

The relationship between anger experience and relationship satisfaction: The mediating role of emotion regulation

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Majority of studies on emotion regulation examined clusters of negative or positive emotions. However, few studies have explored the emotion regulation of specific emotions, such as anger or sadness. This study examines the association between anger experience, emotion regulation strategies, and relationship satisfaction. A sample of 255 emerging adults involved in a committed romantic relationship reported anger intensity elicited by a hypothetical scenario, how they regulated anger, and their momentary relationship satisfaction. We found that anger experience was related to emotion regulation strategies (extrinsic and intrinsic improving), which in turn increased participants' relationship satisfaction. Results indicate that only extrinsic improving emotion regulation strategy mediated the association between participants' anger experience and their own relationship satisfaction. The importance of addressing emotion regulation strategies during couple therapy sessions is discussed.

Keywords: anger; emotion regulation; relationship satisfaction; romantic relationships; young adults

To date, research has shown that anger can lead partners to engage in less resolution conflict situations and to behave in aggressive ways (Nocentini et al., 2013). Also, anger experience is associated with a lower level of couple satisfaction (MacKenzie et al., 2014; Renshaw et al., 2010). Moreover, although the majority of studies on emotion regulation examined clusters of negative or positive emotions, few studies have explored the emotion regulation of specific emotions, such as anger or sadness (Oberst et al., 2013; Páez et al., 2013; Rivers et al., 2007) at an intrapersonal or interpersonal level, failing to explore the effectiveness of strategies in regulating this negative emotions elicited in romantic relational contexts. Furthermore, the other line of research has shown that emotion regulation can be positively (Cameron & Overall, 2018) or negatively associated with relational outcomes (Velotti et al., 2016). However, previous research both on anger and relationship quality, and on emotion regulation and relationship quality limits our understanding of emotion processes in intimate bonds by (a) assessing the experience of anger and its regulation at an intrapersonal or interpersonal level, but not on romantic level; (b) assessing experience of anger and its regulation, but not linking it to relational outcomes; (c) investigating specific emotion regulation strategies (such as reappraisal, suppression, downregulation of emotions) at an intrapersonal level, but not at romantic level; (d) investigating specific emotion regulation strategies which may have an aim to improve (reappraisal) or worsen (suppression) their own emotions, but failing to investigate interpersonal emotion regulation strategies with the aim of improving or worsening other individual' emotions. This present study addresses these gaps in the literature by examining the association between anger experience and relationship satisfaction through the mediating role of emotion regulation. More precisely, we aim to test if extrinsic and intrinsic improving emotion regulation strategies mediate the relationship between anger and relationship satisfaction in emerging romantic couples.

Anger and relationship satisfaction

Anger is a social basic emotion, occurring within the interactions with another person, being directly oriented to another person, because of their improper and unfair behaviour (Shaver et al., 1987), causing deliberately and negligently personal offense (Power & Dalgleish, 1997). Romantic relationships represent the context in which the majority of individuals will experience the most intense positive or negative emotions (Fitness & Fletcher, 1990; Relajo-Howell). Thus, negative emotions such as anger, hurt or sadness are frequently experienced in couple (Ursu et al., 2020). Gottman and Levenson (1992) indicated that regulated couples (those showing more positive than negative emotional behaviours during interactions) had a higher marital satisfaction, less negative and more positive emotional expressions. The non-regulated couples, those showing more negative than positive emotional behaviours during interactions, report a lower marital satisfaction. Further, Gottman (1993a) formulated the theory of sound marital house to analyse the adult relationship patterns from happiness to separation, in which he indicated the role of the negative sentiments overrides in the development of distance and isolation cascade between partners. Indeed, in the context of romantic relationships, anger was classified either as a hard emotion (Sanford & Rowatt, 2004), being associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Lemay Jr et al., 2012) or as a secondary emotion representing a response towards one 's feelings or thoughts rather than to the situation (Greenberg, 2010).

