together ("*work has united us...*") and work separates them, too ("*...because I run errands for the company*", "*when the husband went to the sheepfold... well... he was at work*"). The grandmother tells how she and her husband worked in the household and on the field, the work being what united them. She also claims that a good part of her life ("*all my youth*"), work was also what separated them, her husband, being a shepherd, was gone for a few months in a row. According to the same model, her daughter states that work is what brings them together and work is also what separated them, her husband being away for a long time in their youth, working abroad. To reunite the family, the wife trained in his profession and followed her husband abroad. Their son says that although he did not want the same job for his wife, when he decided to go abroad to work, his wife decided to learn it, too, and practice it abroad together. Thus, we can observe why the adjustment to the relationship through cohesion in the couple, respectively through work, occupies a central place ("*through work, I went to work, I came back...*"). The keyword, collaboration, strengthens the keyword work ("*collaborate with each other in what you do*", "*if you help each other with what you need*"); as a result, for this family, collaboration is important both in terms of work and leisure. The need for cohesion is high, the units of content corresponding to the keyword, time spent together, are expressed in terms of needs ("*to go for a walk more*", "*to spend more time together*").

- *Affectional Expression* – the keywords of this sub-theme are love and gestures ("*through the gestures he makes*", "*he helps me when I need*", "*I help her when she needs*", "*he encourages me!*", "*with a flower, or a kiss...*"). The keywords within this theme reinforce the keywords within the family introjection sub-theme, where the word *gestures* was identified as a keyword ("*he brought flowers*", "*gestures of affection*"). The qualitative processing of the obtained data supports the statement that the adjustment to the marital

relationship is made according to the model inherited from the ancestors.

(2) *Difficulties in emotion regulation*, with the following six sub-themes: lack of emotion awareness (awareness), lack of clarity about the nature of emotions (clarity), lack of emotion acceptance (non-acceptance), lack of access to effective strategies for regulating emotions (strategies), the inability to engage in goal-oriented activities during negative activities/ emotions (goals) and the lack of ability to manage impulses during negative emotions (impulse). Regarding:

- *Lack of emotional awareness* – two key concepts were identified: lack of awareness and awareness of emotions that occur with a relatively similar frequency, which may show that, although the members of this family are aware of their emotions, they use emotion regulation strategies that can affect marital satisfaction.

- *Lack of clarity about the nature of emotions, lack of emotion acceptance, the inability to engage in goal-oriented activities, lack of ability to manage impulses during negative emotions* – a very low percentage was obtained, below 5%, which highlights the fact that members of this family emphasize less their emotions, their understanding and expression, which is why pauses appear while answering the questions. This can also explain why the marital satisfaction subscale, corresponding to the first theme, also gets a low percentage. For the members of this family, it is essential to understand each other and stay together for better or for worse and it is less important what emotions they experience within the couple.

- *Lack of access to effective strategies for emotion regulation* – four key concepts were identified (leaving, silence, positive strategies and quarrels). The most used strategies are: silence (“*shut up and do, to keep it well...*”, “*I shut up and do my job...*”, “*well, it means that one shuts up and obeys... we do not get into a conflict because in general one of us gives in*”), leaving, with a large proportion (“*if I see that we don’t understand each other, I leave!*”, “*if I see that it is so, I’d better leave*”, “*one would go out, the other would stay until it passed*”, “*And if something bothers me, I stand back and sit and wait, I don’t speak immediately*”, “*I usually go to the room and cry for 10 minutes*”, “*he leaves me alone for a while, to calm down*”, “*I don’t tell him!*”). Although the partners are aware of certain emotional sufferings, they choose to keep them quiet and leave in order to avoid a quarrel they associate with insults and attacks (“*they offended each other*”, “*they were attacking one another...*”). Both the positive

strategies and the silence or leaving reinforce the need for understanding in this family, a need transmitted by the predecessors (“*both my father and mother were trying to understand each other and that’s what I took from them*”). For the family projection subscale, corresponding to the theme of transgenerational transmission, the key concept of changing the other was identified, with a frequency of 100% within the sub-theme. The results highlight a dissatisfaction with certain aspects and a desire for the other to change something, so that the personal emotional state changes (“*What she says, I must do. Then it’s good!*”, “*No alcohol.*”, “*He doesn’t have much patience anymore.*”, “*I would like him to let me calm down.*”).

