Mitigation in Women’s Narratives about Met and Unmet Needs in Romantic Relationships
Melissa Zieleni, Jamie DiOrio, and Candice Feiring, Ph.D.
The College of New Jersey

Introduction
• Assessing linguistic markers is one means to examine the emotion regulation during narratives about specific relationship events.
• Mitigation is used to minimize, attenuate and control for uncomfortable emotions that surface during story-telling.
• Mitigation during narratives about romantic relationships may allow the story teller to avoid processing negative emotions.
• Rejection sensitivity refers to people who anxiously expect, readily perceive, and overreact to rejection. Rejection sensitive individuals tend to engage in behaviors aimed at avoiding rejection in their relationships (e.g., self-silencing or the tendency to soften negative situations).

Purpose
1. Create a coding system for mitigation in romantic narratives.
2. Determine if mitigation is more frequent when women talk about unmet compared to met needs.
3. Explore whether mitigation is related to the presence of negative emotions.
4. Explore if rejection sensitivity, relationship satisfaction and verbal aggression are related to higher levels of mitigation.

Method
Sample: 42 female participants (mean age = 19.07 years)
• 64% Caucasian, 98% heterosexual
• Mean relationship length of 20.5 months, ranged from 3-60 months

Semi-structured Interview
• Main prompt: Can you give me an example of a time when your partner met/did not meet your needs
• Follow up prompts: (1) Can you walk me through what happened?, (2) How did you feel?, (3) Did you have any other reactions?, and (4) How did your partner feel?
• Script repeated (attained 2 examples of met needs, 2 examples of unmet needs)

Emotions in Narratives and Rating Scale
• Assessed in regard to needs not met only
• Presence of negative emotion words in narrative
• Rated hard, soft, and flat emotions (CERF)

Questionnaire Packet
• Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ)
• Relationship satisfaction (O-RI; Revised)
• Verbal aggression (CIRQ)

Narrative Coding
Coding Mitigation
5 categories of markers:
• Displays of casual ignorance
  • “I don’t know,” “I don’t really remember”
• Systematic vagueness
  • “Maybe,” “I guess,” “Doing something”
• Response cries
  • “Ahhhh,” “Ooohaaaahh”
• Normalizing
  • “You know,” “Most guys get angry about it”
• Retracting statements
  • “I was a little annoyed, but not annoyed”
• Number of markers was summed to create two total scores (needs met and needs unmet)

Coding Negative Emotion Words
3 categories of emotion words
• Hard – feelings of anger, emotions associated with asserting power and control
  • Pissed off, jealous, heated
• Soft – feelings of sadness, hurt, emotions associated with vulnerability
  • Troubled, worried, let down
• General Negativity – negative emotions that do not fit into the hard or soft category
  • Pressured, ashamed, misunderstood
  • Coded only during needs not met examples
  • Number of words in each category were summed to create three total scores

Example of mitigation in a passage:
“I think he felt bad and a little out of his element because like the relationship was new and, he, I guess didn’t. I mean for me anyway honesty is always the best policy and I don’t think he had quite grasped the concept at that time so he was just like…felt like a little ashamed that he had been caught, so I mean he is not a liar by any means, but it was just he didn’t know how to handle the situation so I guess he felt…a little dumb for having done it so.”

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Mitigation and Number of Lines in Met and Unmet Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mitigation in met</td>
<td>28.86</td>
<td>18.94</td>
<td>4.86</td>
<td>27.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitigation in unmet</td>
<td>36.52</td>
<td>22.55</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>34.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines in met</td>
<td>58.71</td>
<td>29.49</td>
<td>22.133</td>
<td>50.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines in unmet</td>
<td>71.31</td>
<td>33.46</td>
<td>19.167</td>
<td>66.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Means (and SD) for Emotion Ratings and Emotion Words Used In Unmet Portion of Interview By Mitigation Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Emotion Words</th>
<th>Emotion Rating Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results
Reliability for mitigation and emotion coding:
• Mitigation – Excellent
• Relative agreement 1.0 for met and 0.86 for unmet needs
• Absolute agreement 98% for met and 99% for unmet needs
• Negative emotions – Very good
• Hard r=−.97, 82% absolute agreement
• Soft r=−.99, 96% absolute agreement
• General negative – r=−.87, 72% absolute agreement

Mitigation during met and unmet needs (see Table 1)
• There was greater frequency of mitigation in the unmet compared to the met section of the interview (paired t-test (|41|=3.39).
• There was a greater number of lines spoken in the unmet compared to the met portion of the interview (|41|=3.09).
• Chose to control for number of lines in remaining analyses.

Mitigation, Negative Emotions, Rejection Sensitivity, Relationship Satisfaction & Aggression (See Table 2 & 3)
• Median splits to create high and low mitigation groups.
• High (top 33%) mitigation was >35 markers during the met and >50 markers during the unmet section.
• No significant differences by mitigation groups.

Suggestive Patterns:
• High Mitigation unmet needs more anger words and sad words
• But reverse was true for hard and soft ratings of emotions.
• High Mitigation unmet needs more rejection sensitive, less satisfaction, more verbal aggression

Acknowledgement:
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