Several studies were conducted to shed light on the link between anger and romantic relationships. In a multi-study, Sanford and Rowatt (2004) asked participants to rate how they might feel (angry or hurt) in response to six different stems, with each stem describing a common form of negative partner behaviour (e.g., criticised by partner). Firstly, they found that women reported high level of anger compared to men. Secondly, they found that experiencing high level of anger was associated with negative relationship functioning (e.g. high level of conflict, low level of relationship satisfaction). More recent research on the relation between trait anger and relationship quality suggest that anger is negatively correlated with couple satisfaction at both the actor and partner levels (Baron et al., 2007; MacKenzie et al., 2014; Renshaw et al., 2010).

Anger and emotion regulation

Traditionally, the research on emotion regulation has focused on clusters of negative or positive emotions, ignoring specific social emotions such as anger, sadness or hurt. However, when researchers have studied the regulation of discrete emotions, such as anger (Oberst et al., 2013; Páez et al., 2013; Relajo-Howell, 2020; Rivers et al., 2007), they have studied at the intrapersonal or interpersonal level, failing to address the regulation of anger within romantic relationships. For instance, it was found that when anger is elicited in the context of friendships, individuals use emotion regulation strategies as attempts to change the situation, passive or indirect strategies, verbal expressions of anger and leaving or avoidance strategies (Rivers et al., 2007). Moreover, the same researchers reported that attempts to change the situation was the most efficient strategy in regulating anger elicited by the interactions with friends. In addition, Oberst and colleagues

(2013) found that people used more adaptive strategies, such as situation change, direct resolution or planning when regulating anger. In another intent, Páez and colleagues (2013) found that seeking emotional and informative social support was one of the most functional strategies for regulating anger, while social isolation was one of the strategies with the most negative impact on adjustment.

Emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction

Various theoretical models have been suggested when defining the concept of emotion regulation. More precisely, some models address the stage at which the emotion is regulated (e.g., the five stages in the process model of emotion regulation; Gross, 1998), while other models emphasise the aspect of emotion that is regulated (attention, cognitive emotion-relevant knowledge, and bodily manifestations of emotion, Koole, 2009). In addition, some researchers address the target of the emotion regulation (one's own emotions or someone else's emotions; Gross & Thompson, 2007), while other researchers were interested whether the regulation aim is to worsen or to improve emotions (Parrott, 1993; Relojo et al., 2015)). Thus, taking into account the last two theoretical models, the Parkinson and Totterdell's (1999) classification of affect regulation strategies (e.g., cognitive vs behavioural and engagement vs. diversion), together with the reported strategies by people in different types of studies, Niven and colleagues (2009) proposed the Interpersonal Affect Classification (IAC). The IAC model addresses the regulation of both, positive and negative emotions and makes a distinction between affect improving (any strategy to improve people's feelings) and affect worsening (any strategy used to worsen people's feelings). In order to allow researchers to assess the full range of strategies that can be used by people in different contexts, Niven and colleagues (2011) developed Emotion Regulation of Others and Self questionnaire (EROS). They suggested four main types of emotion regulation: intrinsic affect-improving, the deliberate improvement of one's own feelings; intrinsic affect-worsening, the deliberate worsening of one's own feelings; extrinsic affect-improving, the deliberate improvement of another person's feelings; extrinsic affect-worsening, the deliberate worsening of another person's feelings. The initial studies on extrinsic affect-improving showed that people are using these strategies more within romantic relationships compared to other interpersonal relationships such as friendships, family or at work (Niven, et al., 2012). Furthermore, the results from the same study suggested a positive correlation between extrinsic improving strategies and interpersonal relationship closeness.

As the majority of emotion regulation episodes takes place in interpersonal contexts of up to 98% (Gross et al., 2006), one might expect many studies on emotion regulation and romantic relationships. In fact, far less research has examined the associations between specific types of emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction. For instance, Bloch et al. (2014) found that a wife's downregulation of behaviour was associated with husband's and wife's marital satisfaction. Emotion regulation strategies such as suppression, reappraisal, cognitive emotion strategies and emotional expression were also investigated in the context of romantic relationships. The research on suppression suggests mixed results. Velotti and colleagues (2016) found that the wife's use of suppression influenced her satisfaction and the husband's use of suppression influenced not only his satisfaction but also his wife's satisfaction. Consistent with these results, Impett and colleagues (2012) found a lower level of satisfaction when partners use suppression to regulate their emotions. However, contrary to these results, Mazzuca and colleagues (2018) found no influence of the wife's or husband's use of suppression either on their own satisfaction or on their partner's satisfaction. The results also showed that reappraisal influenced the marital satisfaction at both levels (actor and partner), thus the use of cognitive reappraisal influenced their own level of satisfaction, but also their partner's level of satisfaction. Rusu et al. (2018) found that different cognitive emotion strategies (putting into perspective, positive refocusing, positive reappraisal and planning refocusing) influence marital satisfaction through positive dyadic coping. Moreover, Cameron and Overall (2018) found that emotional expression has a positive influence on relationship satisfaction. Kinkead et al. (2021) adapted the extrinsic factors of EROS (Niven, et al., 2011) to couples' context by developing the Couples Extrinsic Emotion Regulation (CEER) questionnaire. They found positive correlations between the extrinsic improving factors and relationship cohesion, relationship satisfaction, relationship consensus and affectional expression.