(3) *Transgenerational psychic transmission*, with the sub-themes: family introjection, family denial, family projection, context and class neurosis. A relatively low percentage of the total number of items was obtained for the first three sub-themes and no content unit was identified for the last one. For the family denial sub-theme, three units of content were highlighted (“[...]”, “*I don’t want (laughs)... I don’t want to ever end up like them*”).

To verify the first three hypotheses, we performed a correlational analysis and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlations between dyadic adjustment and difficulties in emotion regulation

	Difficulties in			
	Emotion Regulation DERS	Awareness DERS	Impulse DERS	Strategies DERS
<b>Dyadic Adjustment</b>	<b>-.212*</b>	<b>-.303**</b>	-.197	-.179
<b>DAS Dyadic Consensus</b>	-.189	<b>-.222*</b>	-.165	-.148
<b>DAS Dyadic Satisfaction</b>	-.067	<b>-.279**</b>	-.065	.049
<b>DAS Affectional Expression</b>	-.121	<b>-.339**</b>	-.136	-.154
<b>DAS Dyadic Cohesion</b>	<b>-.274**</b>	-.134	<b>-.272**</b>	<b>-.414**</b>

\* p<.05, \*\* p<.01

Dyadic satisfaction is associated negatively, statistically significant with a lack of emotional awareness (r = -.279, p <.01). Thus, the more the satisfaction regarding the couple relationship and the commitment of the two partners towards its continuation

increases, the more the couple members become aware of their own emotions. Regarding the relationship between couple satisfaction and difficulties in emotion regulation, the results of the study do not indicate a negative, statistically significant correlation. The obtained results highlight that the dyadic adjustment is associated negatively, statistically significant with the partners' difficulties in regulating their emotions ( $r = -.212, p < .05$ ), as well as with the lack of emotional awareness ( $r = -.303, p < .01$ ). Partners who easily adapt to dyadic marital or consensual relationships are able to successfully manage emotions through their awareness, acceptance, and attention to emotional responses.

Cohesion in the couple correlates negatively, statistically significant with the difficulties of emotion regulation ( $r = -.274, p < .01$ ), with the difficulty of managing impulses during negative emotions ( $r = -.272, p < .01$ ), as well as and with limited accessing of effective emotion regulation strategies ( $r = -.414, p < .01$ ). Partners who value common interests and shared activities are convinced that when they are upset, anxious, moody, disappointed or worried, they can adopt various strategies to regulate their emotions effectively and, more specifically, to control their own behavior.

Pearson coefficients show that there are other significant relationships between variables, as follows: (1) dyadic consensus correlates positively with affective expression ( $r = .763, p < .01$ ) and dyadic adjustment ( $r = .917, p < .01$ ) and negatively with the lack of emotional awareness ( $r = -.222, p < .05$ ); (2) dyadic satisfaction is positively associated with affective expression ( $r = .278, p < .01$ ), dyadic cohesion ( $r = .282, p < .01$ ), dyadic consensus ( $r = .276, p < .01$ ) and dyadic adjustment ( $r = .597, p < .01$ ); (3) affective expression correlates positively with the dyadic adjustment ( $r = .762, p < .01$ ) and negatively with the lack of emotional awareness ( $r = -.339, p < .01$ ); (4) dyadic cohesion positively correlates with affective expression ( $r = .285, p < .01$ ), dyadic consensus ( $r = .472, p < .01$ ) and dyadic adjustment ( $r = .626, p < .01$ ).

