

Emotional Skillfulness in Marriage: Intimacy as a Mediator of the Relationship Between
Emotional Skillfulness and Marital Satisfaction

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Abstract

We tested our hypothesis that emotional skillfulness, specifically the ability to identify and communicate emotions, plays a role in the maintenance of marital adjustment through its effects on the intimacy process. Seventy-nine married couples completed measures of emotional skillfulness, marital adjustment, and intimate safety. As predicted, we found that the ability to identify and the ability to communicate emotions were associated with marital adjustment. Further, the association between these emotion skills and marital adjustment was mediated by intimate safety for both husbands and wives. Gender differences were found in the ability to communicate emotions and in the association between the communication of emotions and the partner's marital adjustment.

The Effects of Emotional Skillfulness on Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction

Developing a healthy relationship may depend on people acquiring a set of emotion skills that allow them to effectively navigate the sometimes challenging and complex emotional waters of intimate relationships. In this paper, we will provide evidence that emotion skills such as the ability to identify and communicate emotions play an important role in the maintenance of marital satisfaction primarily because of the role they play in the intimacy process.

Emotional Skillfulness and Marital Satisfaction

Although evidence suggests that people are born with a basic set of emotional responses (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1975), what individuals learn about how to behave in the context of their emotional experiencing can vary quite dramatically. Whereas everyone experiences emotions, some people learn more relationship adaptive ways of behaving in the context of their emotions. Particularly in the case of strong emotions such as anger, jealousy, lust, or fear, some ways of relating while experiencing those emotions are more skillful than others (e.g., communicating, attending, compromising, versus hitting, hoarding, diminishing). Even how one learns to behave while feeling love can be more or less interpersonally skillful. Our contention is that it is not having an emotion, in and of itself that determines its effect on relationship health, but how skillfully one has learned to behave while experiencing that emotion. We propose that emotion skills, such as the ability to identify and differentiate emotions, the ability to effectively express emotions, the ability to empathize, and the ability to manage emotions in challenging situations, are essential to the development and maintenance of healthy marriages. Within the current study we will be looking at a subset of these skills, specifically the ability to effectively identify and communicate emotions.

A great deal of research has been conducted on the role of emotion in marriage. This work primarily occurs in three somewhat distinct areas. The first area studies the occurrence, valence and intensity of emotional responding in marriage and the corresponding effects on marital health (e.g., Gottman, 1994). Within this area it has consistently been found that distressed couples display more negative affect and more negative affect reciprocity than nondistressed couples (e.g., Gottman & Levenson, 1986). The second area studies the role of disordered emotions such as depression or anxiety in marital health. Within this area research has shown a robust association between depressive affect and marital distress (e.g., Beach, 2001). The third area studies the role of emotions in couple therapy. For example, both Integrative Couple Therapy (e.g., Christensen, Jacobson, & Babcock, 1995) and Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (e.g., Johnson & Greenberg, 1994), consider emotional evocation central to the proposed mechanism of therapeutic change. For example, Greenberg and Johnson (1986) have found that evoking emotion in couple therapy facilitates both intimacy and conflict resolution. To date, however, none of these areas of study have examined the role of emotion skills in marital health. Studying the occurrence and valence of emotions in marriage does not address whether partners can either identify or communicate those emotions and does not consider the likely impact on the relationship of being more or less skillful in that regard. The study of disordered emotions in marriage also fails to address the likely role that skillful identification and communication of emotion plays in fostering more or less healthy relationships. Finally, although some approaches to couple therapy teach skills in identifying and communicating emotions (e.g., Baucom & Epstein, 1990), they rest on the untested assumption that such skills both influence the processes contributing to marital health and vary naturally within the population. The study of emotion skills is not so much concerned with the occurrence of

emotions in and of themselves, but with the variety of ways that people have learned to “do” their emotions. For example, empathy is not itself an emotion, but is the skillful use of emotions to make inferences about the experiencing of others. Attending to and identifying emotions are not themselves emotions, but are instead skills applied within the experience of emotions that vary from individual to individual.