Although anger is a natural, healthy, appropriate, life-enhancing emotion, nonetheless it may be potentially destructive to a person's well-being, and to their relationships quality if not appropriately managed (Berkowitz & Harmon-Jones, 2004; Relojo & dela Rosa, 2017). In the last decades, anger effects on romantic relationships have been studied, being positively associated, not only with intrapersonal outcomes such as neuroticism (Pfeiler et al., 2018; Zajenkowski & Gignac, 2018), impulsivity (Itani et al., 2016; Tanik, et al., 2020), low self-esteem (Galambos et al., 2006; John & Gross, 2004), but also with interpersonal outcomes such as marital distress, marital dissatisfaction and marital dissolution (Gottman, 1993b; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Johnson, 2002; Lemay Jr et al., 2012; Renshaw et al, 2010). However, the research on the link between anger experience and relationship satisfaction is limited, the results are still inconsistent, and does not examine its explanatory processes. Furthermore, research has examined separately the link

between anger and emotion regulation, anger and satisfaction, or emotion regulation and satisfaction, while ignoring the link among these three variables. This means that, it is not entirely clear how the process of anger regulation within romantic relationships works.

All previous conducted studies assessed the general abilities of specific emotion regulation strategies and their effects on relationship satisfaction. However, none of them assessed how emerging adults involved in romantic relationships regulate specific emotions, previously elicited by a scenario and its effects on relationship satisfaction. In addition, all studies in which participants regulated their anger with specific emotion regulation strategies, measured regulation with retrospective self-reports failing to assess the actual emotion regulation strategy. To cover this gap, we decided to investigate the mediating role of emotion regulation strategies between anger experience and relationship satisfaction. More precisely, we decided to see if extrinsic and intrinsic improving regulation strategies mediate the link between individuals' relational anger and their momentary relationship satisfaction.

Adaptive social relationships require effective emotion regulation. Emotion regulation can be adaptive, with the aim of improving their own and other's people feelings but also maladaptive, which worsen their own and other people's feelings (Aldao & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012; Niven et al., 2011). Emotion regulation strategy can improve relational outcomes, such as couple satisfaction at a personal level but also at partner level (Bloch et al., 2014; Mazzuca et al., 2011; Rusu et al., 2018) or can worsen them at both levels (Impett et al., 2012; Velotti et al., 2016).

Based on previous existing results (Bloch et al., 2014; Gottman et al., 1998), we assume that not only does the experience of an emotion (e.g., anger) affects relationship satisfaction, but also, more importantly, is how individuals regulate that emotion while experiencing it. For instance, young adults will experience conflict and intense negative emotions, such as anger within a romantic relationship maybe more than any other age group. Previous research, which focused on anger effects during intimate conflicts, found that a lack of skills for managing anger within romantic relationships make partners escalate their anger to more severe and intense reactions, engaging in less conflict resolution discussions and employing maladaptive resolution styles such as psychological and physical aggression (Nocentini et al., 2013; Sommer et al., 2019).

Current study

The current study aims to test whether emotion regulation mediates the relation between anger experience and relationship satisfaction in emerging non-marital relationships.

