

# Emotionships: Examining People's Emotion-Regulation Relationships and Their Consequences for Well-Being

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## Abstract

Is it better to have a few relationships that can fulfill all our emotion-regulation needs or to have a more diverse relationship portfolio, in which different individuals serve distinct emotion-regulation needs? The present research examined how people distribute their emotion-regulation needs across different emotion-specific regulation relationships (emotionships) and their consequences for well-being. Study 1 demonstrated the existence of emotionships by showing that individuals can name discrete relationships that they consider effective at regulating specific emotions (e.g., I turn to my sister to cheer me up when I'm sad) and that the accessibility and value of these relationships change as a function of manipulated emotional states. Studies 2a and 2b revealed that individuals who diversified their emotion-regulation needs across multiple specialized relationships (e.g., having distinct relationships for cheering up sadness vs. soothing anxiety) showed higher well-being than those with similar numbers of close relationships, but who concentrated their emotion-regulation needs in fewer, less specialized relationships.

## Keywords

emotion regulation, well-being, relationships, emotions, social networks

The ability to effectively regulate one's emotions is critical for well-being (Gross, 2007). Although most emotion-regulation research examines the individual cognitive and motivational resources that determine successful regulation, a growing literature encourages attention to interpersonal emotion-regulation resources, as emotion regulation most frequently takes place in social contexts (Coan, 2011; English, John, & Gross, 2013; Rimé, 2009). Of the research that has examined the use of social relationships for emotion regulation, most of this research focuses on the use of attachment figures (parents and romantic partners) to buffer stress when things go wrong (Cohen & Wills, 1985) and to capitalize on happiness when things go right (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). In the present research, we sought to expand the scope of interpersonal emotion-regulation resources beyond attachment figures to explore the arrangement and use of broader social networks for emotion regulation. Specifically, we were interested in the structure and utility of people's portfolios of emotion-regulating relationships termed *emotionships*.

## Emotionships: Key Premises

We define *emotionships* as the specific social relationships people expect to serve distinct emotion-regulation needs (e.g., who cheers up sadness vs. soothes anxiety). The current research presents the initial explorations of emotionships, examining two key premises concerning the role of broader

social networks in emotion regulation. First, we propose that individuals maintain knowledge about the emotion-regulation capacities of various individuals in their social networks and strategically (albeit largely nonconsciously) utilize specific relationships to optimize emotion regulation. Second, we assume that the structure of an individual's emotionship portfolios—specifically the extent to which they diversify their emotion-regulation needs across multiple specialized relationships (e.g., turning to one's sister for regulating anger, but to one's best friend for regulating sadness)—will influence the quality of their emotion regulation and thus the overall well-being.

Regarding the first premise, Fitzsimons and Shah (2008) demonstrated that people strategically drew closer to friends who are instrumental for specific goals (e.g., academic vs. fitness goals) when those goals were activated. The current work capitalizes on this finding to examine the potential existence and strategic utilization of relationships for optimal emotion regulation, rather than goal pursuit. Study 1 thus evoked

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specific emotions in participants (e.g., sadness, anger) to assess whether the relationship most effective at regulating that emotion (e.g., the individual effective at cheering up sadness vs. soothing anxiety) would come spontaneously to mind and increase in relational value, as compared to individuals who were effective at regulating emotional states that were not currently being experienced.

Regarding the second premise, although one's closest relationships can be particularly effective at providing security and comfort during times of distress (Bowlby, 1969; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007), concentrating *all* of one's emotion-regulation needs on these relationships may prove detrimental for well-being, as any single individual may not have the ability or the resources to meet the majority of one's emotion-regulation needs. Indeed, recent social support<sup>1</sup> research suggests that perceived-support availability is not related to the depth of one's support resources (the amount asked from each supporter) but instead seems to be grounded in the breadth of one's support resources (the number of supporters sought out), suggesting that a single relationship may be insufficient for experiencing high perceived support availability (Armstrong & Kammrath, in press).

Instead, diversifying one's emotion-regulation needs across multiple specialized relationships may be a better strategy for optimizing well-being. Research in the developmental literature suggests that diversification of social support needs begins in adolescence, with increasing reliance on peers (and decreasing reliance on parents) for support (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Whereas peer and parental support both independently contribute to well-being in adolescence, those who report having high levels of *both* peer and parental support experience the highest levels of well-being (Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2000; Laible, Carlo, & Raffaelli, 2000).