Constructs similar to emotion skills have been discussed before in the context of emotional intelligence (e.g., Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and emotion regulation (e.g., Garber & Dodge, 1991). To our knowledge, however, these constructs have not been explored in relation to marital health. The only study to specifically examine the association between emotional skillfulness and marital health occurred in the context of Gottman, Katz, and Hooven’s (1997) broader work on parental meta-emotion. In their study, they found some evidence that men’s and women’s awareness of their own sadness and anger was correlated with such indicators of marital health as marital satisfaction, we-ness, and fondness. The current study adds to Gottman, et al., (1997) by going beyond awareness of sadness and anger to examine partners’ general ability to identify emotions as well as their general ability to communicate those emotions effectively. Our contention is that emotion skills, such as the ability to identify emotions and the ability to express emotions are essential to the development and maintenance of healthy marriages. Further, we contend that emotional skillfulness affects marital health through its effect on the intimacy process.

The Intimacy Process

In order to provide a context for the above contention, we will briefly present the theory of intimacy informing this research. Cordova and Scott (2001) posit that intimacy is a process generated by events in which one person’s interpersonally vulnerable behavior is reinforced by

the response of another. This sequence is labeled an intimate event. Behavior is considered interpersonally vulnerable to the extent that it has been associated with punishment by others in the past (either directly or indirectly). All social behavior, therefore, falls on a continuum from not at all vulnerable (no history of punishment) to extremely vulnerable (punished consistently, severely, or threatened with such punishment). Each individual will acquire different vulnerabilities falling at various points along the continuum. For example, if one person has been consistently punished for expressing feelings and another has not, then feeling expression would be more vulnerable for the first than the second. Individuals with particularly punitive interpersonal histories likely enter new relationships less inclined to engage in interpersonally vulnerable behavior than those with less punitive histories.

When one person exposes vulnerable behavior and that exposure is reinforced by another person, then the probability of that behavior occurring again in relation to the person that reinforced it increases, generating the process of intimate partner formation (a process technically referred to as a gain in stimulus control). In other words, an intimate event changes the relationship between the two people such that the first person is more likely to engage in interpersonally vulnerable behavior in relation to the second person. For example, if Bill has been punished more than reinforced for expressing sadness, then expressing sadness is interpersonally vulnerable for him. If, however, a situation arises in which Bill cannot effectively suppress sadness in the presence of Sharon, and Sharon responds in a nonpunitive and supportive manner (assuming such a response is reinforcing), then Bill becomes more likely to express sadness specifically with Sharon in the future. Thus, when he is feeling sad, he may be more likely to seek out Sharon, playing the odds that that behavior will be reinforced again and continuing the process of intimate partner formation.

The process of intimate partnership formation also involves risk of punishment. The more open and vulnerable we make ourselves to others, the more likely that, on occasion, we will be hurt. Because intimate events increase the frequency of vulnerable behavior in relation to the other person, the probability that some of that behavior will result in either contingent or accidental punishment also increases. The punishment of interpersonally vulnerable behavior is called a suppressive event and, in theory, suppressive events are an integral part of all intimate partnerships. In short, intimate partnerships are uniquely emotionally challenging specifically because of the role that vulnerability plays in their formation and development over time.

Developing intimate partnerships are characterized by an accumulation of both intimate and suppressive events. Those partnerships that are richer in intimate than suppressive events should be perceived as emotionally safer. This developed sense of comfort-being-vulnerable, is posited to be the affective dimension of intimacy and is labeled intimate safety. Feelings of intimate safety span a continuum from feeling very safe to feeling very threatened depending on the ratio of intimate to suppressive events.