More precisely, the present study has three main goals. First, based on previous findings (Baron et al., 2007; MacKenzie, et al., 2014; Oberst et al., 2013; Páez et al., 2013; Renshaw et al., 2010) we expect anger intensity to be negatively correlated with both (extrinsic and intrinsic improving) emotion regulation strategies and relationship satisfaction. Second, based on previous findings of extrinsic improving factor of CEER (Kinkead et al., 2021) and findings from other adaptive emotion regulation strategies (Cameron & Overall, 2018; Mazzuca et al., 2018; Rusu et al., 2018), we expect each emotion regulation strategy to be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction. Moreover, considering the negative associations between anger and relationship satisfaction (Baron et al., 2007; MacKenzie et al., 2014; Renshaw et al., 2010) and the positive associations between extrinsic improving factor of CEER and relationship satisfaction (Kinkead et al., 2021), the positive associations between other adaptive emotion regulation strategies and relationship satisfaction (Cameron & Overall, 2018; Mazzuca et al., 2018; Rusu et al., 2018) and the positive effects of extrinsic improving regulation strategy and adaptive emotion regulation strategies on personal well-being and adjustment when used to regulate anger within friendship relationships (Niven et al., 2012; Oberst et al., 2013; Páez et al., 2013), we expect extrinsic and intrinsic improving emotion regulation strategies to mediate the link between relational anger and relationship satisfaction.

METHOD

Ethical permission

The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of large Romanian university.

Participants

The sample of the present study consists of 255 university students (51.8% women) of a large Romanian university. The age ranges between 18–25 years, with a mean of 20.36 ($SD = 1.63$). The mean length of time being involved in a non-marital committed relationship was 16.34 months ($SD = 9.56$) with a range of 3–36

months. 84% ($n = 215$) of the sample completed high school, 15.3% graduated with a bachelor degree and the others graduated with a master's degree. None of the participants were involved in a romantic relationship with each other.

Measures

Sociodemographic questions. This section includes socio-demographic questions such as gender, age, level of education, partner relationship status and relationship length.

Scenario. In a previous study two scenarios were validated for eliciting romantic relational anger and romantic relational hurt respectively (Ursu et al., under review). In order to reach the aims of the present study, to elicit romantic relational anger, only one scenario was used. We contra-paired the participants' gender with the target personage's gender.

More precisely, the following scenario was used to elicit romantic relational anger in men:

Radu and Ioana have been together for a year and a couple of months. Lately, it seems that they don't understand each other anymore, they fight without reasons, they do not care about the needs and desires of each other, shortly, and they are not open to do any compromise for their relationship. Moreover, in the last time, Ioana has become more and more uninvolved in housekeeping activities. Yesterday, before joining their friends for dinner, they decided that they would not argue in public. But, during dinner, Ioana rejected all of Radu's ideas, and besides all, she told him to shut up for a couple of times because he did not have anything interesting to say, continuing with bad jokes at his address. Arriving home, they argued again, Ioana insisting that she hadn't done anything wrong, regardless of Radu's arguments.

In order to elicit women's romantic relational anger, the following scenario was used:

Radu and Ioana have been together for a year and a couple of months. Lately, it seems that they don't understand each other anymore, they fight without reasons, they do not care about the needs and desires of each other, shortly, and they are not open to do any compromise for their relationship. Moreover, in the last time, Radu has become more and more uninvolved in housekeeping activities. Yesterday, before joining their friends for dinner, they decided that they would not argue in public. But, during dinner, Radu rejected all of Ioana's ideas, and besides all, he told her to shut up for a couple of times because she did not have anything interesting to say, continuing with bad jokes at her address. Arriving home, they argued again, Radu insisting that he hadn't done anything wrong, regardless of Ioana's arguments.

We decided to use Radu and Ioana as personages' first names, as these two first names are very commune in Romania. Four negative emotions (anger, hurt, boredom, and fear) were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. Participants were asked to assess the emotions' intensity thinking of how they would feel in target personage's place. In this study, we only use the data for collected for the experience of anger.