Furthermore, a diversification strategy can be particularly protective in instances when one's closest relationships are unavailable for providing regulation. For instance, maintaining a diverse support network seems to be protective when faced with the loss of a primary support provider. Specifically, women tend to suffer fewer health detriments than men after marital disruption (e.g., bereavement, divorce), potentially because women tend to maintain more diverse support networks than men, who typically rely on their spouses as their *only* confidant (see Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Moreover, maintaining a diverse support network seems to offer health-protective benefits in instances where one's closest relationships are the source of distress in themselves. For instance, spouses who report receiving satisfying support from their broader social networks tend to be buffered from the negative physiological consequences of daily marital conflict (Keneski, Loving, & Neff, 2013).

However, because social support encompasses many forms of assistance (e.g., monetary, informational, companionship, tangible, etc.), it is unclear what aspects of having diverse support networks lead to general well-being. The current work focuses on the benefits of having diverse *emotionship* networks specifically. By narrowing the scope of support to emotion

regulation, we are able to examine a previously unexplored explanation for why diverse support networks may promote well-being. Specifically, we posit that a diverse network can provide people with a broader pool of emotion-regulation resources to draw from, thereby allowing people to capitalize on others' strengths at providing regulation (specialization). As such, the utilization of specialized relationships may optimize the quality of emotion regulation received and thus, overall well-being. For instance, if one's spouse is particularly effective at cheering up sadness but ineffective at calming anger, an individual with a diverse set of emotionships can limit emotional reliance on that spouse when feeling sad and seek a more calming relationship when feeling angry. Such a strategy, which efficiently utilizes each individual's skill at regulating specific emotional needs, should result in better assistance with emotional regulation overall and thus, maximize well-being. Importantly, even controlling for the number of positive, close *relationships* individuals possess, a diverse portfolio of *emotionships* should be associated with greater well-being.

### Overview of the Present Research

In Study 1, we sought to demonstrate that people use specific relationships to fulfill distinct emotion-regulation needs (emotionships) and strategically draw closer to these relationship partners when the relevant emotion is experienced (Premise 1). In Studies 2a and 2b, we examined how people distribute their emotion-regulation needs across their social relationships and the consequences of different strategies (i.e., diversifying across multiple specialized relationships vs. concentrating on fewer emotionally deeper relationships) for well-being (Premise 2).

## Study 1

Prior research on interpersonal goal pursuit has found that people will draw psychologically closer to individuals who can help them achieve a currently active goal (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). We adapted the paradigm used by Fitzsimons and Shah (2008) to assess whether activating a specific emotion would lead participants to draw closer to individuals who are effective at regulating that emotion.

At an initial testing session, participants first completed emotionship nominations in which they nominated friends who were effective at regulating five different emotions. Several days later, participants took part in a follow-up survey in which we induced a specific emotion (anger, sadness, or anxiety), and then, in an ostensibly unrelated task, participants first listed five friends that came to mind, and also evaluated each of the friendships that they had listed in the initial session. We expected that when participants were experiencing a specific emotion (e.g., sadness), the friend listed as effective at regulating that emotion would increase in both accessibility and value as compared to friends who were effective at regulating the other, noninduced emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety).

## Method

### Participants

Participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk participated in two online studies for payment, that is, an initial emotionship nomination study and a follow-up emotionship evaluation study. Two hundred and fifty-four online participants (130 women;  $M_{\text{age}} = 33.25$ ,  $SD = 12.29$ ) took part in the initial study. Of the initial 254 participants, 210 indicated interest in completing the follow-up and 135 of these participants completed it. Although the sample of participants who completed the follow-up tended to be older, more educated, and wealthier than the sample of participants who did not complete the follow-up study (see supplemental analyses), the samples did not differ in terms of their emotionship nomination ratings (i.e., effectiveness of regulation, relationship length, and relationship satisfaction, all  $ps > .19$ ). Of the 135 participants who completed the follow-up survey, 22 participants were excluded from analyses for failing an attention check.

