

Thematic Analysis of Emotional Salience in Autobiographical Stories and its Relationship to Emotion Regulation

Maha Z. Rizvi, Isabelle A. Monroe, & Nakia S. Gordon, Ph.D.

Introduction

- Existing research in the field of emotion regulation (ER) has demonstrated two possible outcomes of experiencing negative events with high emotional salience and intensity.
 - Engaging in **maladaptive** ER strategies (Gross, 1998; Kozubal et al., 2023).
 - Engaging in **adaptive** ER strategies (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015; Wilms et al., 2020).
- However, it remains unclear whether reappraisers or suppressors are more emotionally expressive and more willing to discuss intense emotional experiences.
- A qualitative approach may help detect nuances in emotional salience and allow for a deeper analysis on the role of emotion regulation.

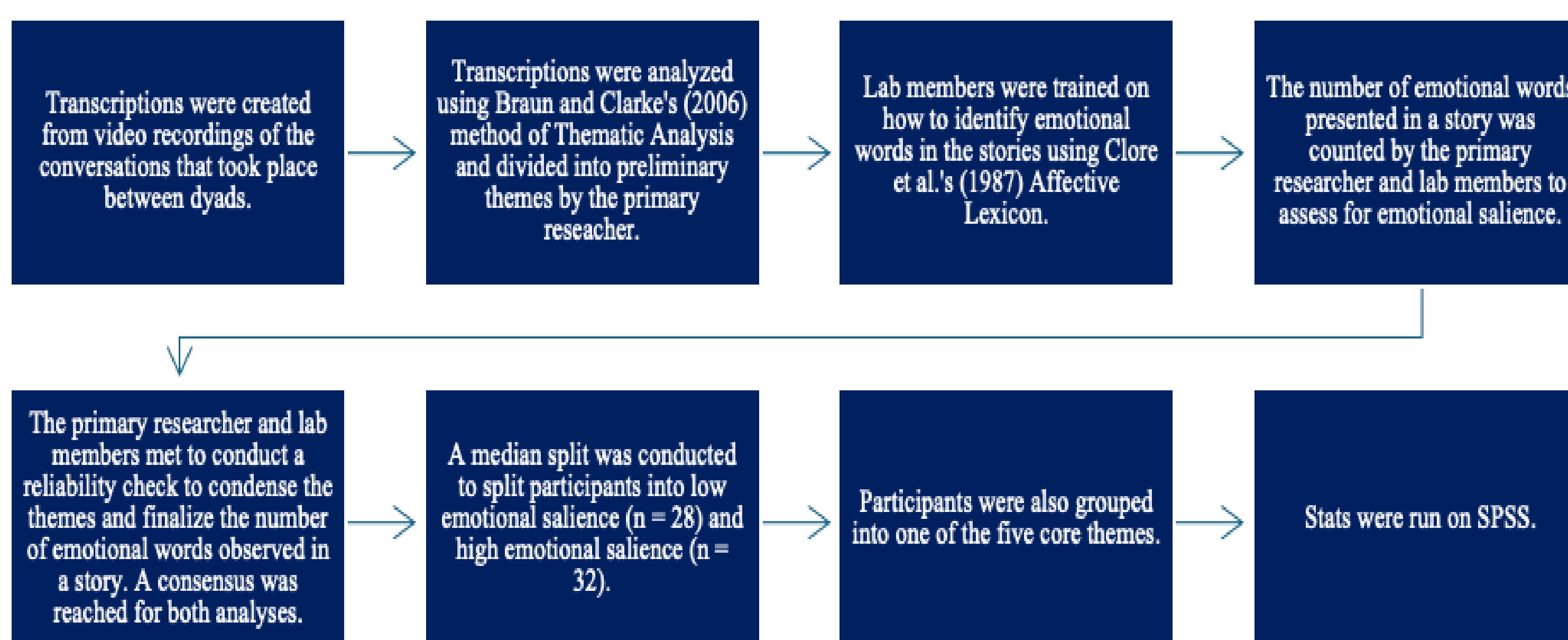
Hypotheses

- Individuals whose stories represent higher emotional salience will (1) show a tendency to use **reappraisal** and (2) will exhibit **less difficulties** in emotional regulation.
- There will be a positive relationship between emotional salience and emotional intensity.
- Emotional salience and emotional intensity will differ based on the theme of the negative story.