The main point of presenting this formulation of intimacy is to emphasize the inherently emotionally challenging nature of the intimacy process as it evolves over the course of an intimate partnership. Since, according to this formulation, all intimate partnership involve both events that build closeness, warmth and safety (intimate events) and events that are emotionally painful (suppressive events), intimate partnership should be particularly emotionally challenging. We propose that coping with these emotional challenges requires a degree of emotional skillfulness that allows one to respond to emotional hurts in ways that are not relationship destructive. Specifically, we propose that the ability to identify and communicate emotions allows a person to recognize emotional hurt from a perspective that facilitates responding to and

communicating that hurt in ways that facilitate intimacy rather than reacting to emotional hurt with either hostile retaliation or reactive withdrawal. In addition, we propose that these emotion skills further facilitate intimacy by providing the principal means for engaging in interpersonally vulnerable behavior and by facilitating a person's capacity to effectively reinforce the vulnerable behavior of others. Although a great deal of work has been done demonstrating the association between intimacy and satisfaction (e.g., Barnes & Sternberg, 1997), the likely role played by basic emotion skills in establishing and maintaining intimacy and relationship satisfaction has not been elaborated upon or tested. Therefore, in this paper we both elaborate upon the likely role played by emotion skills in the intimacy process and relationship satisfaction and provide an empirical test of that model. To our knowledge, this is both a novel formulation of the role of emotion skills in marriage and a novel test of that theory.

In this formulation, intimate events, suppressive events, intimate partner formation, and intimate safety are all facets of intimacy as a process. None of these facets alone adequately define intimacy, nor does intimacy alone define relationship satisfaction or love (see Sternberg, 1987). Note also that there are similarities between this conceptualization of intimacy and both L'Abate's discussion of the sharing of hurts (e.g., Cusinato & L'Abate, 1994), and Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna's (1985) conceptualization of interpersonal trust. The development of intimate safety is akin to the development of interpersonal trust (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985) in that it involves (1) predictably probable reinforcement of interpersonal vulnerability, (2) development of a relationship with the partner that feels dependable and safe, and (3) an increasing faith in the partner's positive responses. Our intimacy formulation, however, also emphasizes the integral nature of emotional hurt in intimate partnerships. As noted, this is particularly important within the current model in that is precisely this emotionally challenging

quality of genuine intimacy that we propose necessitates emotional skillfulness to navigate successfully toward relationship satisfaction.

Emotional Skillfulness, Marital Satisfaction and Intimacy

Broadly, our contention is that emotion skills such as the ability to identify and communicate emotions affect marital health through their more direct effect on the intimacy process. Specific to the current study, we contend that the skillful identification of emotions affects the intimacy process in several ways. First, we argue that the skillful identification of emotions facilitates a person's ability to effectively reinforce the vulnerable behavior of a partner because of its role in accurate empathy and the reading of social cues. Existing evidence suggests that a person's ability to report their own emotional experience is indeed associated with accurate empathic understanding (Alcorn & Torney, 1982). Second, we contend that the ability to identify emotions allows a person to recognize and communicate emotional hurt in more relationship healthy ways. Third, conceptually the ability to identify emotions precedes the skillful communication of emotions thus facilitating the intimacy process through that route (see below). Therefore, we hypothesize that the ability to identify emotions is associated with marital adjustment and that that relationship is mediated by intimate safety for both men and women. Further, we hypothesize that the ability to identify emotions is associated with partners' marital adjustment regardless of gender because of the theoretical role it plays in accurate empathy and thus the effective reinforcement of interpersonal vulnerability.