### Procedure

**Initial session: Emotionship nominations.** At the initial session, participants were presented with five emotional domains (cheering up sadness, calming down anxiety, calming down anger, capitalizing on happiness, and amplifying anger). For each domain, participants were asked to nominate one friend who would be effective at helping them regulate that emotion (effective emotionship) and one friend who would not be effective at helping them regulate that emotion (ineffective emotionship). For each friend listed, participants were asked to indicate the individual's first name, gender, relationship satisfaction with that individual, and his or her effectiveness at regulating that emotion (see supplemental materials).

Upon completion of the initial emotionships nomination session, participants indicated whether they would be interested in taking part in a follow-up study for additional compensation. Three days later, participants who had indicated interest in taking part in the follow-up study were contacted with the second survey link via e-mail. Participants were given 2 weeks to complete the follow-up study before the survey link expired.

**Follow-up session: Emotionship evaluations.** During the follow-up session, we induced specific emotions in participants (anger, sadness, or anxiety) and assessed whether participants drew closer to the friends they had initially nominated as effective within that domain.

**Emotion induction.** Participants first completed an emotional reliving task (e.g., Lerner & Keltner, 2001) in which they were randomly assigned to relive one of three emotional experiences (anger, sadness, or anxiety) involving family members. The reliving task was restricted to past experiences involving family members in order to minimize the chances that the friends who were nominated in the initial survey would be featured in these past experiences.

**Emotionship accessibility and relational value measures.** Upon completion of the emotional reliving task, we measured the

accessibility and value of all the friends that participants had listed in the initial session using procedures similar to those used in Fitzsimons and Shah (2008). To measure accessibility, participants were asked to list the first names of five friends in the order in which they came to mind. Accessibility scores reflect the order in which they were listed (i.e., an individual received a score of 1 if their name was listed in the first position, and so on with 5 indicating the person listed in the fifth position). Individuals who were listed at Time 1 but whose names were not present in the follow-up session list were assigned an accessibility score of 6.

Next, participants were presented with the first names of all the friends who they had nominated in the initial session. For each friend listed, participants indicated how much time (in hours) they would want to spend with that individual if they had a free day to spend with friends, how close they currently felt with that individual, and how satisfied they were with their relationship with that individual.

## Results and Discussion

### Analysis Plan

To examine whether participants experiencing a specific emotional state would both spontaneously think about and value the specific emotionships effective at regulating that emotion, we compared the ratings of the friend listed as effective at regulating the *induced* emotion with the average ratings of the friends listed as effective at regulating the other, noninduced emotions. For example, if they were in the cheer up sadness condition, we compared the friend who was listed as effective at cheering up sadness roughly 5 days prior, with the average ratings of friends who were listed as effective at calming down anxiety, calming down anger, capitalizing on happiness, and amplifying anger in that same initial session. If the target friend (effective at regulating the induced emotion) was listed as an effective friend in the other emotional domains, the scores for that person were excluded from the comparison group.<sup>2</sup>

### Accessibility

To determine whether friends who were effective at regulating the induced emotion were more spontaneously accessible than friends who were effective at regulating other emotions, we conducted a mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) on accessibility scores, with induced emotion (anger vs. sadness vs. anxiety) as the between-subject factor and emotionship-type (effectively regulates induced emotion vs. effectively regulates other emotions) as a within-subject factor. As expected, we found a main effect of emotionship type, such that friends were more accessible when they were effective at regulating the currently induced emotion ( $M = 3.21$ ,  $SD = 2.21$ ) than when they were effective at regulating other emotions ( $M = 4.04$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ),  $F(1, 107) = 10.14$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ . No main effect of induced emotion,  $F(2, 107) = .69$ ,  $p = .50$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ , nor emotionship type by induced emotion interaction,  $F(2, 107) = .10$ ,  $p = .91$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .002$ , emerged.