Methods

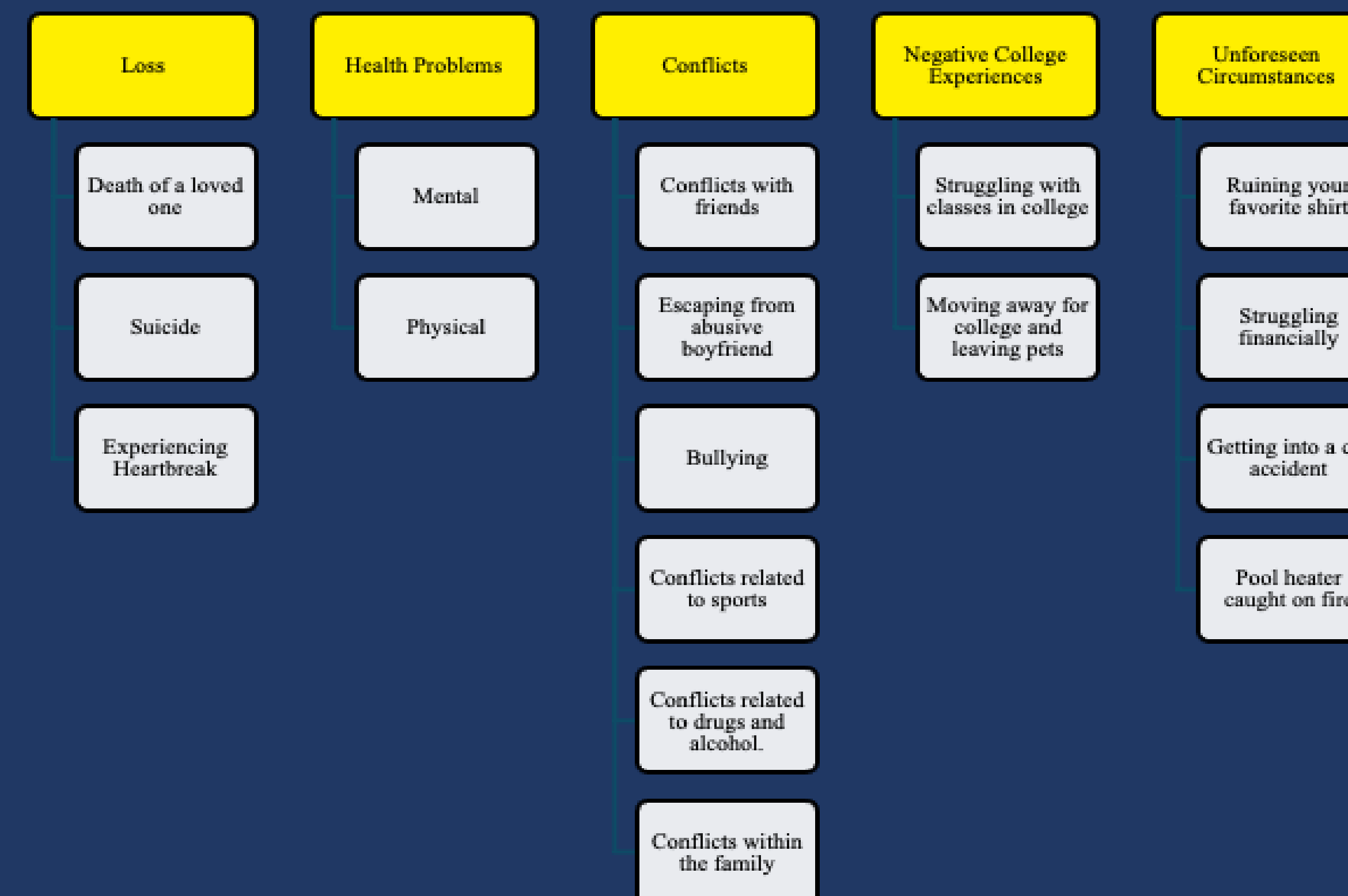
Participants:

- Sixty participants (30 dyads).
- The primary source of recruitment were MU undergraduates.
- Racial categories represented: White/European American (57.4%), Hispanic/Latino (13.1%), Asian (11.5%), Middle Eastern (6.6%), Biracial (6.6%), and African American (3.3%).
- Majority of dyads were female.