The results obtained after testing the last two hypotheses concerning the differences between the pairs of ancestors and those of descendants are presented in Table 2.

The results of the study indicate statistically significant differences, between the couples of predecessors and descendants, both in terms of dyadic adjustment ( $t = 13.23, p < .01$ ) and the partners' difficulties in emotion regulation ( $t = 2.28, p < .05$ ). As a result, partners in the descendant couples report a higher level of dyadic adjustment than the predecessors,

while the members of the predecessors couples show more difficulties in regulating their own emotions than the descendant couples.

Table 2. Differences between predecessors and descendants dyadic adjustment and difficulties in emotion regulation

		M	SD	t	df	p
<b>Dyadic Adjustment DAS</b>	<b>Couples of predecessors</b>	93.64	19.132	<b>13.23</b>	82.741	<b>.002</b>
	<b>Couples of descendants</b>	105.36	15.489			
<b>Difficulties in Emotion Regulation DERS</b>	<b>Couples of predecessors</b>	45.00	10.26	<b>2.28</b>	91.67	<b>0.024</b>
	<b>Couples of descendants</b>	39.98	11.004			

#### IV. Discussions

The data obtained from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews suggest that the transmission of models from predecessors influences both marital adjustment and emotion regulation within the couple relationship. The largest share of the total units of significance is covered by the first theme that includes the ways to adapt to the couple relationship. The proportion of units of significance that refer to transgenerational transmission justifies the perpetuation of a model transmitted by predecessors.

The analysis of the statistical results confirms that the development of the two partners' emotional awareness in the couple is associated with high dyadic satisfaction, highlighted in a study regarding the relationship between emotional abilities and marital satisfaction. Having your feelings hurt by another person, although a universal experience, can cause some to withdraw, some to attack, and others to reveal themselves. Some of the strategies lead to long-term intimate health in relationships (self-disclosure), while others are pervasive-corrosive (retaliation). The development of intimacy involves a process in which one partner shares a vulnerable behavior and the other responds empathetically. Given that dyadic satisfaction requires a high level of intimacy, and intimacy implies increasing levels of personal vulnerability, partners become extremely sensitive to being hurt by each other (intentionally or accidentally). Thus, the more one of the partners has a reduced capacity for emotional awareness, the more the interpersonal hurt is manifested by revenge, withdrawal, defense, hostility or avoidance, which determines the decrease of intimacy and couple satisfaction. On the other hand, if partners have developed emotional abilities, self-disclosure,

confidence, emotional communication, finding solutions, positive approach, forgiveness, assertive communication, maintaining intimacy and couple satisfaction are more common. At the same time, partners with developed emotional abilities are less likely to hurt their partners. For example, empathic partners are happier in their relationships, and partners able to identify and communicate their own emotions report high marital satisfaction, mediated by the intimacy felt. Women are much more sensitive to emotions than men, and their ability to empathetically express their concerns is positively correlated with the ability to self-report their own emotions, the ability to identify and communicate them properly (Mirgain & Cordova, 2007).

Partners who adjust easily to dyadic marital or consensual relationships have the ability to understand and control emotions, one of life's greatest challenges (Gross, 2002), which means that they are aware of the emotions experienced, attentive to their evolution over time, able to label and sort them correctly, then direct and modify them so that they achieve their goal and build healthy relationships. At the same time, Pantaziu and Năstăsă (2008) argue that couple members skilled in perceiving, evaluating and expressing emotions, in accessing and generating feelings that facilitate thinking, in understanding emotion and especially in managing emotions report a high level of marital satisfaction. Emotions are usually caused by external events and emotional reactions are directly linked to them (Heberlein & Atkinson, 2009). A successful marriage is significantly related to the two partners' relationship abilities. The following skills that promote marital happiness are highlighted: self-disclosure, listening, showing understanding, trust, caring, pleasant verbalizations, limited criticism, pleasant nonverbal acts (kisses, caresses, etc.), related to intimacy, friendship, sexual relations, assertiveness, anger control, solving problems that arise in the relationship, developing the relationship (Nelson-Johns, 1996; Argyle, 1998).