Further, we contend that the ability to effectively communicate emotions is one of the principal ways that partners behave vulnerably toward each other, and thus precipitate intimate events. Support for this supposition is provided by self-disclosure research. For example, there is evidence that disclosure of feelings is perceived as more revealing than behavioral disclosures

(Lazowski & Anderson, 1990), and that negative and more intense emotional disclosures (e.g., sadness) are perceived as more intimate than positive and less intense emotional disclosures (Howell & Conway, 1990). At the same time, not all emotional disclosures are equally likely to facilitate the intimacy process. For example, hostile negative disclosures such as contempt have been shown to be associated with marital deterioration, particularly in the absence of high rates of positive behavior (Gottman, 1994). The assumption, however, is that the ability to communicate emotions involves the communication of positive and nonhostile negative emotions more so than the communication of hostile negative emotions. Following from this, we hypothesize that the ability to communicate emotions should be significantly associated with marital adjustment and that that relationship should be mediated by intimate safety for both women and men.

Gender, Emotion Skills, and Intimacy

There is a good bit of evidence suggesting a gender difference in emotional expressiveness. For example, studies have found that women are more likely to express their anger, love, happiness, and sadness than men (e.g., Balswick & Avertt, 1977; Ross & Van Willigen, 1996). In addition, men have been found to score higher on measures of difficulty identifying and communicating emotions than women (e.g., Carpenter & Addis, 2000); and men with greater gender role conflict have been found to report greater fear of intimacy expression (Fischer & Good, 1997). Research has linked these gender differences in emotional expression to women's lower rates of cardiovascular disease and men's lower rates of depression (e.g., Brody, 2000). In fact, an argument has been proposed that male emotional socialization processes result in a form of alexithymia (difficulty identifying and communicating emotions in conjunction with an external orientation) that is actually normative for males (Levant, 2001).

In addition, it is likely that the effective communication of emotions is more important for the marital satisfaction of women partners than of men partners. To clarify, the current conceptualization of intimacy posits that one's ability to communicate emotions should play an important role in developing one's own sense of intimate safety and marital satisfaction for both men and women because communicating emotions often involves vulnerability. However, there is reason to speculate that men's communication of emotions is more important to women's marital satisfaction than women's communication of emotions is to men's marital satisfaction, because the exchange of emotional information is a more normative social process for women than for men (e.g., Dindia & Allan, 1992). In other words, men's intimate safety and marital satisfaction may rely on their being able to talk about their own emotions, but may not rely on their wives' ability to communicate their emotions because it may be a less common type of interaction for men historically. Following from this, we hypothesize that men's ability to communicate emotions will be associated with women's marital adjustment, but that women's ability to communicate emotions will not be associated with men's marital adjustment.

Given the breadth and variety of findings suggesting gender differences in emotional expressiveness, we will be examining wives' and husbands' data separately and will also test for the expected gender difference in emotional expressiveness (in this case, the ability to communicate emotions). Our decision to analyze husband and wife data separately results from our concern that collapsing across gender to analyze couples as the unit of analysis is likely to mask important differences in the patterning of results (given the existing literature documenting robust gender differences in emotional expressiveness). Additionally, given that wives and husbands are not statistically independent of each other, they cannot be included together in analyses that assume subjects are independent. Finally, repeated measures analyses of variance

are not applicable to the current data set since we are not concerned with mean differences between groups.

Methods

Participants

Participants were 79 married couples recruited by newspaper ad to participate in a relationship study. Husbands ranged in age from 19 to 78 years, with a mean age of 41.0 ($sd = 12.3$). Wives ranged in age from 20 to 72, with a mean age of 38.8 ($sd = 10.8$). Partners' marriages ranged in length from 3 months to 50 years, with a mean of 11.2 years ($sd = 10.8$). Number of children ranged from 0 to 6 with a mean of 1.7 ($sd = 1.2$). Median annual income was \$45,000 to \$60,000. The sample was 98% White. Years in school ranged from 8 to 26, with a mean of 16.3 ($sd = 3.1$).

Measures

Participants were mailed questionnaires that husbands and wives were instructed to complete separately. Participants returned their questionnaires by mail or in person if participating in in-lab assessments conducted as part of another study.

Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20; Bagby, Taylor, & Parker, 1994). Two subscales of the TAS were used to measure the emotional skills of interest. The Identification of Emotions subscale reflects difficulty identifying one's own emotions. Examples of items on this subscale are "I am often confused about what emotion I am feeling" and "I have feelings that I can't quite identify." Examination of the specific items comprising this subscale reveals that item content relates primarily to an individual's general sense of confusion about emotional experience and inability to differentiate between emotions. The Communication of Emotions subscale measures difficulty describing one's emotions. Examples from this subscale include "It is difficult for me

to find the right words for my feelings” and “I find it hard to describe how I feel about people.” Examination of the items comprising this subscale reveals that items pertain primarily to a general sense of discomfort discussing emotions and recognition of some pressure to be more disclosing. Participants indicate the degree to which they agree with each statement on a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree); higher scores reflecting greater difficulty. The TAS-20 has been found to have moderate test-retest reliability ($r = .75 - .82$) and internal consistency ($\alpha = .79$), and good convergent and discriminant validity (e.g., Taylor, Bagby, Ryan, & Parker, 1990).

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) is a 32-item, widely used measure of marital satisfaction. The DAS has been demonstrated to have acceptable psychometric properties as a global assessment device, including very good internal consistency ($\alpha = .96$) (Spanier, 1976; Spanier & Thompson, 1982).

The Intimate Safety Questionnaire (ISQ; Cordova, Warren, Gee, & McDonald, 2002). The ISQ is a 14-item self-report scale specifically designed to measure intimate safety across a range of relationship domains. Items include “When I am with my partner, I feel anxious, like I’m walking on eggshells,” “I feel like I have to watch what I do or say around my partner,” “I feel comfortable telling my partner things I would not tell anybody else,” and “I feel comfortable telling my partner my likes and dislikes while we are making love.” Respondents rate each statement on a 5-point scale from 0 (Never) to 4 (Always). Factor analyses support a single-factor interpretation of the ISQ. Internal reliability has been found to be adequate with alphas of .93 and .96 for men and women respectively and test-retest reliabilities of .83 and .92 for men and women respectively. On a sample of 60 married Midwestern couples, the ISQ has been found to be significantly correlated with the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships

Questionnaire (Schaefer & Olson, 1981), particularly with the Intellectual Intimacy subscale ($r_s = -.78$ and $-.73$ for women and men respectively) and the Emotional Intimacy subscale ($r_s = -.82$ and $.80$ for women and men respectively) suggesting that the ISQ and PAIR are measuring very similar constructs. In addition, the ISQ is significantly correlated with the Global Distress Scale of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder, 1979; $r_s = -.72$ and $-.68$ for women and men respectively), the Marital Status Inventory (Weiss & Cerreto, 1980; $r_s = -.54$ and $-.43$ for women and men respectively), and partners' attachment styles (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; $r_s = .42$ and $.43$ with secure attachment for women and men respectively). These results provide preliminary support for the ISQ's construct and criterion validity.

Results

Descriptive statistics of study variables are presented in Table 1. T-tests were conducted for gender differences on DAS, intimate safety, difficulty identifying emotions, and difficulty communicating emotions. Only one significant gender difference was found. As expected, men scored higher on difficulty communicating emotions ($t(159) = 4.81, p < .001$). Correlations between study variables and demographic variables were all nonsignificant, except for a negative correlation between wives' level of education and difficulty communicating emotions ($r(90) = -.27, p < .01$). Including level of education as a covariate did not substantively change the results of any of the following analyses. The remaining demographic variables were also included as covariates, including age, number of children, income, and years married. Including these variables as covariates did not substantively change the results of the following analyses.

Zero-order correlations are also presented in Table 1. In keeping with our hypotheses, both difficulty identifying emotions and difficulty communicating emotions were negatively correlated with dyadic adjustment for husbands and wives. Also difficulty identifying emotions

and difficulty communicating emotions were negatively correlated with feelings of intimate safety for both husbands and wives. Husbands' difficulty communicating emotions was negatively correlated with wives' dyadic adjustment, but wives' difficulty communicating emotions was not correlated with husbands' dyadic adjustment. For both husbands' and wives', difficulty identifying emotions was negatively correlated with their partners' dyadic adjustment.