### Desired Amount of Time Spent

To determine whether participants wanted to spend more time with friends who were effective at regulating the induced emotion relative to friends who were effective at regulating other emotions, we conducted an identical mixed ANOVA on participants' responses for the desired amount of time spent with each emotionship. As expected, we found a main effect of emotionship type, such that participants reported wanting to spend more time with friends who were effective at regulating the currently induced emotion ( $M = 9.33$ ,  $SD = 7.74$ ) relative to friends who were effective at regulating other emotions ( $M = 6.48$ ,  $SD = 4.49$ ),  $F(1, 107) = 12.06$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .10$ . No main effect of induced emotion,  $F(2, 107) = 1.19$ ,  $p = .31$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ , nor emotionship type by induced emotion interaction,  $F(2, 107) = 0.21$ ,  $p = .81$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .004$ , emerged.

### Closeness

To determine whether participants felt closer to friends who were effective at regulating the induced emotion relative to friends who were effective at regulating other emotions, we conducted an identical mixed ANOVA on participants' closeness ratings. As expected, we found a main effect of emotionship type, such that participants reported feeling closer to friends who were effective at regulating the currently induced emotion ( $M = 7.48$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ) relative to friends who were effective at regulating other emotions ( $M = 6.47$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ),  $F(1, 107) = 20.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .16$ . No main effect of induced emotion,  $F(2, 107) = 0.10$ ,  $p = .90$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .002$ , nor emotionship type by induced emotion interaction,  $F(2, 107) = 0.50$ ,  $p = .61$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .009$ , emerged.

### Relationship Satisfaction

To determine whether participants reported greater relationship satisfaction with friends who were effective at regulating the induced emotion relative to friends who were effective at regulating other emotions, we conducted an identical mixed ANOVA on participants' relationship satisfaction ratings. As expected, we found a main effect of emotionship type, such that participants reported greater relationship satisfaction with friends who were effective at regulating the currently induced emotion ( $M = 7.71$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ) relative to friends who were effective at regulating other emotions ( $M = 6.62$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ),  $F(1, 107) = 26.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .20$ . No main effect of induced emotion,  $F(2, 107) = 0.36$ ,  $p = .70$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .007$ , nor emotionship type by induced emotion interaction,  $F(2, 107) = 0.27$ ,  $p = .76$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .005$ , emerged.

Taken together, the results of Study 1 demonstrated that people not only can identify relationships that fulfill specific emotion-regulation needs (emotionships) but that these emotionships are spontaneously activated and increase in value when the relevant emotion is experienced, supporting our first premise. To the extent that individuals maintain and utilize a set of specialized emotionships, it may have broader implications for well-being. Specifically, people who understand and strategically capitalize on the emotion-regulation strengths of individual members in

their social networks may potentially receive more optimal emotion regulation across time, leading to higher well-being. Our assessment of participants' emotionship nominations was limited in Study 1, in that participants were only allowed to nominate one emotionship per emotion-regulation domain, and we limited nominations to participants' friends (excluding family relationships). In the remaining studies, we examine participants' broader emotionship portfolios as well as explore how different structural features of those portfolios predict well-being.

### Studies 2a and 2b

Studies 2a and 2b assessed the structure of participants' emotionship portfolios as well as the overall quality of their relationships, in order to isolate the potentially unique contribution of emotionship portfolio structure on well-being. We hypothesized that having a diverse emotionship portfolio (consisting of multiple specialized relationships across a broad range of emotions) should contribute to well-being, even controlling for the effects of having multiple high-quality relationships.

Study 2a focused upon the role of emotionship portfolio structure on well-being, whereas Study 2b served as a replication with a larger sample, and an extension by examining associations between emotionship portfolio structure and the following individual difference variables: self-monitoring, attachment style, and extraversion. Because high self-monitoring has been linked with the tendency to construct compartmentalized social worlds (Snyder, Gangestad, & Simpson, 1983), we expected self-monitoring to be positively associated with the proportion of participants' emotionships that are specialized. Whereas attachment avoidance has been linked with discomfort relying on others when distressed, both attachment anxiety and extraversion have been linked with increased reliance on others for support (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007; Swickert, Rosentreter, Hittner, & Mushrush, 2002). Thus, we expected that the size and breadth of participants' emotionship portfolios would be negatively associated with attachment avoidance and positively associated with attachment anxiety and extraversion. Importantly, we also expected that having a diverse emotionship portfolio would be associated with greater well-being in both studies, controlling for the number of high-quality close relationships in Studies 2a and 2b as well as controlling for potentially relevant individual differences in Studies 2b.

