The Role of
Self-Esteem, Emotional Intelligence, and Communication in Relationship Satisfaction

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Faculty of the Adler Graduate School

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree of Master of Arts in

Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

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December 2012
Abstract

The purpose of this master’s thesis is to provide support of the model \( E=mc^2 \): Self-Esteem + Emotional Intelligence + Communication = Relationship Satisfaction, a 4 stage model for long-term relationship satisfaction. There are four major concepts being integrated in this research; self-esteem, emotional intelligence, communication, and relationships. All of these concepts exist on a continuum of healthy to unhealthy. The focus of these concepts for the purpose of this research is on the healthy side of the continuum. Together self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and communication create a cycle that has the potential to create and maintain relationships on the continuum of healthy to unhealthy.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the following people for their incessant support of my endeavors to bestow knowledge upon myself and others. My mother, Brenda, and my sister, Tifanie, have been my superheroes through this journey we call life. Their love and encouragement forced me into a better a world in so many ways; emotionally, mentally, financially, physically. However, my family is where my roots will always remain. They have given and continue to provide me with the wings I need to grow. Without their belief in me and their pride in my accomplishments, I would not have the energy for this journey. My mother reminded me of her love and belief in me many times over the past two years on her almost weekly 60 mile journeys to my house to let my beloved thirteen-year-old Labrador, Muzzo, out to get some exercise and a potty break. The blessing of my beloved Labrador is that Muzzo has taught me the true meaning of unconditional love. The children in my life, Jamisen (my one and only nephew), Jennesa (my adored god-daughter), Isaac, Quintin, Aubreyana, and many others, drive me to want to create a better world. They are the inspiration I have needed for the passage through my academic career. Through this passage, I have learned to stand like a rock for what I believe. The inspiration that fuels me has taught me the need for personal strength. Strength I learned from my steadfast, root-holding, stubborn, but treasured grandmothers, Josephine and Merrily. My sounding board doubles as my playground for observations and experiments. For listening to and playing along with it all, Adam, Ronnie, Travis, Katie, Crystal, Tara, Kelsey, those I forgot and those mentioned above, I thank you ☺. And last, but first in the hearts of many, and his forever grateful daughter, thanks are due to my father, my angel, Michael. He was the true life John Travolta version of Michael, the walking, talking, smoking, drinking, good timin’ angel! May his never-ending pride and love for me follow me all the days of my life. The opening of
master’s project is dedicated solely to my beloved father; *when I needed you, I was truly the master at getting what I wanted!* My master’s project is dedicated to you all.
# Relationship Satisfaction

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Preface

My interest in healthy and satisfying relationships stems from my roots where a dysfunctional home transitioned to a broken home. Healthy relationships did not exist in this home. It is impossible for humans to exist without being in relationships with others, because humans are social creatures by nature. Through my training in the field of psychology, as well as my personal experiences, I have learned healthy relationships require arduous efforts. When relationships demise themselves, humans tend to place blame upon all things but themselves. The blame game becomes the fuel of unhealthy relationships, and proves to be a difficult pattern to break.

The abundance of research on relationships is growing, especially since the emergence of the field of Marital and Family Therapy. We know some relationships work and other do not. We know some relationships are able to maintain themselves even if they are unhealthy. We know that relationships exist on a continuum of healthy to unhealthy and have the potential to fluctuate in dysregulation. We know relationships are influenced by our feelings, thoughts, and actions. We know our feelings are regulated by our self-esteem. We know our feelings effect our thoughts and actions. We know our feelings and thoughts propel us into action, and part of our actions is communicating with others.

Unfortunately, we also know that relationships fall apart every day. Some of those relationships have the wherewithal to be repaired while others do not. My hope is that this model will provide a perspective for therapists and mental health providers to gain greater awareness and understanding for the effects of self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and communication on relationship satisfaction. With greater awareness and understanding, I hope
therapists and mental health providers will have enhanced insight for working with dysregulated relationships.
Model Abstract

The model was created to visually represent the connection between the concepts and components of self-esteem, emotional intelligence, communication, and relationships. It includes the basics of feeling, thinking, and acting and the way they equate to self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and communication respectively. The model utilizes John Gottman’s four horsemen to portray the steps in the demise of communication. The model also equates the four horseman of Gottman’s theory to the concepts of self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and communication. It is at these levels of the process that an individual follows the path of least resistance and cycles through the line of dysregulation to propel into unhealthy relationship territory or chooses to retrace the trajectory and return to the realm of health. The continuum of the relationship from healthy to unhealthy is the base point for the model. As an individual propels through the stages, they travel the line of dysregulation until the relationship becomes unhealthy. This often leads to relationships stuck in a vicious cycle of unhappiness. The model is meant to provide a visual representation for therapists and mental health providers to educate individuals of their role within the context of a relationship.

The model utilizes the concept of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy’s thought, feeling, and action cycle. The cycle is included in Appendix E for reference.
Presentation of the Model

E=MC^2: SE + EI + C = RS
A 4 stage model for long-term healthy relationships:

- Relationship Satisfaction
- Self-esteem + Emotional Intelligence + Communication

EMEC2:
The Role of Self-Esteem, Emotional Intelligence, and Communication in Relationship Satisfaction

Is it an ‘obvious conclusion that if partners’ needs and goals diverge it is time for a parting of the ways? In the ‘real world’ it is not always this simple. For one thing, there are needs and then there are needs. And as the rolling stones say, ‘you can’t always get what you want…but you can get what you need.’ Thus, what I may need in order to feel good, may not be what I need in order to develop. On the other hand, doing what “feels good” may be exactly what I need for my development. It all depends on what I am, where I have been, and where I am going. And since each individual’s journey is unique, no two people ever travel at exactly the same rate in exactly the same direction.