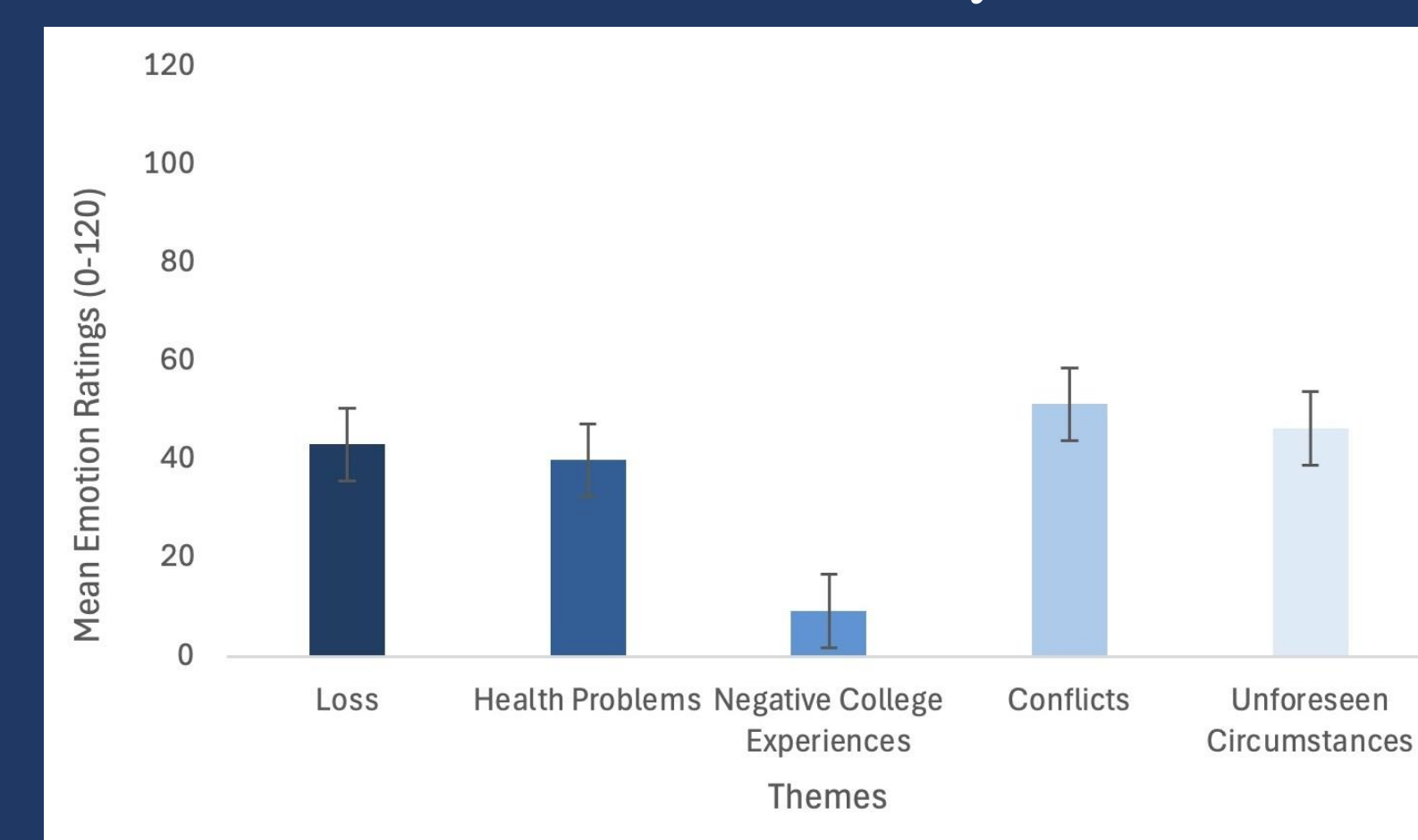


Results

Themes

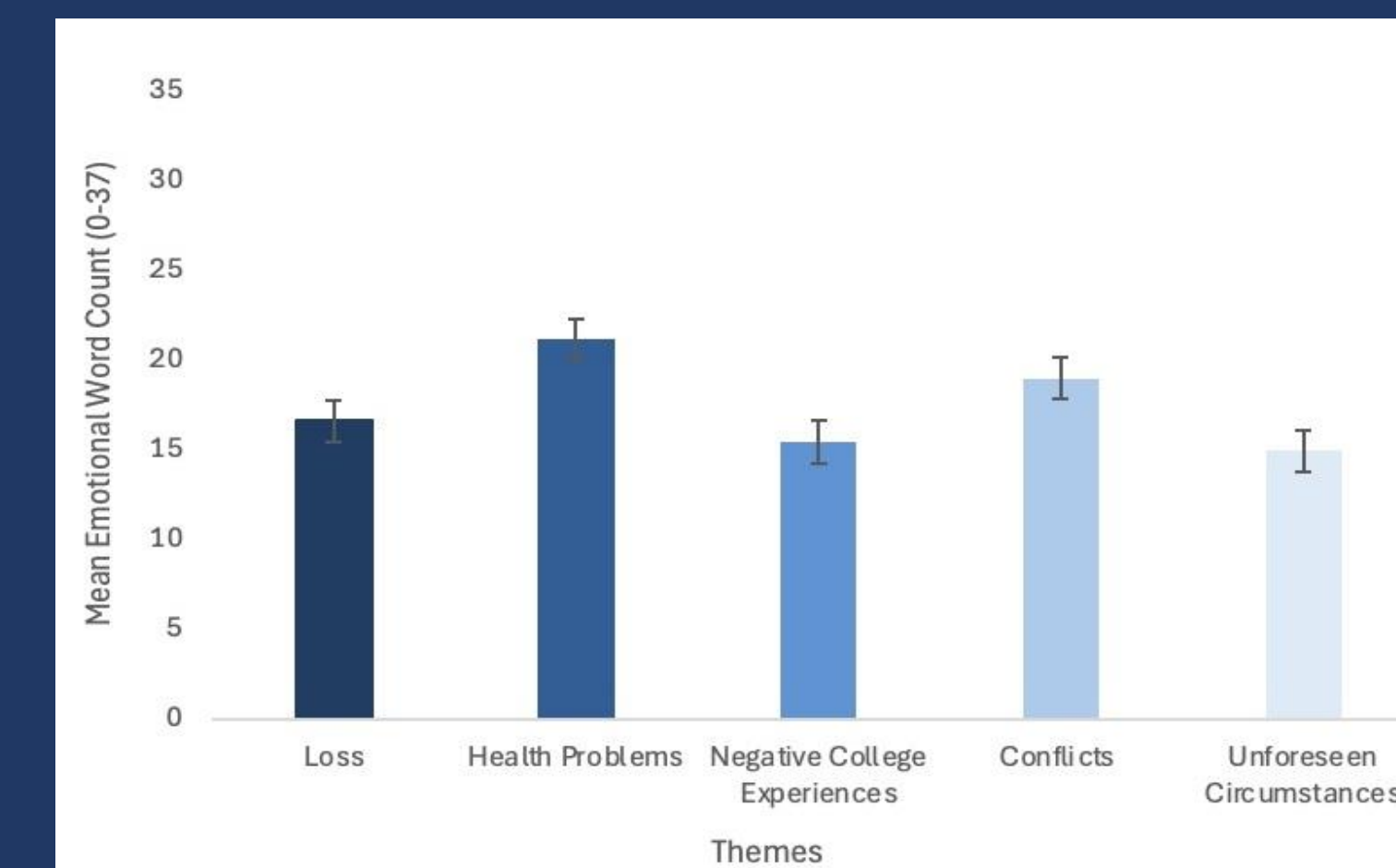


Mean Emotional Intensity Scores



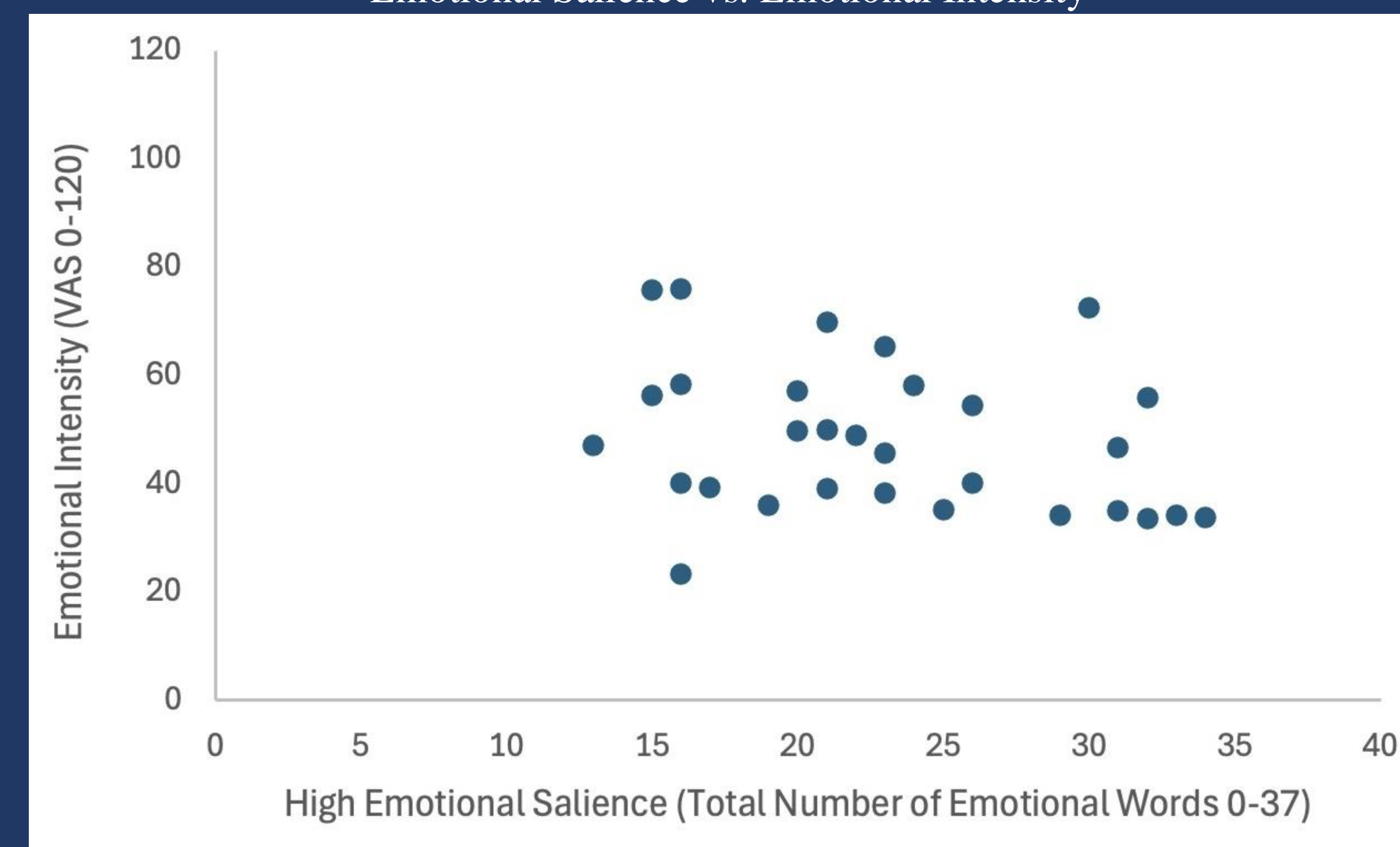
Note: No significant differences across themes. Negative College Experiences had missing data.

Mean Emotional Salience Scores



Note: No significant differences across themes.

Emotional Salience vs. Emotional Intensity



Emotion Regulation: No significant relationship was found between emotional salience, Difficulties in Emotion Regulation scores, and ERQ Reappraisal and Suppression scores.

Measures:

- Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS; Gratz & Roemer, 2004)
 - 36-item questionnaire rated on a 1 (almost never) - 5 (almost always) Likert scale.
 - Scores range from 36 – 180.
 - Higher** scores indicate **more** difficulties in emotion regulation.
- The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003)