### Method

#### Participants

Ninety-six participants (59 women;  $M_{age} = 37.04$ ,  $SD = 13.17$ ) in Study 2a and 221 online participants (128 women and 93 men;  $M_{age} = 35.36$ ,  $SD = 13.16$ ) in Study 2b were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk to participate in an online study for payment. Twenty-nine participants in Study 2a and 43 participants in Study 2b were excluded from the analyses for failing attention checks.

**Table 1.** Studies 2a and 2b: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Well-Being.

Variable	Study 2a		Study 2b	
	Step 1 $\beta$	Step 2 $\beta$	Step 1 $\beta$	Step 2 $\beta$
Loneliness	-.37**	-.39**	-.47***	-.44***
Average relationship quality	.32**	.41**	.21**	.27***
Breadth of emotional domains	—	.24*	—	.16*
Average number of emotionships per domain	—	-.04	—	.07
Proportion of specialized emotionships	—	.26*	—	.18*
$R^2$	.33	.43	.32	.36
$\Delta R^2$	.33***	.10*	.32***	.04*

Note. Values beneath the heading " $\beta$ " indicate the standardized  $\beta$ s.

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

### Procedure and Materials

Participants completed an emotionship nomination measure (adapted from Hazan and Zeifman's, 1994, WHOTO attachment nomination measure in which participants nominate individuals they seek out for different attachment functions). In the present study, we modified the WHOTO to assess the individuals people seek out to serve different emotion-regulation functions. Participants nominated up to four people (emotionships) they would seek to help them regulate specific emotions across seven emotional domains (i.e., cheering up sadness, calming down anger, calming down anxiety, capitalizing happiness, amplifying anger, reducing guilt, and reducing embarrassment). For each emotionship listed, participants reported the individual's first name and gender, the length of their relationship with the participant, the individual's effectiveness at regulating that emotion, and 3 items assessing the quality of their relationship with that individual (i.e., liking, closeness, and relationship satisfaction). All participants also completed measures of loneliness (3-item Loneliness Scale; Hughes, Waite, Hawkey, & Cacioppo, 2004,  $\alpha$ s = .90 & .84) and well-being (Satisfaction with Life Scale; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffen, 1985,  $\alpha$ s = .93 & .93). Participants in Study 2b additionally completed a series of individual difference measures assessing self-monitoring (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986;  $\alpha$  = .81), extraversion (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003;  $\alpha$  = .74), and global attachment style. Attachment style was assessed using the Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationship Structures Questionnaire which assesses the following two attachment dimensions: attachment avoidance and anxiety (ECR-RS; Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011;  $\alpha$ s = .83 and .91 respectively). In Study 2a, participants completed the WHOTO before the well-being and loneliness measures, in Study 2b the order of the measures was reversed.

## Results and Discussion

### Emotionship Portfolio Characteristics

We calculated the following three indices to assess the structure of participants' emotionship portfolios: (a) the breadth of participants' emotionship portfolio (the number of emotional

domains in which participants listed at least one emotionship), (b) the average number of emotionships participants had per emotional domain, and (c) the proportion of emotionships that were specialized (the proportion of individuals in participants' emotionship portfolio that solely served one emotion-regulation function). We also calculated the average relationship length and the average effectiveness scores across the emotionships listed. Next, we calculated a relationship quality score for each emotionship listed by aggregating the items for liking, closeness, and relationship satisfaction ( $\alpha$ s = .89 & .91). Lastly, we created an index of general relationship quality for each participant by aggregating relationship quality ratings across all emotionships listed. We used this as a proxy for the average quality of participants' close relationships across their social network. See supplemental analyses for descriptive statistics.

### Well-Being

To examine the consequences of participants' emotionship portfolios for individual well-being, we conducted a hierarchical regression with well-being as a dependent variable. To control for the robust effects of having positive close relationships for well-being (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995), we entered loneliness and average network relationship quality in the first step of the model. In the second step, we entered three variables representing the structure of participants' emotionship portfolios (i.e., breadth of emotional domains, average number of emotionships per domain, and proportion of specialized emotionships). All independent variables were mean centered for the analyses.