EROS. A Romanian translation of Emotion Regulation of Other and Self (EROS) (Niven, et al., 2011) was used to assess the emotion regulation strategy. EROS is a self-reporting scale which contains 19 items grouped in four factors: intrinsic affect-improving, intrinsic affect-worsening, extrinsic affect-improving and extrinsic affect-worsening assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. However, in this study we used only two factors, extrinsic and intrinsic improving. Reliability was assessed for the two factors and the Alpha Cronbach values are as follows: intrinsic affect-improving .74, and extrinsic affect-improving .87. In order to measure the intention of participant to regulate their partner's emotions, we adapted the items from extrinsic improving subscale by changing the original pronoun 'other' with 'my partner'. Six out of 19 items measure extrinsic improving strategy (e.g., 'I would helpful advice to my partner. I would do something nice with my partner. I would listen to my partner's ideas. I would spend time with my partner.') while other six items measure intrinsic improving (e.g. 'I would do something I enjoy. I would think about something nice. I would think of positive aspects of my situation. '). The seven remain items measure the intrinsic and extrinsic worsening strategies. Participants were asked to rate the items thinking of how they would behave in target personage's place.

KMS. To assess relationship satisfaction we used a Romanian translation of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (Nichols et al., 1983) . This scale contains 3 items assessing the intimate partners' relationship satisfaction. The internal consistence assessed by the Alpha Cronbach is .89. We adapted the items for the sample's marital status by changing the nouns "husband" and "wife" with a more general noun "partner"

Examples the items are: "How satisfied are you now with your partner? " "How satisfied are you now with your relationship" "How satisfied are you now with your relationship with your partner? ".

Procedure

First year students were invited to participate in this study. All the students received extra-course credit. All the study questionnaires were filled in online. All the participants signed an informed consent form to participate in the study. First, the participants filled in the socio-demographic questions. Second, they read the scenario, being asked afterwards to fill in EROS items, thinking of how they would behave if they would had experienced the situation presented in the scenario. Also, they filled in the items related to their momentary relationship satisfaction (KMS).

Data analysis

We used SPSS version 21 for the preliminary data analyses. The mediational analysis was conducted using the macro PROCESS in SPSS (Hayes, 2013). We explored the direct and indirect effects of the variables.

RESULTS

Preliminary results

Table 1 depicts the means, standard deviation and t-test for independent samples for study's variables. In general, the scores were moderate for the emotion regulations strategies (extrinsic and intrinsic). For momentary relationship satisfaction the average scores were rather low. However, men reported significantly higher scores on relationship satisfaction than women, $t(239.99) = 2.93, p < .01$, significantly higher scores on extrinsic improving emotion regulation strategy than women $t(253) = 1.89, p < .05$ and significantly lower scores on anger intensity than women $t(242.36) = -5.05, p < .01$.

Table 1
 Descriptive statistics and independent t-test of variables

Variable	M (SD)		t	df
	Men	Women		
Extrinsic improving	3.59 (1.00)	3.35 (1.01)	1.89*	253
Intrinsic improving	3.15 (0.85)	2.97 (0.87)	1.65	253
Relationship satisfaction	2.76 (1.49)	2.25 (1.26)	2.93**	239.99
Anger	3.39 (1.18)	4.09 (1.03)	-5.05**	242.36

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Pearson correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 2. Positive correlations were found between extrinsic improving emotion regulation and intrinsic improving emotion regulation ($r = .69, p < .001$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = .34, p < .001$) and between intrinsic improving emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction ($r = .28, p < .001$). Negative correlations were found between extrinsic improving emotion regulation and anger ($r = -.24, p < .001$), between intrinsic improving emotion regulation and anger ($r = -.12, p = .49$) and between relationship satisfaction and anger ($r = -.31, p < .001$). The results depicted in Table 2 suggest that the first and second hypotheses are supported.

Table 2
 Bivariate correlations between anger intensity, improving regulation strategies, and relationship satisfaction

Variable	1	2	3	4
Extrinsic improving	–	0.69**	0.34**	-0.24**
Intrinsic improving		–	0.28**	-0.12*
Relationship satisfaction			–	-0.31**
Anger				

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The mediation model is illustrated in Figure 1. The results reveal that the model has the following indices: $R^2 = .18, F(3, 251) = 18.96, MSE = 14.64, p < .001$. The total effect of anger experience on relationship satisfaction was $b = -1.15, p < .001$.