(Campbell, 1980, p. 141)

At the core of relationships is communication, but what influences the communication? Communication, whether it is verbal or nonverbal, is the factor that allows individuals to be in relation with others. Communication is formulated through a person’s reaction to their feelings and is the action a person takes to either protect or promote their feelings. Because communication is an action and a choice, people are able to control the responses they communicate to others. Individuals may choose to use their communication to foster either feelings of rejecting or feelings of accepting in the other (Park & Crocker, 2007). However, feelings propel individuals to react with actions which may potentially result in unhealthy communication.

Ultimately, these are the only two things that are within the realm of control by the individual, behaviors and feelings. Thus self-esteem and emotional intelligence filter the way individuals chose to communicate with each other, and in due course, the communication affects
the health of relationships either positively or negatively. Melanie Booth-Butterfield (2002) provides a representation of this filter:

Self-esteem entails the positive or negative evaluation we have of ourselves. Thus it is the evaluative component that rates our personal characteristics. Think of your self-esteem as a protective glass shield around your core, inner self. All message that are communicated to others must also pass through the protective glass shield. The better your self-esteem, the higher the quality of the glass shield. If this glass is high quality, the messages will pass through the shield with greater clarity and accuracy. You will be able to clearly communicate messages, confident that your encoding will remain pure and not be distorted as it passes through the glass. In addition, the clear glass shield gives you an accurate perception of those who are sending you messages and the intent they are trying to communicate (p. 14).

As humans are social creatures, satisfying relationships are crucial to our survival. Brown (2008) informs, “in satisfying relationships, we are relaxed, happy, and more able to think clearly and be aware of those around us…we are empowered to become aware of our thoughts, actions, and motivations in satisfying relationships.” Satisfying, healthy relationships promote healthy self-esteem and emotional intelligence, thus producing satisfying, healthy, relationships that promote healthy communication. The overarching goal of this thesis is to illuminate the implications of the relationship between self-esteem, emotional intelligence, communication, and, which ultimately affect the satisfaction and health of relationships. To this end, the remainder of this introduction is structured into three sections; self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and communication and the way these concepts integrate with each other to produce relationships on the continuum of healthy to unhealthy.
Self-Esteem

Schiraldi (2001) defines self-esteem as “a realistic, appreciative opinion of oneself” found on a continuum between “self-defeating shame and self-defeating pride.” Both ends of the continuum produce low self-esteem. It is in the balanced middle of the continuum healthy and high self-esteem is found. Sanakteken and Sunar (2008) assert the balanced middle is found when, “the high self-esteem individual is conceptualized as the person who sees relatively little discrepancy between his/her ideal and real selves, whereas the individual who perceives a great discrepancy is expected to have low self-esteem.” One of the first steps towards unbalancing one’s self-esteem is receiving criticism from others. Individuals with low self-esteem are especially susceptible to criticism because they “believe that most people are more competent than they themselves are” (Sanakteken & Sunar, 2008). However, the reaction that unbalances self-esteem may occur on the shame end of the continuum or on the pride end of the continuum. It is when the self-esteem is at the extremes of shamed based or pride based that patterns of dysfunction develop, because self-esteem “is associated with exaggerated sensitivity and a tendency to overreact to rejection or negative feedback from others” (Goncu & Sumer, 2011). When self-esteem produces a pattern of dysfunctional behavior, self-esteem gains the power to initiate the blame game amongst relationships. The blame game becomes triggered by threats to the self-esteem, and escalates as the threats to self-esteem escalate. Goncu & Sumer (2011) support this notion by reporting “that individuals with unstable self-esteem are likely to blame others and attribute responsibility for the negative behaviors to the other party.” The blame game results in irresolvable low self-esteem and creates a repeating pattern within the cycle of dysregulation.
The pattern of the blame game produces more destructive patterns over time as self-esteem diminishes and Gottman’s four horsemen take control of the relationship. Gottman’s four horsemen are a pattern that destructs the integrity and heart of relationships. The four horsemen produced momentum as a relationship escalates through the pattern of criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. Gottman and Silver (1999) outline the four horsemen as follows:

1. **Criticism**: You will always have some complaints about the person with whom you live. But there’s a world of difference between a complaint and criticism. A complaint only addresses the specific action at which your spouse failed. A criticism is more global—it adds on some negative words about your mate’s character or personality. The problem with criticism is that when it becomes pervasive, it paves the way for the other, far deadlier horsemen.

2. **Contempt**: Sarcasm, cynicism, name calling, eye rolling, sneering, mockery, and hostile humor are all types of contempt. In whatever form, contempt—the worst of the four horsemen—is poisonous to a relationship because it conveys disgust. It is virtually impossible to resolve a problem when your partner is getting the message you are disgusted with him or her. Contempt is fueled by long-simmering negative thoughts about the partner. These thoughts are likely to grow if differences remained unresolved.