In order to test our hypothesis that the relationship between emotion skills and marital adjustment would be mediated by intimate safety, we used Baron and Kenny's (1986) criteria for the conditions that must be met to test a mediation effect. First, variation in the mediator variable (intimate safety) must be significantly associated with variation in the independent variable (identification or communication of emotions). Second, variation in the mediator variable (intimate safety) must be significantly associated with variation in the dependent variable (marital adjustment). Finally, when regressing the dependent variable (marital adjustment) on both the independent variable (identification or communication of emotions) and the mediation variable (intimate safety), a previously significant association between the independent and dependent variable should no longer be significant. In this case, the bivariate intercorrelations between the mediator, dependent and independent variables demonstrate that the first two conditions were met.

Analyses revealed that both difficulty identifying and difficulty communicating emotions, when examined separately, are significantly associated with DAS for both women and men (see Table 1). However, when examined simultaneously via regression, difficulty identifying emotions was uniquely predictive of men's DAS, whereas difficulty communicating emotions was not uniquely predictive of men's DAS (see Table 2). For wives, neither difficulty identifying nor difficulty communicating emotions was uniquely predictive, indicating that each variable

essentially accounts for the same portion of variability in the DAS as the other (see Table 2).

Stepwise analyses revealed that of the two, difficulty identifying emotions was the better single predictor of DAS for both men and women ($\beta = -.41, p < .001$ and $\beta = -.30, p < .01$ respectively).

We therefore tested the mediation model using difficulty identifying emotions as the marker for emotional skillfulness in the identification and communication of emotions.

We conducted regression analyses with dyadic adjustment as the dependent variable, first entering difficulty identifying emotions alone as the independent variable and then adding intimate safety as the mediator for men and women separately. Difficulty identifying emotions was negatively predictive of dyadic adjustment for both men and women when entered alone. However, when the amount of variance attributable to intimate safety was considered, difficulty identifying emotions no longer predicted dyadic adjustment for either men or women. Thus, intimate safety fully mediated the relationship between difficulty identifying emotions and dyadic adjustment for both men and women (see Table 3).

Although of lesser predictive value than difficulty identifying emotions, the same analyses were conducted substituting difficulty communicating emotions for difficulty identifying emotions. Difficulty communicating emotions was negatively predictive of dyadic adjustment for both men and women. For women, when the amount of variance attributable to intimate safety was accounted for, difficulty communicating emotions no longer predicted dyadic adjustment. For men, both intimate safety and difficulty communicating emotions accounted for unique portions of the variance in dyadic adjustment. Thus, results indicated that intimate safety fully mediated the association between the ability to communicate emotions and dyadic adjustment for women and partially mediated that association for men (a 53% decrease in beta) (see Table 4). This might indicate that men that have more difficulty communicating their

emotions are less satisfied in their relationship not only because it diminishes their level of experienced intimacy, but also because it interferes with other important relationship processes such as, for example, effective instrumental problem-solving.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine our contention that those emotion skills characterized by the ability to identify and communicate emotions are essential to marital satisfaction specifically because of the role they play in the intimacy process. The results of this study are consistent with that contention.

We found that difficulty identifying emotions was negatively associated with partners' own marital adjustment and experience of intimate safety for both husbands and wives. Furthermore, we found that partners' intimate safety fully mediated the negative association between difficulty identifying emotions and marital adjustment. These results are consistent with our contention that the ability to skillfully identify one's own emotions facilitates the intimacy process, which in turn contributes to a well-adjusted marriage. However, the direction of effect implied by the model cannot be inferred from the data.