As would be expected, given the robust effect of close relationships on well-being, the initial regression step examining the effects of loneliness and relationship quality accounted for 33% of the variance in well-being in Study 2a and 32% of the variance in Study 2b. More important for the present hypotheses, entering the variables representing the structure of participants' emotionship portfolios in the second step increased the overall  $R^2$  of the equation to .43, accounting for an additional 10% of the variance in well-being in Study 2a, and increased the overall  $R^2$  of the equation to .36, accounting for

an additional 4% of the variance in well-being in Study 2b. Specifically, the characteristics related to having a diverse emotionship portfolio—the proportion of specialized emotionships (Study 2a  $\beta = .26, p = .02$ ; Study 2b  $\beta = .18, p = .01$ ) and the breadth of emotional domains (Study 2a  $\beta = .24, p = .02$ ; Study 2b  $\beta = .16, p = .01$ )—were both statistically significant in predicting well-being over and above the effects of having high-quality close relationships alone (see Table 1).

### Individual Differences

As one goal of Study 2b was to explore whether the effects of emotionship portfolio structure on well-being were distinct from related individual difference variables, we also examined the associations between the structural features of participants' emotionship portfolios and our individual difference variables of interest (i.e., self-monitoring, attachment, and extraversion).

As expected, we found a positive association between the proportion of specialized emotionships in participants' portfolios and self-monitoring, though this association was only marginally significant ( $r = .13, p = .075$ ). Also as expected, we found that breadth of emotional domains was positively associated with extraversion ( $r = .25, p = .001$ ) and negatively associated with attachment avoidance ( $r = -.21, p = .005$ ). Lastly, the average number of emotionships participants had per domain was positively associated with both extraversion ( $r = .21, p = .005$ ) and self-monitoring ( $r = .21, p = .005$ ), and negatively associated with attachment avoidance ( $r = -.18, p = .015$ ). See supplemental analyses for the full correlation table.

Given that self-monitoring, attachment avoidance, and extraversion were associated with the structural features of participants' emotionship portfolios, we conducted three separate hierarchical regressions examining whether the effect of having a diverse emotionship portfolio on well-being remained significant when controlling for self-monitoring, attachment avoidance, and extraversion, respectively. The characteristics related to having a diverse emotionship portfolio—the proportion of specialized emotionships and the breadth of emotional domains—remained statistically significant in predicting well-being even when controlling for self-monitoring ( $\beta_{\text{specialized}} = .19, p = .009$  and  $\beta_{\text{breadth}} = .16, p = .01, R^2 = .37, \Delta R = .04, p = .011$ ), attachment avoidance ( $\beta_{\text{specialized}} = .16, p = .02$  and  $\beta_{\text{breadth}} = .13, p = .046, R^2 = .38, \Delta R = .03, p = .059$ ), and extraversion ( $\beta_{\text{specialized}} = .16, p = .02$  and  $\beta_{\text{breadth}} = .14, p = .04, R^2 = .37, \Delta R = .03, p = .05$ ).

Taken together, our findings from Studies 2a and 2b suggest that having a diverse portfolio of emotionships are associated with greater well-being. Moreover, the boost to well-being supported by this type of emotion-regulation network emerges over and above the known benefits of having multiple positive close relationships and appears distinct from potentially related individual difference variables

### General Discussion

The present investigation examined how people utilize their broader social networks for emotion regulation and tested the benefits of diversifying emotion-regulation needs across multiple specialized relationships. Study 1 demonstrated that people appear to easily list distinct relationships that they turn to for fulfilling specific emotion-regulation needs (emotionships) and, more importantly, that these relationships increase in accessibility and value when the relevant emotion is experienced. Studies 2a and 2b demonstrated that having a diverse emotionship portfolio is associated with enhanced well-being, even controlling for the effects of having multiple high-quality relationships.<sup>3</sup>

The positive influence of having a diverse emotionship portfolio on well-being may seem surprising, given the robust literature highlighting the importance of attachment figures for emotion regulation (Bowlby, 1969; Shaver & Mikulincer, 2007). However, by expanding the scope of interpersonal emotion-regulation resources to include the use of people's broader social networks *in addition* to their attachment figures, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of how we can optimally arrange and utilize our social networks to promote well-being.