Attachments are considered to be a primary mechanism for regulating emotions. People are born with the desire to seek the proximity of their partner/ attachment figure, who is available to protect or alleviate distress. The feeling of security appears with the formation of attachment bonds. In a threatening situation, the attachment system determines the search for the attachment partner/ person, an aspect on which the emotion regulation strategies are based on. When the partner in the couple is perceived as unavailable, the feeling of insecurity and distress appears, which

determines a state of hypervigilance and helplessness in regulating emotions (Bowlby, 1988). Also, in intimate relationships, the feeling of security creates a positive interaction between the couple partners. Driver and Gottman (2004) argue that the ability to use positive emotions and humor during marital confrontations, as well as the manifestation of behaviors that show affection for each other is essential in predicting a healthy and beneficial couple relationship for both partners. The members of the couple who have discovered the way in which they manage to prevent the negative thoughts and emotions towards their partner from overwhelming the positive ones succeed in increasing their feelings of love, playfulness, fun, adventure and mutual development (Gottman & Silver, 2016).

The ability to effectively regulate emotions is an essential skill for healthy functioning. If emotion regulation abilities are underdeveloped or otherwise compromised, affective development may be delayed and the risk of developing psychopathology increases. Numerous studies found links between the inability to regulate emotions and identity disturbance (Kaufman, Cundiff & Crowell, 2015), self-inflicted harm (Crowell, Beauchaine, et al., 2005; Gratz & Tull, 2010), eating disorders (Racine & Wildes, 2013; Lavender et al., 2014), substance abuse (Dvorak et al., 2014), behavioral problems (Beauchaine, Gatzke-Kopp & Mead, 2007; Cappadocia et al., 2009), anxiety (Folk et al., 2014), depression (Crowell, Baucom, et al., 2014) and post-traumatic stress (Weiss et al., 2013). Difficulties in emotion regulation are a valid indicator of vulnerability, hence they affect the easy adjustment of the two partners in dyadic marital or consensual relationships.

Partners willing to participate in activities and share common interests are able to refrain from impulsive behaviors when faced with negative emotions and flexibly use appropriate emotion regulation strategies when experiencing anger, anxiety, malaise, disappointment, or worry. The process of emotion regulation is strongly influenced by the emotion that a partner lives, how he experiences it and especially how he expresses it. Some approaches to emotion regulation emphasize the importance of accepting and valuing emotional responses (Cole, Michel & Teti, 1994; Linehan, 1993). Consistent with these statements, researchers suggested that the tendency to experience negative emotions in response to one's own emotional reactions (indicating lack of emotional acceptance) is maladaptive and associated with greater difficulty in regulating emotions (Cole et al., 1994; Paivio & Greenberg, 1998; Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 1999). The

difficulty in emotion regulation reflects maladaptive ways in which the partner lives and responds to their own or the other's emotional states. This difficulty mediates the relationship between restrictive emotionality (ruminating anger) and aggressive behavior (reactive aggression). At the same time, understanding and differentiating between emotions influences the relationship between anger and aggression, and the negative effects of difficulties in regulating emotions in an adaptive way increase aggression. While the difficulty of inhibiting impulsive behavior is a significant mediator between men and women, difficulties in emotional awareness demonstrated a mediation effect only in men (Donahue et al., 2014). Difficulties in inhibiting impulsive behaviors under stress, difficulties in engaging in goal-oriented behaviors, and limited access to emotion regulation strategies have also been reported, significantly correlated with intimate partner abuse (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). There are studies that show that engaging in violence against intimate partners, as well as manifesting aggressive behavior can function as strategies for regulating emotions within the couple (Bushman, Baumeister & Phillips, 2001; Jakupcak, Lisak & Roemer, 2002).