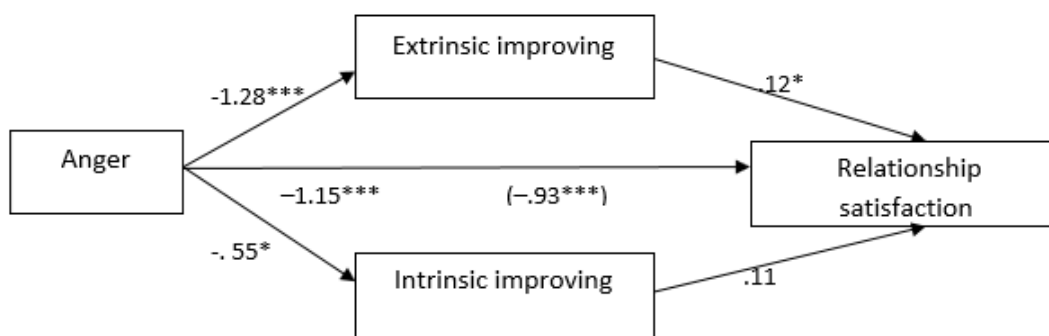


Figure 1
 The mediation model testing emotion regulation (extrinsic and intrinsic emotion regulation) as a mediating variable in the relationship between anger experience and relationship satisfaction. Note: * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Direct effects

Anger had a direct effect on intrinsic improving regulation ($b = -.55$, $p < .05$), on extrinsic improving regulation ($b = -1.28$, $p < .001$), and on relationship satisfaction ($b = -.93$, $p < .001$). In addition, extrinsic emotion regulation had a direct effect on relationship satisfaction ($b = .11$, $p < .05$) while intrinsic improving regulation failed to have a direct effect on relationship satisfaction ($b = .12$, $p > .05$).

Indirect effects

We assumed that emotion regulation (intrinsic improving and extrinsic improving) would explain the influence of anger on relationship satisfaction. The findings showed that extrinsic improving emotion regulation partially mediated the effects of anger experience on relationship satisfaction ($b = -.04$; $CI: -.087; -.006$), while intrinsic improving emotion regulation failed to mediate the effects of anger experience on relationship satisfaction ($b = -.01$; $CI: -.053; -.0003$).

Testing alternative model

To rule out the alternative explanation, by which relationship satisfaction leads to higher extrinsic improving and to higher intrinsic improving, which in turn leads to less anger experience, this reverse model was examined. The reversed model showed lower indices: $R^2 = .13$, $F(3, 251) = 12.51$, $MSE = 1.18$, $p < .001$. The total effect of relationship satisfaction on anger experience was also lower than vice versa ($b = -.08$, $p < .001$).

Direct effects

Relationship satisfaction had a direct effect on intrinsic improving regulation ($b = .36$, $p < .001$), on extrinsic improving regulation ($b = .49$, $p < .001$), and on relationship satisfaction ($b = -.93$, $p < .001$). In addition, extrinsic emotion regulation had a direct effect on anger ($b = -.04$, $p < .05$) while intrinsic improving regulation failed to have a direct effect on anger ($b = .02$, $p < .05$).

Indirect effects

We tested if emotion regulation (intrinsic improving and extrinsic improving) would explain the influence of relationship satisfaction on anger experience. The findings showed that extrinsic improving emotion regulation partially mediated the effects of relationship satisfaction on anger experience ($b = -.08$; $CI: -.15; -.021$), while intrinsic improving emotion regulation failed to mediate the effects of relationship satisfaction on anger experience ($b = .03$; $CI: -.01; .09$). Theoretical arguments provided in the Introduction section, the reported data in the present section (e.g., the lower indices of the reverse model) indicate that the initial model has a better fit to the dataset, being theoretically and statistically more appropriate.

DISCUSSION

Although the effects of anger on romantic relationships functioning and outcomes were supported in previous studies, there is a lack of knowledge related to different aspects of emotion regulation (such as intrinsic and extrinsic improving strategies), and on how individuals involved in non-marital committed

relationships effectively regulate their anger elicited during partners interactions. This present study aimed to test the mediating role of emotion regulation in the association between anger experience and relationship satisfaction in non-marital emerging couples.