3. **Defensiveness**: Defensiveness is a way of placing blame on one’s partner. Defensiveness escalates conflicts quickly. The defensiveness horseman pulls from the previous two of criticism and contempt. The relationship begins to repeat patterns of attack and defend, and the pattern continues to escalate.
4. **Stonewalling:** Eventually relationships hit a brick wall, as the pattern of integrated criticism, contempt, and defensiveness becomes cyclic and continues to escalate. This cycle has the potential to lead to stonewalling, where one of the partners tune out, becomes less responsive, and avoids arguments as well as avoiding the relationship. The stonewaller begins to stop caring about the relationship and communication (pp. 27-35).

The blame game truly emerges through the first three of the four horsemen. However, by the time the relationship escalates to a state of stonewalling, the blame game has succeeded in destroying the integrity of the relationship. Low self-esteem becomes the driving force in the cyclic pattern that maintains the blame game and the dissatisfaction of the relationship. Ultimately, emotional intelligence and communication become silenced in their allowed participation in the healthy relationship because self-esteem has taken over the control of the relationship.

In the balanced middle, where high self-esteem resides, is where patterns of healthy relationships develop and thrive. Healthy self-esteem produces healthy emotional intelligence and ultimately healthy communication. When these three things are in equilibrium, healthy relationships once again thrive. However, the self-esteem has the power to tip the continuum of healthy in regards to all four continuums. For example, Sciangula and Morry (2009) state, “people with high self-esteem more accurately perceive how their partners actually view them (DeHart et al.). Therefore, self-esteem, or individuals’ feelings of self-worth, should influence how individuals perceive themselves, their perceptions about how their dating partners view them, and their overall relationship quality.” A study by Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996) reinforces this notion in the findings which showed that low self-esteem was related to lower
relationship well-being and high self-esteem was related to higher overall relationship satisfaction.

Self-esteem is often connected to self-worth. The longer an individual remain in a relationship with another individuals the deeper their self-worth becomes attached to the other. The other develops the power to control the pattern of self-esteem, especially as the relationship develops and partners become more involved with each other and less involved with the others in their lives. For instance, Knee, Bush, Canevello, and Cook (2004) supply, “relationship contingent self-esteem is an unhealthy form of self-esteem that depends on one’s relationship and represents a particular kind of relationship investment.” Moreover, individuals with lower self-esteem will, in due course, experience more negative emotions (Knee, Bush, Canevello, and Cook, 2004), and they do not understand the proper way to respond to the negative emotions because it threatens the self-esteem. Ultimately, this results in lower emotional intelligence due to the inability to break the patterns of negative emotions and low self-esteem. Because the self-worth continues to be connected to the negative emotions, the difficulty in bringing the self-esteem back to a healthy, homeostatic presence is present. Thus, the opposite should be expected to be true as well; the positive interpretation of self-worth should produce positive self-esteem resulting in satisfying relationships. Cramer (2003) recounts the view of self-actualization theorists as those “who proposed that a positive self-evaluation results from perceiving oneself as genuinely understood and unconditionally accepted by a significant other person. Relationships having these ‘facilitative’ qualities should be experienced as satisfactory, and satisfaction in these relationships should be positively associated with self-esteem.” The combination of these two supporting perspectives provide solid support for self-esteem directly affecting relationship
satisfaction through the byway of emotions conveyed between partners exchanges during communication.

**Emotional Intelligence**

Killian (2012) contributes the definition of emotional intelligence as “the ability to perceive and identify emotions in self and other, and to manage one’s own affective states to enhance wellbeing and the quality of one’s personal and professional relationships.” Mayor and Salovey (as cited in Schroeder-Abe & Schutz, 2011) add, “the emotional intelligence approach addresses individual differences in emotional processing (i.e., the ability to recognize, understand, use and regulate emotions) and assumes that one can process emotions in a more or less appropriate way.” Emotional intelligence is not something that is possessed by all humans. It presents itself at different levels of understanding and comprehension amongst individuals. This is because “emotional intelligence includes the ability to understand and regulate emotions; it includes positive mood and high self-esteem” (Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, & Hollander, 2002). This makes it apparent that individuals with low self-esteem likely possess relatively lower emotional intelligence and emotional regulation skills.

As self-esteem and communication thrive on a continuum so, too, does emotional intelligence. There are five domains of emotional intelligence: knowing one’s emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships (Goleman, 1995, p. 42). Each of these domains may be measured on a continuum from healthily able to unhealthily able to comprehend and deploy in relationships. For instance, “emotions play an important role in the coordination of social interactions and relationships (Keltner and Haidt, 2001) and serve important communicative functions (Elfenbein, Food, White, Tan & Aik, 2007) by providing information about thoughts and intentions and the
probable behavior of interacting partners” (Schroder-Abe & Schutz, 2011). Engagement with others, which is manifested through both verbal and nonverbal communication, takes place throughout these five domains. Emotions are the driving force behind all five domains of emotional intelligence, but it is the skills individuals have that determine the manner in which emotions manifest themselves within the self and within the relationship. Conflict is inevitable in relationships; however, emotional intelligence has the power to control the outcome of conflicts in relationships.

Brackett, Warner, and Bosco (2005) declare, “higher emotional intelligence may lead to better management of disagreements, which in turn might predict less conflict and higher relationship satisfaction” resulting in “spouses that are more likely to accommodate than to retaliate during conflict.” Emotional intelligence has the potential to slow responses. Sometimes the thinking process will endure a tumultuous pattern and individuals may become stuck in the thinking stage. Slowed thinking patterns produce more tactful responses to criticism, contempt, or defensiveness. Gottman and Silver (1999) propose, “the more emotionally intelligent a couple—the better able they are to understand, honor, and respect each other” and their relationship, thus “the more likely that they will indeed live happily ever after” (pp. 3-4).