The more skilled both partners are in being aware of and understanding their emotions, the easier it is for them to collaborate and understand each other when setting the budget, household chores and duties, recreational activities, and partying. The partners' satisfaction with the couple's emotional and sexual expression is influenced by each partner's ability to identify and understand emotions, their conscious and responsible commitment to continuing the relationship, appreciating common interests and sharing common activities, as well as the partner's availability to reach a consensus.

According to the results obtained, there are differences between ancestor couples and descendant couples, in terms of couple adjustment and the difficulties in emotion regulation. The partners in the descendant couples, compared to their predecessors, easily adapt to the dyadic marital relations, while the members of the ancestral couples show more difficulties in regulating their own emotions than those in the descendant couples. These differences are consistent with another study that argues that the level of marital satisfaction fluctuates in a long-term marriage, tending to gradually deteriorate (Sokolski & Hendrick, 1999). Marital satisfaction is not a fixed, static feature of a relationship, but it decreases or increases over time.

There are studies that claim that marital satisfaction changes throughout the family life cycle. Thus, a decrease in the level of marital satisfaction can be highlighted, the decline starting in the first year of marriage. Satisfaction continues to decline during the first ten years of marriage or maybe even more. The highest level of marital satisfaction is recorded during the first stages of the marital relationship, then begins to decline, and then re-enters an upward path (Strong, DeVault & Sayad, 1998). It was found that parents report lower marital satisfaction compared to partners without children and there is a significant negative correlation between marital satisfaction and the number of children. The birth of a child may involve a temporary change of power in the couple, in the sense that the mother is more active in the role of caring for the child, and the father is more concerned with the financial aspect. Conflict can arise in this situation, when one of the partners feels unhappy with the adoption of the new role. Marital satisfaction decreases after the birth of a child due to role conflicts, restriction of freedom and inability to return to the original roles (Twenge, Campbell & Foster, 2003). Regarding emotion regulation, it is worth noting that parents who are able to perceive and express emotions accurately tend to avoid adopting strategies for modifying by suppressing the displayed emotional expression in accordance with the rules of emotional expression. Those who do not resort to strategies of changing by simulating the displayed emotional expression adequately manage personal emotions, but also those of their own children. Parents who make a considerable effort to change their expressed or experienced emotions tend to hide or simulate their own emotional expressions, as well as to change their internal emotional feelings so that they become consistent with the rules of emotional expression. Also, those who feel a small discrepancy between the emotion experienced and the appropriate one in relation to their own children use strategies to modify by simulating the emotional expression displayed according to the rules of expression of emotions (Năstasă, Cimpu & Fărcaș, 2018).

Starting from the study of Kaufman et al. (2016), we can say that although emotion regulation abilities develop with age, throughout life difficulties in regulating emotions may arise. By associating it with a lower score of the dyadic adjustment scale for the families of predecessors, we can expect an increased emotional labor and implicitly the encounter of some difficulties in emotion regulation. It was also found that members of predecessor couples who made sustained

efforts to change their expressed or experienced emotions tended to change their internal emotional feelings so that they became consistent with the rules of emotional expression. At the same time, the partner in the ancestor couple who feels a small discrepancy between the emotion experienced and the appropriate one in relation to their partner and/or other family members mainly uses strategies to suppress and simulate the emotional expression displayed to be in line with the rules of emotional expression. The more frequent the direct interactions with the people from the close entourage, the bigger the effort made by them in order to change the emotions displayed or experienced (Mindu & Năstasă, 2018).

## **V. Conclusions**

The qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews suggests that both marital adjustment and emotion regulation within the couple relationship are influenced by the transmission of patterns from predecessors. The results of the study show the tendency to carry on the model transmitted by the predecessors in terms of couple adjustment and difficulties in emotion regulation. The partners in the couple of descendants take over, from their ancestors, certain models of adaptation to the couple relationship, but also of emotion regulation. Some aspects can alter the adjustment to the couple relationship for the descendant couples, precisely by the lack of awareness of taking over this model.