In theory, the skillful identification of emotions facilitates intimacy by contributing to a person's ability to effectively reinforce the interpersonal vulnerability of others because of the role that ability theoretically plays in empathy and reading of social cues. Alcorn and Torney (1982) have shown that a person's ability to accurately report their own emotional experience is associated with accurate empathic understanding. In addition, the skillful identification of emotions should facilitate a person's capacity to effectively engage in interpersonally vulnerable behavior by contributing to a person's ability to effectively communicate emotions. The communication of emotions, particularly intense emotions is perceived as very intimate (e.g.,

Howell & Conway, 1990). Finally, the skillful identification of emotions should contribute to a person's ability to recognize and communicate interpersonal hurt in relationship constructive ways.

We found that difficulty communicating emotions was negatively associated with marital adjustment and intimate safety for both husbands and wives. Furthermore, we found that partners' experience of intimate safety mediated the negative association between partners' difficulty communicating emotions and marital adjustment (fully mediated for wives and partially mediated for husbands). These results are consistent with our contention that the ability to skillfully communicate emotions contributes to the intimacy process that, in turn, contributes to overall marital adjustment (although the direction of effect implied by this model cannot be inferred from the data).

Finally, our results uncovered some interesting gender differences. First, we found that husbands reported more difficulty than wives communicating their emotions. This finding fits with a number of previous studies that have found that women engage in more emotion talk than men (e.g., Dindia & Allen). Second, we found that husbands' difficulty communicating their emotions was negatively associated with their wives' marital adjustment, but that wives' difficulty communicating their emotions was not associated with their husbands' marital adjustment. These results support our contention that the communication of emotions is a more important component of marital adjustment for women than for men.

Our speculation is that the skillful communication of emotions is a more common and expected means of behaving vulnerably for women than for men, because the communication of emotions is less vulnerable for women (it is punished less consistently). This conceptualization implies that the communication of emotions is a riskier behavior for men and thus less probable

means of initiating the intimacy process. This may account for the greater difficulty men report communicating their emotions, as well as the finding that men and women were not significantly different in their ability to identify emotions (because the identification of emotions is less available to the type of punishment that typically suppresses the communication of emotions in boys). It also may provide some explanation for the link between men's communication of emotions and their wives' marital adjustment, but the absence of the link between women's communication of emotions and their husbands' marital adjustment. For women, partners' communication of emotions may be more commonly associated with intimate events than they are for men.

Interestingly, men and women did not significantly differ in their levels of reported intimate safety in this study, suggesting that men develop equivalent feelings of intimate safety within their marriages, but that the vulnerable behavior that sets the stage for that process does not rely as heavily on the communication of emotions as it does for women. The question becomes, if men do not modally initiate intimate events through the communication of emotions, what is their modal means of initiating intimacy? In other words, what serves the equivalent role for men that is served by the communication of emotions for women? There is some speculation that sexual behavior may be a more common path to intimacy for men than women (e.g., Hatfield, Sprecher, Pillemer, Greenberg, & Wexler, 1988). There is also some evidence that men may place a high value on being able to relax and be oneself as factors in establishing intimacy (Wagner-Raphael, Seal, & Ehrhardt, 2001). However, this remains a question that is virtually unexplored in the literature and that may be essential to our understanding of the intimacy process in marriage.

In sum, the results of the current study are consistent with our contention that the emotion skills consisting of the ability to identify and communicate emotions affect the quality of a marriage because of the facilitative role they play in the intimacy process. The implication is that marital health depends to some degree on the level of intimacy that couples achieve as partners and that that level of intimacy relies on the emotion skills that partners bring with them to the relationship. An implication of these results is that therapeutic interventions designed to address intimacy problems in couples (e.g., Jacobson & Christensen, 1996; Johnson & Greenberg, 1994) may need to directly assess and address the emotional skillfulness of clients, because interventions designed to facilitate intimacy may not work with clients that have a skill deficit in either the identification or communication of emotions.