One of the central reasons more emotionally intelligent couples have greater relationship satisfaction is because of their ability to successfully utilize repair attempts. Repair attempts, as Gottman and Silver (1999) define them, “are efforts the couple makes to deescalate the tension during a touch discussion” (p. 39). Repair attempts provide a break for the individuals in the relationship. They provide time for two things. First, they provide time for the individuals involved to bring their physiology back to a state of contentment, which reduces critical responses. Solomon and Tatkin (2011) avow that in relationships, “painful patterns of interaction
frequently develop. Love turns to war between intimate through a series of psychological and physiological interactions that are outside conscious awareness” (p. 176). Heightened emotions lead to an acceleration in physiological responses such as sweaty palms, raised body temperature, and quickened heart rate. This heightened state encourages individuals to react to the situation based on protecting their self-esteem, regardless of the effects it may produce for the relationship. Humans need time to cool down and think through difficulties in order to produce rational responses. Second, it provides thinking time for individuals to make emotionally intelligent decisions to bring the relationship out of dysregulation and back into a state of homeostasis. “Emotional intelligence may lead to more effective communication in social interactions with one’s partner. For example, accurately perceiving others’ emotions may help to more correctly perceive the partner’s needs and opinions and result in better perspective taking” (Schroder-Abe & Schutz, 2011). The long-term outcome of homeostatic relationships is that they are more satisfying and more likely to produce effective and healthy communication patterns.

On the other hand, failed repair attempts produce threatened self-esteem, which results in emotions that are controlled by reaction. Emotions are the fuel for making humans think and the thinking produces behavior. Sometimes the thinking process has the potential to be short lived, if the self-esteem has been threatened deeply enough. If the thinking process becomes short lived, fight responses are quick to be released through communication, because the individual needs to defend themselves in order to protect their self-esteem. Brackett, Warner, and Bosco (2005) maintain, “emotional abilities are thought to be important because emotions serve communication and social functions, conveying information about people’s thoughts and
intentions, and social encounters” increasing in relationships because “emotional abilities involve intimacy and emotional involvement.”

**Communication**

William Glasser (as cited in Brown, 2008) asserts, “we steer ourselves with our thoughts and actions and are moved by our emotions and physiology.” Communication is produced through the combination of one’s emotions and physiological responses. An individual’s physiological responses propels them into fight or flight responses to their situations. As Brown (2008) reports, “when our reasoning manages our emotions, we are unable to reduce our emotional defenses, and think clearly and rationally. Moreover, when an individual’s self-esteem is threatened, communication crumbles and becomes channeled through protecting our self-esteem. The fight or flight responses allow individuals to protect their integrity and return their internal struggles to homeostasis.”

Communication in relationships is a key component of developing and maintaining intimacy. However, if individuals in a relationship are unable to communicate, intimacy is hindered. For example, self-disclosure, “the process of revealing personal information about oneself to another”, is a core component of communication in relationships as it builds closeness (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Self-disclosure is the process by which people develop relationships. If an individual desires for a relationship to prosper and grow, self-disclosure will be more prevalent in communication exchanges. When taken a step further, self-disclosure involves releasing information from our past to another person (Stewart, 2002). It involves revealing one’s patterns of thinking, acting, and feeling. Self-disclosure facilitates the growth of the intimate relationship because understanding of perceptions and reactions is attained between partners. Further, self-disclosure allows partners to reveal their self-esteem to their partner.
When self-disclosure is not reciprocated, communication breaks down and relationships stop growing. When relationships stop growing, they begin to break down. For instance, Stewart (2002) provides, “a relationship grows and develops as two people become more open about themselves to each other…two people who let each other know how they are reacting to situations and to each other are pulled together; two people who stay silent about their reactions and feelings stay strangers.” Nonetheless, if one or both individuals are uncomfortable with themselves, and do not possess self-esteem, self-disclosure remains difficult and uncomfortable and prevents the growth of intimacy in relationships.

Faulty comprehension produces communication that hampers intimacy and relationship satisfaction. When self-esteem is threatened, communication becomes filtered through stress. As communication is quick to have a fight or flight response when self-esteem is threatened, communication is quick to spiral into patterns of defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. Carlson and Sperry (1999) present the notion that, “Under stress, people use defensive communication styles that alienate their partners.” Individual’s emotions become activated when self-esteem is brought to the forefront of the mind. Emotional intelligence serves to mediate between actions and feelings, and produces thinking to create a resolution to return emotions to homeostasis. Carlson and Sperry (1999) report, “Emotional blocks can hamper development of intimacy. Bottling up feelings or expressing them in destructive ways reduces our ability to solve problems.” When individuals become unable to problem solve, they become stuck in a vicious cycle of unhappiness. The model, \( E=MC^2: \text{Self-Esteem + Emotional Intelligence + Communication} = \text{Relationship Satisfaction} \), portrays a vicious cycle of unhappiness driven by threatened self-esteem which launches the fight or flight responses of defensiveness, contempt, or stonewalling.
Segal (2008) provides an example of couple that bases their exchanges of communication on emotional intelligence as an exchange that is based on:

- Self-awareness
- A willingness to be revealing
- The capacity to listen to the emotional content of what is being said—and to be moved by it
- The ability to express one’s own emotions
- A willingness to be emotionally moved and affected by the other—to change as a result of the relationship (p.34).