These results are especially important in light of recent societal trends suggesting that contemporary Americans are increasingly relying on their spouses (and decreasingly relying on their broader social networks) to fulfill their higher level needs (Finkel, Hui, Carswell, & Larson, 2014). Furthermore, these results may also help illuminate the beneficial effects of network diversity on well-being more generally (Cohen & Janicki-Deverts, 2009). Specifically, the present research suggests that one potential explanation for why network diversity appears beneficial for well-being is that a diverse network can optimize the quality of emotion regulation received by providing individuals with a broader pool of emotion-regulation resources to draw from.

One limitation of the present research was that we relied on an emotional reliving task in Study 1, which may have offered less experimental control than other emotion-induction procedures (e.g., film clips). We posited that the personal nature of reliving actual past emotional experiences creates conditions most similar to those faced in daily life that might lead people to seek out specific emotionship partners. Nevertheless, future research would benefit from examining these processes using different emotion-induction procedures.

Another limitation of Study 1 was that participants' emotionship nominations were restricted to friends. This restriction arose from wanting to avoid overlap with the reliving task, which concerned past experiences involving family. It is thus possible that the shifting relationship value effects may be limited to friends. However, because Studies 2a and 2b used a more comprehensive emotionship nomination measure adapted from an established measure of attachment (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994) that allowed participants to freely nominate any type of relationship (e.g., romantic partner, family) that they turned to

for emotion regulation, we are confident the well-being effects hold across a variety of relationship types.

In the present research, we theorized that having a diverse emotionship portfolio promotes well-being by allowing people to capitalize on others' strengths at providing regulation (specialization), thereby optimizing the quality of emotion regulation received. However, in the present studies, we did not examine the effects of having a diverse emotionship portfolio on emotion regulation directly. Thus, it remains an open question why having a diverse emotionship portfolio promotes well-being. Future research should employ experimental or prospective methodologies to clarify whether enhanced emotion regulation is indeed the mechanism underlying the relationship between emotionship portfolio structure and well-being. Furthermore, future research should examine the consequences of emotionship portfolio structure on physical health outcomes more generally.

Additionally, in the present studies, we asked participants to nominate individuals they would explicitly *seek out* for regulation rather than having participants nominate all the individuals who actually *provide* regulation in their daily lives (e.g., individuals who may be convenient, but not necessarily effective, providers of regulation). Future research should employ daily diary or experience sampling methodologies to examine the consequences of receiving regulation from emotionships versus other network members for emotional recovery.

Lastly, the present research primarily focused on the consequences of maintaining a diverse versus concentrated emotionship portfolio for *individual* well-being. Although we found that a diversification strategy offered benefits for promoting individual well-being, perhaps there may be differential benefits of a concentration strategy in terms of promoting *relationship* well-being. Future research should explore whether there may be potential relationship-deepening benefits of a concentrated emotionship portfolio.

## Conclusion

The emotion-regulation arsenal appears to include specialized relationships (emotionships) in addition to individual strategies. People readily reported using specific relationships for regulating distinct types of emotion and navigated their social networks in a way that optimized emotion regulation. Furthermore, those who maintained a diverse emotionship portfolio experienced greater well-being. Taken together, these findings suggest that the examination of social relationships for emotion regulation may be useful in enriching our understanding of when and how emotion regulation is most successful.

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## Notes

1. Although the construct of emotionships is related to social support, we consider emotionships to be distinct. Social support encompasses many forms of assistance (e.g., monetary, informational, emotional, etc.), whereas emotionships are limited to emotion regulation. Moreover, social support research tends to focus on stressful life events (e.g., job loss, chronic illness, transitioning to college), whereas our conceptualization of emotionships extends beyond the domain of stress to explore multiple discrete emotional domains (e.g., capitalizing happiness, amplifying anger, reducing guilt).
2. We did not find any main effects or moderation by gender. See supplemental analyses.
3. Diversity of portfolio structure in Study 1 also was significantly, though more weakly, associated with well-being, despite impoverished structural diversity measures (Study 1 assessed only one emotionship per emotion and limited emotionships to friends only). See supplemental analyses.

## Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at <http://spps.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

## References

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