The hypotheses formulated complement the studies on dyadic satisfaction and the difficulties encountered by members of the couple in the process of regulating emotions. The processing of statistical data shows that there is an association between couple adjustment and the partners' emotion regulation, as well as that there are differences between the predecessor and descendant couples in terms of difficulties in regulating emotions and couple adjustment.

In the present study, the results obtained are consistent with the above research, and according to the hypotheses we can state that: (1) members of the couple who describe themselves as satisfied with the current state of the partnership and willing to engage responsibly in its continuation report less difficulty in becoming aware of one's emotions; (2) partners who adjust easily to the dyadic marital or consensual relationships are able to: successfully manage emotions through their awareness, manifest acceptance and attention to emotional responses, modify them according to the proposed goals, control impulses and behavior, as well as

use effective strategies to regulate emotions; (3) members of the couple willing to share common interests and participate in activities together are able to control their impulses when faced with negative emotions and resort to various appropriate emotion regulation strategies when experiencing sadness, anxiety, malaise, disappointment or worry; (4) partners in the descendant couples report a higher level of dyadic adjustment than their ancestors; (5) members of predecessors couples have more difficulty in adjusting their emotions than those of the descendant couples. It is worth noting that the quantitative results support the last two statements, while the qualitative analysis suggests that the partners' ability to adjust to the marital relationship and also the strategies used for emotion regulation are taken over from their predecessors. A possible future qualitative research could start from these findings in order to identify the way of transmitting the models from the ancestors in several families so that the results could be more detailed.

Within the limits of this research, we can highlight the small number of participants and the online application of questionnaires, which for predecessor couples could have been a difficulty, both in using the device and in understanding the requirements. Also, this way of completing the study instruments did not allow the identification of the difficulties encountered by the respondents, nor the assurance of the veridicality of the answers. The state of self-isolation was another condition that could have changed the responses provided by participants, and may have usher other influencing factors, difficult to control, such as emotional experiences in recent times, which could have biased certain responses. Taking into account these aspects, it is desirable that a future study on the same topic be carried out within a mixed but longitudinal research. It would be interesting to follow the evolution of the couple partners in terms of marital adjustment and emotion regulation strategies over the years and to involve a larger number of couples.

This in-depth analysis of the aspects in which behavioral patterns are transmitted from generation to generation can lead to a better knowledge and understanding both at personal level and in the couple relationship. The obtained results can represent a starting point in developing couple relationship screening protocols. They can also be used in the design and successful implementation of prevention and intervention programmes, the formulation of relevant psychotherapeutic objectives that take into account the intrapsychic reality of each member, aspects that can lead to easy adjustment of partners to the couple life and to better emotion

regulation. Such a programme is necessary to aim at developing adjustment in couple relationships and increase marital satisfaction, acquiring strategies for emotion regulation and understanding the transgenerational pattern by: ● identifying disruptive defense mechanisms; ● awareness of the current issues brought here and now; ● awareness of the different types of relationships that exist between the members of the dyad, with their advantages and disadvantages, but also awareness of their own emotions and their congruence with body language in order to develop authenticity; ● exploring emotional blockages and investigating memories, in order to bring the two people together in an authentic way; ● identification of transgenerational, repetitive, contaminated themes. All this is in line with the opinion of Mitrofan and Vasile (2012), who argue that from the dynamics and structural or functional transformations of the family, the partners' joy and suffering, adjustment and maladaptation, efficiency and inefficiency are born. At the same time, maintaining the behavioral pattern can lead to a balance in the family system, but also to dysfunctions (Voicu, 2017). If partners understand what is actually happening, Schützenberger (2015) believes that they can observe these repetitions or coincidences in their context and complexity, get out of the circle of repetitions and become able to regain their freedom. In this way, each person's existence can become clearer, more receptive to what it really is, or to what could be, given their own human potential.

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