Utilizing these criteria as guidelines for communication between partners has the potential to produce healthy, effective communication between individuals that facilitates meeting the needs of both partners involved in the interaction. Schwartz and Johnson (2000) suggest, “there now exists an impressive body of research demonstrating that inhibiting emotions damages our health, while writing or talking about emotions has many benefits.” Although it is difficult to remain objective and thoughtful in one’s word choices and actions during times of heightened emotional exchanges, the capacity to remain thoughtful and objective will greatly benefit the quality of the relationship. As the relationship grows and communication continues to be exchanged between individuals, intimacy has the opportunity to grow the relationship or destroy it. Gottman (as cited in Schwartz and Johnson, 2000) found, “how partners feel toward each other and the ways in which they express those feelings predicts the future of their relationships, as does the ability of the couple to engage emotionally. The degree of emotional engagement, rather than the number or nature of the conflicts, defines the happiness and stability of
relationships. The process of communicating emotions—not the resolution of content issues or problems—is pivotal.”

**Adler’s Commentary on the Literature**

The Adlerian notion of social interest, or the way in which we relate to others, plays a key role in the context of relationships, which ultimately means social interest also contributes to the satisfaction of relationships. Relationship satisfaction is composed of skills and abilities within the individual. One of those skills and abilities is healthy self-esteem. As McMahon (1992) states, “Social Interest flows from self-esteem in a natural manner because it is a human need to relate with others and to have relationship. This order is necessary because it is critical first to learn self-esteem and then to focus on relationship issues.” The skill of possessing or learning self-esteem must come before personal health has the potential to be transpired into relationship health and produce satisfying relationships. Individuals must first and foremost learn the skill of loving thy self in order to truly and fully comprehend the notion of being worthy of love from others. In order to love oneself, one must learn to accept thy self (McMahon, 1992). Once people are able to learn to do this for themselves, they are able to carry those skills over into relationships with others. Moreover, they are able to initiate and utilize the skills associated with social interest because they have developed these skills within their deeply rooted personal relationship with their self-esteem and have learned the tools to successfully deploy their skills.

McMahon (1992) defines good relationships as, “comprised of mutual respect and kindness to the self and to the other” (p. 170). In order to successfully navigate a path that leans toward healthy relationship status, on the line of dysregulation, in the E=mc^2 model, one must learn to utilize the skills of respect and kindness. In addition, they must learn to utilize those
skills in order to avoid moving into the world of defensiveness and stonewalling. “A good relationship is comprised of trust, acceptance, communication, a genuine liking for the other person, and a willingness to compromise at times “ (McMahon, 1992, p. 170). This brings the importance of self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and communication to the forefront of significance in preventing criticism and contempt from taking over the relationship and spiraling it into a state of dysregulation. The skills involved in emotional intelligence promote kindness to the self and to the other. For example, “emotion management is measured with two tasks that assess people’s ability to choose among more or less effective means of managing emotions in private situations (Emotion Management) and interpersonal emotional situations (Social Management) to promote personal understanding and growth” (Brackett, Warner, & Bosco, 2005). The skill of emotional intelligence is driven by the development and maintenance of self-esteem. McMahon presents the implications for the notions of these concepts being recognized as skills, “a key word in understanding good communication is the word skills. There are some lucky souls who naturally know how to communicate well with others but most of us have to learn these skills” (p. 219). Self-esteem is translated through communication with others. In the event that self-esteem is unstable, the other three, emotional intelligence, self-esteem, and the relationship itself are thrown out of equilibrium. Self-esteem is ultimately the roots that allow for emotional intelligence, communication, and relationships to grow and flourish. If an individual feels as though they need to protect their self-esteem from harshness of others’ unhealthy communication, they will safeguard. The Adlerian concept of safeguarding allows the individual to avoid having to admit wrongness when being criticized and feeling the need to protect their self-esteem.
Criticism conveyed through communication, both verbal and nonverbal, has the potential to destroy an individual’s self-esteem. This idea should be thought of as common sense, but in a society based on the western model of loving others at the expense of loving ourselves it fails to register as common sense. The safety that is gained through possessing healthy self-esteem and using it to carry out the thinking of emotional intelligence and the actions of communication produces a safety within the relationship. The following excerpt from Solomon (2011) explains the process that leads to safety being broken down in a relationship:

When partners ask, “Are we right for one another?” or say, “Maybe we just aren’t compatible,” the psychobiologically oriented therapist, armed with an understanding of compatibility, knows that the question to be answered is, given their individual attachment histories, how far can these partners advance together before their capacities to coregulate and maintain safety and security reach their limit? And when they reach that limit, what might we expect to occur between them? Would we expect an affair? Would we expect secrets? Would we expect dysregulation. (p.153)