The current study is limited in its representation of ethnicity and socioeconomic status as well as in the range of potential emotion skills assessed. Future studies will need to address the generalizability of these findings to a more representatively diverse sample. Studies currently being conducted in our lab are assessing additional emotion skills such as empathy and emotional self-regulation with both self-report and observational measures. Further work also remains in the area of potential gender differences in emotional skillfulness and the modal initiation and maintenance of the intimacy process between genders. Work also remains to more effectively address the direction of effect. Finally, future research will have to address the possibility of intervening in emotional skill deficits as a means of addressing intimacy difficulties in couples.

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Table 1

Correlations Among, and Descriptive Statistics for, Emotion Skills, Marital Adjustment, Intimacy and Depressive Symptoms (n = 79)

<u>Scale</u>	<u>ID</u>	<u>COM</u>	<u>DAS</u>	<u>PDAS</u>	<u>ISQ</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Sd</u>
ID	---	.57***	-.41***	-.30**	-.41***	13.2	4.7
COM	.55***	---	-.39***	-.34**	-.33**	13.2	4.3
DAS	-.30**	-.27*	---	.71***	.77***	108.8	14.7
PDAS	-.26*	-.16	.71***	---	.56***	109.7	16.1
ISQ	-.40***	-.30**	.80***	.60***	---	3.0	0.6
Mean	12.9	10.2	109.7	108.8	3.0	----	----
SD	5.5	4.2	16.1	14.7	0.7	----	----

Note: Numbers above the diagonal refer to men and numbers below the diagonal refer to women.

ID = Identification of emotions. COM = Communication of emotions. DAS = Dyadic

Adjustment Scale. PDAS = Partner's Dyadic Adjustment Scale. ISQ = Intimate Safety

Questionnaire. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2 Summary of Regression Analyses Predicting Dyadic Adjustment From Difficulty Identifying and Difficulty Communicating Emotions (n = 79)

Variables	<u>Dyadic Adjustment Scale</u>			
	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>	<u>R²</u>
Men				
Identification of Emotions	-.82	.39	-.27*	
Communication of Emotions	-.79	.43	-.24	.20***
Women				
Identification of Emotions	-.66	.39	-.22	
Communication of Emotions	-.53	.47	-.14	.11**

Note: R² = Total R² for both Identification and Communication of Emotions. * p < .05. ** p <

.01. ***p < .001.

Table 3 Summary of Regression Analyses Testing Intimate Safety as a Mediator of the Association Between the Ability to Identify Emotions and Marital Adjustment (n = 79)

Variables	<u>Dyadic Adjustment Scale</u>			
	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>	<u>R²</u>
Men				
Step 1				
Identification of Emotions	-1.24	.32	-.41***	.16***
Step 2				
Identification of Emotions	-.36	.24	-.12	
Intimate Safety	18.45	2.02	.72***	.60***
Women				
Step 1				
Identification of Emotions	-.90	.32	-.30**	.09**
Step 2				
Identification of Emotions	-.18	.22	-.06	
Intimate Safety	20.33	1.90	.78***	.64***

Note: R² for Step 2 = cumulative R². * p < .05. ** p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 4 Summary of Regression Analyses Testing Intimate Safety as a Mediator of the Association Between the Ability to Communicate Emotions and Marital Adjustment (n = 79)

Variables	<u>Dyadic Adjustment Scale</u>			
	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>	<u>R²</u>
Men				
Step 1				
Communication of Emotions	-1.32	.35	-.39***	.15***
Step 2				
Communication of Emotions	-.61	.25	-.18*	
Intimate Safety	18.27	1.89	.72***	.62***
Women				
Step 1				
Communication of Emotions	-.99	.41	-.27*	.07*
Step 2				
Communication of Emotions	-.14	.30	-.04	
Intimate Safety	20.52	1.90	.79***	.63***

Note: R² for Step 2 = cumulative R². * p < .05. ** p < .01. ***p < .001.