The results revealed significant gender differences on all study 's variables besides intrinsic improving emotion regulation strategy. Men reported lower anger intensity, higher extrinsic improving emotion regulation and higher relationship satisfaction comparing to their partners. Lower anger intensity in men was also reported by other studies (Fischer & Evers, 2011; Fischer et al., 2018). These results may be explained by the demand withdraw pattern when women are starting more often conversations about sensitive topics than men, demanding for change in their relationship. These conversations may lead to conflicts (Christensen & Heavy, 1993) and divorce because of the usage of criticism and blame expressed towards their partner (Gottman, Coan et al., 1998). Another alternative explanation may be related to the hypothetical scenarios. The scenarios act based on network theory of affect (Bower, 1981). When female participants read the scenarios, the knowledge nodes of similar events (rejecting all her ideas, telling her to shut up in from of their friends because she does not have anything interesting to say, even if they decided together to not offend each other in public anymore) are activated. In turn, these nodes will activate the nodes representing emotional information by increasing the level of anger. The results are in line with those reported by Stanford and Rowatt (2004) indicating not only that woman reported higher level of anger compared to men, but also that experiencing higher level of anger was associated with negative relationship functioning (e.g., higher level of conflict, lower level of relationship satisfaction). The findings related to men's higher satisfaction level are consistent with other studies conducted in Romania (Rusu et al., 2018) or in other countries (Jackson, et al., 2014; Renshaw et al., 2010). This may be explained by the fact that the committed romantic relationships' benefits are higher for men (Waite et al., 2000). For example, men receive more support from their partner' s than women (Cutrona, 1996; Gottman & Notarius, 2000).

Men used more the extrinsic improving emotion regulation strategy compared to women. Although studies have rarely reported gender differences in emotion regulations strategies, Gullone and colleagues (2010) indicated that starting from childhood men reported more suppression use compared to women. At the same time, McRae and colleagues (2008) reported that men are more efficient than women at reappraisal. When attempting to downregulate negative emotion, such as anger, men are able to use regulation with greater efficiency, or less effort, than women (McRae et al., 2008). Pauw and colleagues (2019) presented two primary forms aimed at supporting the emotional experiences of others: the socio-affective support (providing comfort, care and validation), and the cognitive support (directed at altering cognitions related to the emotional experience by reappraisal or directed at disengaging from the emotional situation by suppression). When confronted with a person in distress, women may be more prone to offer their socio-affective support, while men try to distract that person from the emotional situation by cognitive reframing or to encourage her to suppress her emotions. The results show that anger was significantly negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, and with extrinsic and intrinsic improving emotion regulation strategies. Moreover, extrinsic and intrinsic improving emotion regulation strategies were significantly positively associated with relationship satisfaction. In addition, only extrinsic improving emotion regulation strategy affected relationship satisfaction positively. Thus, the results of negative association between anger experience and relationship satisfaction are consistent with previous research on trait anger and relationship satisfaction (Baron et al., 2007; MacKenzie et al., 2014). Additionally, Sanford and Rowatt (2004) also found that women reported higher intensity of anger and negative correlations between anger and relationship satisfaction. Also, the results indicated a negative association between anger and both extrinsic and intrinsic improving emotion regulation strategies. Previous studies on Romanian youngsters also found negative correlations between anger and other adaptive emotion regulations such as reappraisal (Mitrofan & Ciuluvica, 2012).

Moreover, the present study revealed positive correlations between both extrinsic and intrinsic improving emotion regulation strategies and relationship satisfaction. These results are in line with recent research on the associations between extrinsic improving factor of CEER and relationship satisfaction (Kinkead et al., 2021), and past research on the link between adaptive emotion regulation strategies such as downregulation (Bloch et., 2014), cognitive reappraisal (Mazzuca et al., 2018; Rusu et al., 2018) or emotional expression (Cameron & Overall, 2018) and relationship satisfaction.

These results add new features in the area of emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction, taking into account that the participants were involved in non-marital young romantic relationships and not in marital relationships. Despite confirming these negative associations between anger and emotion regulation, positive association between emotion regulation and relationship satisfaction, the present study extends the knowledge on understanding which strategies have a positive effect on the link between anger experience

and relationship satisfaction. More precisely, the results show that extrinsic improving emotion regulation partially mediates the relationship between anger experience and momentary relationship satisfaction. In other words, when participants use extrinsic improving emotion regulation to regulate their romantic relational anger elicited by a hypothetical scenario, the participants felt more satisfied within their romantic relationships. Poorly regulated anger may have a higher negative effect on relationship satisfaction. Consistent with these conclusions, Gottman and colleagues (1998) found that decline in relationship satisfaction was related to what he termed "negative start-up by wife" and also women's lack of de-escalation of high intensity conflict. Women high in anger elicitation may also be more likely to initiate a demand-withdraw pattern with their partners. The demand-withdraw pattern characteristically involves the women making a request for a change and the man avoiding or 'stonewalling' in response to that demand. On the long term, these interactions patterns may lead to relationship dissolution (Christensen & Heavy, 1993; Gottman, 1993).