Although a breach in the feeling of safety has the ability to produce dysregulation, safety also has the ability to allow for the growth of intimacy. McMahon (1992) provides, “Communication is a means of obtaining intimacy with others. It is a way to share to feel belongingness.” In reverse, the Adlerian notions of safety and belongingness facilitate the ability for an individual’s self-esteem to grow and develop through relationships with others. McMahon (1992) continues, “Good communication allows others to really know us and to provide feedback and support when we need them. Good communication is one of the great joys of life. Practicing Social Interest involves learning good communication skills” (p. 219). Accordingly, Social Interest promotes the cycle of creating healthy intimate relationships.
Adler would look at unhealthy relationships through the lens of neuroticism. Adler would speculate that the individuals in the relationship are perpetuating a cycle that maintains the unhealthy relationships because they are safeguarding their self-esteem. The four horsemen lead the path of destruction in relationships. As relationships enter this path of destruction, self-esteem becomes the first factor immediately affected by the exchanges of destruction being communicated. Criticism is typically the first exchange of communication to initiate the cycle that leads relationships into dysregulation. In the previous paragraph, criticism towards others was discussed. However, criticism may also be self-directed. Adler (as cited in Grayson, 1983) “explained all neurotic behavior, as an unconscious play to safeguard self-esteem. According to this view when people berate themselves as worthless or evil, stupid or incompetent, ugly or hateful, their hidden motive is self-enhancement. They condemn themselves the better to exalt themselves.” As relationships grow, self-esteem becomes more connected to the relationship. Intimate relationships becomes the sole proprietor of primacy in the partner’s lives, as a result most communication the individuals engage in, is exchange amongst the partners themselves. Rosenberg (1985) indicates, “self-esteem is based partly on comparison of the self to meaningful others.” Since we are socially connected beings, relationships are inevitably a component of mental health in general. Healthier individuals tend to be surrounded by healthier relationships and vice versa unhealthy relationships tend to be central to unhealthy individuals. Ultimately, dysregulation and functioning begin to grow unbalanced because of the unhealthy relationships surrounding the individual and their need to cope with the presenting situation. Self-criticism allows individuals to utilize the useless side of life to fester their symptoms of neuroticism, which allows them to safeguard. For example, Bruch (as cited in Grayson, 1983) describes an example of a woman that never feels as though she is always a failure:
Pride in failure is illustrated by Cheryl, another young person who realistically has been successful, but subjectively feels a failure. Although she never has been dangerously underweight, she shares with anorectic’s rigid goals in respect to controlling eating, earning outstanding grades, denying herself pleasure, and pleasing other people. Cheryl never quite achieves these goals, however. She does not starve herself, drive herself, deny herself, or placate others with enough dedication to be ‘perfect’. And so after a while she periodically gives up the effort and abandons herself to true failure, indulging in food, drugs, alcohol, sex, and an orgy of self-condemnation.

Useless side of life behavior may present itself in many formats. Cheryl displays symptoms of the useless side of life on two different sides of the spectrum, yet they are both useless. Cheryl could never feel perfect enough for herself because she was too busy pleasing others and trying to be perfect for them. As the Adlerian perspective supplies, in order for a pleaser to be a pleaser, they have to forget themselves. Cheryl forgot herself through pleasing others, but never received the satisfaction of attaining the feeling of perfection. Even more, chasing the feeling of perfection is an impossible goal, because it is not a feeling. In order to chase the impossible one must set their own needs aside and lose the balance between self and others. Safeguarding hinders the growth and maintenance of intimacy as it builds a wall between partners. Safeguarding and criticism allow for a cycle of dysregulation to take control of a relationship.

**Clinical/Practical Application**

The Model $E=mc^2$: $SI+EI+C=RS$ has the potential to be utilized by mental health practitioners to provide psycho-education to their clients in regards to the patterns their clients are repeating in their relationships. It is displayed in a graphical representation for visual learners. The model also has the ability to provide insight for practitioners to have greater
understanding of the cycles that promote unhealthy relationships. It allows clinicians to develop an understanding for relationships that involve repeated failed attempts at emotional connections (Gottman & Driver, 2005). Once clinicians gain an understanding for the fuel that facilitates the destructive patterns of their client’s relationships, they are better able to utilize their therapeutic tools and techniques to alter the current patterns of functioning. As healthy communication and healthy emotional intelligence are difficult skills to possess if the self-esteem is off balance, developing and learning to utilize healthy self-esteem is a difficult and tumultuous journey. Developing self-esteem often involves digging into the emotional difficult trials of one’s life. This may prove to be difficult for individuals that are unable to develop healthy relationships, because they do not know how to facilitate the exchanges in the relationships. The therapeutic relationship has the potential to be the relationship which facilitates the development of the skills associated with self-esteem. Working with couples has the advantage of facilitating the growth of self-esteem, emotional intelligence, communication, and relationship satisfaction in more than one person.

One tool for treatment has been provided. This tool is located in the appendixes as a sample tool for treatment. This tool is known as the value tree. The graphical representation of the tool was developed as part of this thesis project. However, the concept of the value tree was provided in a course taught by Dr. William Premo at the Adler Graduate School. The tool has the potential to be utilized to identify the current values that guide an individual’s primary reason to think, feel, or act in response to a message that has been communicated between individuals, whether it is verbal or nonverbal. This would reveal the values that currently guide the individual in their responses to others. This would assist mental health practitioners in developing therapeutic goals for clients.
Conclusion and Future Implications

Restatement of the Problem

The hypothesis that has been presented in this thesis originally stated that individuals with healthy self-esteem will have greater emotional intelligence thus possess greater communication skills which will ultimately result in healthier, more satisfying relationships. This research, which created this hypothesis, led to the creation of a model for mental health practitioners to utilize in practice with clients. The model is supported by the literature review provided in this paper. This thesis has integrated the concepts of self-esteem, emotional intelligence, communication, and relationship satisfaction to produce a model and body of literature for support.