 - 10-item scale rated on a 1 (strongly disagree) - 7 (strongly agree) Likert scale.
 - Cognitive reappraisal scores range from 6-42; Expressive suppression scores range from 4-28.
 - Higher** scores indicate the tendency to use a specific emotion regulation strategy.
- Visual Analog Scale (VAS; Hayes & Patterson, 1921)
 - Emotions rated on a 0 (not at all) - 10 (extremely) continuous automated visual analog scale (VAS) after each conversation.
 - The 12 affect descriptors include: Disgusted, Sad, Cheerful, Pity, Neutral, Happy, Guilty, Emotionally Connected, Aroused, Angry, Sympathetic, Empathetic, and Compassionate.
 - Scores range from 0-120.
 - Emotions rated after both emotional conversations were summed for the purpose of this study and operationalized as emotional intensity.
- Emotional Salience
 - Emotional words were identified from each story using Clore et al.'s (1987) Affective Lexicon.
 - Scores ranged from 0-37.
 - Stories that exhibited 16 or less emotional words were defined as a low emotional salience, while stories that exhibited more than 16 emotional words were defined as high emotional salience.

Discussion and Implications

- The hypotheses were partially supported, as people sharing high emotional salience stories trended towards fewer difficulties in emotion regulation.
 - These individuals may have been more willing to discuss a highly emotional story and are better at articulating emotions.
- Since there were no differences in emotional salience between Reappraisers and Suppressors, we are not able to determine if these regulation styles effect salience of emotional expression.
- This research is a stepping stone towards understanding differences in emotional salience and emotional intensity in negative autobiographical stories.