The result that intrinsic improving emotion regulation strategy failed to mediate the link between anger experience and relationship satisfaction converges with prior research showing that another emotion regulation which it was considered as having an intrinsic character, namely suppression had no effect on intimate partners' satisfaction (Mazzuca et al., 2018). The results of the present study have clinical implications. More precisely, the results emphasise the rationale for the development, and implementation of a comprehensive multilevel, preventively oriented partner and couple support interventions for the emerging adults involved in a committed romantic relationship. Couple intervention is defined broadly as a therapeutic process, which helps modify psychological distress of individuals by targeting their interpersonal relationships within the couple (Bradbury et al., 2016). During couple therapy sessions, therapists can work at two levels, by addressing emotions experienced by the partners in their romantic interactions and the used emotion regulation strategies. Firstly, the therapist can work with the intimate partner's anger to understand the needs and emotions which are underneath it. As it was mentioned before, EFT suggested that the primary emotions in anger's case are hurt or fear (Greenberg, 2010). When the therapist is working on creating a safe, validating and empathetic environment, actually it is creating a context in which primary emotions as hurt, sadness and fear could be expressed. Together with the expression of primary emotions all associated adaptive information are accessed in order to obtain partners' emotional reconnection. When intimate partners are emotionally reconnected, maladaptive primary emotions such as the anxiety of basic insecurity or a sense of lonely abandonment and anger are accessed and regulated.

Secondly, the therapist can make intimate partners aware of their role in regulating partner's emotions. For example, one partner – through their own emotion regulation strategy – can comfort the angry partner in order to make them to feel heard, understood and validated. Acknowledging the effects of their own emotion regulation strategy used for regulating partner's anger is the first step in changing their emotional dynamic. Moreover, understanding how their emotion regulation strategies are influencing partner's satisfaction is crucial for creating a high level of couple security in which they can express their needs and desires being sure that their partner will be there to meet their needs in a satisfactory way.

CONCLUSION

These findings contribute the anger and romantic relationships literature in several ways. First, we tested the mediation role of specific strategies of emotion regulation between romantic relational anger and relationship satisfaction. Second, they show which strategies intimate partners use for regulating a specific emotion, elicited in the context of intimate relationships. Third, the results of the present study add additional findings on the mediator role of the extrinsic improving emotion regulation strategy between anger and relationship satisfaction, after previous recent study revealed the positive associations between these two variables. Fourth, the use of the standardised hypothetical scenario is another strength of the study, first because of its standardization, but also because it is avoiding memory bias and tasks demand characteristics.

In addition to its strengths, the present study had also some limitations. The first limitation is that only one partner and only one emotion were examined. Future research needs to assess both partners. Using an actor-partner model to analyse the data would be helpful for revealing actor and partner effects. In addition, future studies could assess other positive and negative emotions in order to add knowledge to the effectiveness of specific emotion regulation strategies and their effects on romantic relationships outcome as relationship satisfaction. Another limitation concerns the usage of cross-sectional design. The mediational model was tested in a cross-sectional design, which does not permit us to know if the mediation effect is stable over time and does not allow us to make causal assumptions (MacKinnon & Fairchild, 2009). Another limitation concerns the fact that we used an instrument to assess relationship satisfaction that was not created for dating individuals. However, the items are general and the results of one meta-analysis concluded that KMS

can be successfully used for unmarried couples (for a review, see Graham et al., 2011). Finally, the convenient sample, participants with slightly higher education level is another limitation of this study. However, for the group age assessed and the type of romantic relationships which we were interested in, the student sample is one of the most representative.

In conclusion, this study provides preliminary evidence on the mediator role of extrinsic improving emotion regulation strategy between romantic relational anger and momentary relationship satisfaction.

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