Explanation of the Literature

Each concept that has been integrated to create the working model $E=mc^2$ has its own importance in the cycle of Self-Esteem + Emotional Intelligence + Communication = Relationship Satisfaction. First, Baker and McNulty (2011) provide support for self-esteem, “High self-esteem individuals report more favorable views of their partners, behaving in ways that increase closeness with their partners and being more satisfied in their relationships.” Second, Brackette, Warner, Bosco (2005) supply the importance of emotional intelligence as, “reviewed research showing that accuracy in expressing and recognizing emotions correlates with couples’ reports of marital happiness.” Finally, Oattes and Offman (2007) present the defense for communication as, “research has shown that higher levels of communication between partners are associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction.” The three concepts are all correlated with promoting greater relationship satisfaction. However, the concepts also integrate with each other. For instance, “high global self-esteem in may translate into a greater likelihood
of verbal and nonverbal communication, including communication about safer sex, and related topics.

**Recommendations for Future Research Directions and/or Therapeutic Implications**

Several types and theories of therapy support the concepts of the model $E=mc^2$. Cramer (2003) provides the following:

- “Among the components of behavioral marital therapy are communication “
- “Both person-centered and rational-emotive theories have suggested that greater self-acceptance should bring about greater relationship satisfaction.”
- “Person-centered theory postulated that self-acceptance facilitates accepting others, which results in more satisfying and enriching relationships, including romantic relationships.”

Exploration of the types and theories of therapy could have the potential to provide more support and evidence for the model. Furthermore, the model does not provide intervention methods that may potentially facilitate the ending of the cycles of behavior portrayed in the model. Further research on the utilization of the model could potentially reveal effective intervention techniques that facilitate the use of the model by practitioners.

Another option for further research and compilation that would add to the utilization of this model in the therapeutic settings is to create a training guide. The training guide could include such items as:

- Communication skills necessary for healthy communication
- Diagrams or models of communication skills
- Emotional intelligence skills necessary to promote healthy relationships
- How to use communication to facilitate the growth of emotional intelligence and self-esteem
- How to use emotional intelligence to communicate
- Methods for developing skills associated with emotional intelligence
- Models or diagrams displaying the advantages of possessing the skills of emotional intelligence
- Models or diagrams displaying the advantages of possessing the skills of self-esteem
- Tools and techniques for developing self-esteem
- Modeling techniques for therapists to model the skills of self-esteem
- Use of encouragement
- Information on John Gottman’s four horsemen of the apocalypse.

Research leading to the compilation of such training manual would likely reveal more topics to include in the context of this resource for mental health practitioners.

**Conclusion**

It has been presented that a strong correlation exists between self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and communication and their ability to work together to produce satisfying, healthy relationships. Self-esteem is the driving force in the equation. Emotional intelligence and communication provide the filter that transfers self-esteem into relationships. This thesis project provides the foundation for this integration and produced the ground work for a research study on this subject. This thesis has also compiled suggested information for a potential training and education for colleagues. The research for this thesis project also resulted in the production of
the model, $E=MC^2$: $SE + EI + C = RS$, to provide a graphical representation of the research and hypothesis integration.
Appendix A: Measure of Relationship Satisfaction

Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire

Name_______________________________     Date__________________

A. Please list ten things which your partner does which please you:

1.__________________________________________
2.__________________________________________
3.__________________________________________
4.__________________________________________
5.__________________________________________
6.__________________________________________
7.__________________________________________
8.__________________________________________
9.__________________________________________
10.__________________________________________

B. Please list three things you would like your partner to do more often. Put an X under
the days, indicating how often he/she did each of these things during the past seven
days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tues</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thurs</th>
<th>Fri</th>
<th>Sat</th>
<th>Sun</th>
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<td>1.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
C. List Three Things you think your partner would like you to do for him/her and put an X under the days indicating how often you did each of these things during the past seven days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mon</th>
<th>Tues</th>
<th>Wed</th>
<th>Thurs</th>
<th>Fri</th>
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<td>1.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

D. List five interests which you and your partner share. How often do you do these things together. (Mark with an X)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Less Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

E. List five of your own interests. How often do you do these? (Mark with an X)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Less Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
F. List five positive characteristics of your partner and five positive characteristics of yourself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ___________________________</td>
<td>1. ________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ___________________________</td>
<td>2. ________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ___________________________</td>
<td>3. ________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. ___________________________</td>
<td>4. ________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ___________________________</td>
<td>5. ________________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

G. List what you would like to change about yourself.

1. ___________________________
2. ___________________________
3. ___________________________
4. ___________________________
5. ___________________________

H. In what ways have I been showing or giving love lately?

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________
4. __________________________________________

I. Overall, on a scale of 0-10, (0=very dissatisfied and 10= very satisfied), rate the following (circle a number):

1. How satisfied do you think your partner is with your relationship?

   0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
2. How satisfied are you with your relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

J. List three things which you believe would improve your satisfaction with your relationship.

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________

K. List three things which you believe would improve your partner’s satisfaction with your relationship.

1. ____________________________
2. ____________________________
3. ____________________________

L. Overall, on a scale of 0-10 (0=not at all committed and 10=very committed), rate the following (circle a number):

1. How committed do you think your partner is to working on this relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. How committed are you to working on this relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. How committed do you think your partner is to making changes to improve the relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. How committed are you to making changes to improve the relationship?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. What proportion of the time spent with you is happy for your partner, in your opinion?

0% 25% 50% 75% 100%
6. What amount of the time spent with your partner is happy for you?

   0%  25%  50%  75%  100%

7. How much happier do you think your partner expects to be?

   0%  25%  50%  75%  100%

8. How much happier do you expect to be as time goes on or with therapy?

   0%  25%  50%  75%  100%
Appendix B: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

**Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale** (Rosenberg, 1965)

The scale is a ten item Likert scale with items answered on a four point scale - from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The original sample for which the scale was developed consisted of 5,024 High School Juniors and Seniors from 10 randomly selected schools in New York State. Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, circle SA. If you agree with the statement, circle A. If you disagree, circle D. If you strongly disagree, circle SD.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.          SA A D SD
2.* At times, I think I am no good at all.          SA A D SD
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.   SA A D SD
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people. SA A D SD
5.* I feel I do not have much to be proud of.        SA A D SD
6.* I certainly feel useless at times.               SA A D SD
7. I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. SA A D SD
8.* I wish I could have more respect for myself.     SA A D SD
9.* All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.   SA A D SD
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.        SA A D SD

Scoring: SA=3, A=2, D=1, SD=0. Items with an asterisk are reverse scored, that is, SA=0, A=1, D=2, SD=3. Sum the scores for the 10 items. The higher the score, the higher the self-esteem.
The scale may be used without explicit permission. The author's family, however, would like to be kept informed of its use:

The Morris Rosenberg Foundation
c/o Department of Sociology
University of Maryland
2112 Art/Soc Building
College Park, MD 20742-1315
Appendix C: Communication Assessment

Communication Assessment

HOW IS OUR RELATIONSHIP DOING?

Good communication is important for all successful relationships. When communication breaks down, so do many other aspects of a relationship. The problem is communication rarely breaks down overnight. It is a subtle wearing away that is oftentimes difficult to see happening.

Gauging your communication and understanding some of your patterns together is a very helpful way to begin assessing the state of your relationship. Respond with "true" or "false" to the following statements. When finished, compare your score to the assessment scale below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>True</th>
<th>False</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. We have at least one meaningful conversation per day.</td>
<td>⬜</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We regularly share our daily routines with one another.</td>
<td>⬜</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We talk about difficult or challenging issues in a safe and relaxed way.</td>
<td>⬜</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. When my partner calls on the telephone, I always answer.</td>
<td>⬜</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. When we argue, we make efforts to avoid sarcasm or name calling.</td>
<td>⬜</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. When we have a disagreement, we are able to compromise or agree to disagree.</td>
<td>⬜</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Our relationship is not at risk during disagreements or confrontations.</td>
<td>⬜</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Even when we disagree, I feel like my partner has respect for my opinions.</td>
<td>⬜</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. When an argument or discussion gets out of control, we routinely call timeout.</td>
<td>⬜</td>
<td>⬜</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. I feel comfortable talking about sexual issues with my partner.

11. We don't assume we know what one another is thinking.

12. We don't assume our partner should know what we are thinking.

13. I feel comfortable talking about difficult issues with my partner.

14. I regularly try to see my partner's perspective on things.

15. When we fight or argue, we rarely raise our voices.

16. I feel I can trust what my partner says to me.

17. I am satisfied with the level and frequency of our communication.

18. We never go to bed angry.

19. The majority of our conversations are stress-free and productive.

20. When we speak, I feel like my partner is really listening.

Assessment Scale

0-8: On the Brink: Communication has broken down, and is most likely impacting all areas of your relationship.

9-15: Holding Steady: Not bad, but you could make some adjustments to avoid the brink.

16-20: Far from the Brink: Fantastic job. You are wonderful communication. Nothing to worry about.
Appendix D: Emotional Intelligence Assessment

For the purpose of this research, I would utilize the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) developed by Boyatzis, Goleman, and the Hay Group. It can be purchased at http://www.haygroup.com/leadershipandtalentondemand/ourproducts/item_details.aspx?itemid=58&type=7&t=2.

The following description of the ESCI is provided by the Hay Group:

Use the emotional and social competency inventory (ESCI) to:

- measure emotional intelligence in your leaders and professionals
- raise awareness through powerful feedback
- focus your coaching and development on crucial capabilities
- bring out the best in individuals and teams.

Why choose the Boyatzis, Goleman and Hay Group ESCI?

Emotional and social intelligence is now recognized as a key factor in leadership performance. Our long partnership with Dr. Richard Boyatzis and Dr. Daniel Goleman has resulted in one of the most validated behavioral measures of emotional and social intelligence, based on hundreds of competency studies conducted in organizations throughout the world. Because it is behavioral, it enables you to assess, develop, and coach your leaders and embed this crucial capability within your organization.

Drawing on the work of Boyatzis and Goleman, and research at Hay Group, the ESCI is a 360° tool, avoiding the distortion of self-assessment questionnaires. It describes 12 competencies that differentiate outstanding from average performers.
Cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT) is based on the idea that our thoughts, feelings, and behavior reinforce each other and that changing our thoughts or behavior can make us feel better.
Appendix F: Sample Tool for Treatment

The Value Tree

Why is this important?
The one that makes you feel, creates a stall.
The one that makes you act is the most powerful.
The one that makes you feel, hurts you the most.

Top 10 Values
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.

Which one makes you think?

Which one makes you act?

Which one makes you feel?
References


Nahom, H., & Nahum, D. *Marital satisfaction questionnaire*. Retrieved from


