

## Introduction

- Emotion suppression as a regulation strategy may have particularly harmful effects on social relationships (Butler et al. 2003, Srivastava et al., 2009).
- Law enforcement officers (LEOs) experience high levels of job stress; their job also requires frequent use of emotion regulation strategies, such as emotion control or suppression, that have the potential to cause job burnout and impact relationships (Pogrebin & Poole, 1991, Krannitz et al., 2015, Kwak et al., 2018).
- In prior research, LEOs struggled with accepting and tolerating negative emotions and tended to avoid situations that could cue negative emotions (Berking et al., 2010).
- LEOs and their spouses show patterns of emotional behavior and self-reported experience that suggest marital interactions may be characterized by emotional disengagement and/or suppression (Roberts et al., 2001, Roberts et al., 2013).
- Research suggests that couples who share an occupation or career experience greater spousal support, work-family balance, and family and job satisfaction (Ferguson et al. 2016, Janning 2006).
- Anecdotally, LEOs report a reluctance to share their job experiences with their spouse; therefore, we expected that LEOs who feel their spouse does not understand their job may report lower relationship satisfaction.
- The current study investigated the link between perceived lack of spousal job understanding and relationship satisfaction, and how the link is affected by emotion suppression in the context of LEO relationships.

## Hypotheses

- H1 -2: LEOs who feel their spouse misunderstands their job (H1) and who hide their feelings from their spouse (H2) will report lower relationship satisfaction.
- H3: The extent that a LEO hides their feelings from their spouse will mediate the relationship between perceived spousal misunderstanding and relationship satisfaction, even when accounting for overall (trait-like) emotion suppression.

## Method

### Participants

- $N = 109$  (80 males, 29 females) married or partnered Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs)
- Age 21 to 59 years ( $M = 36.5$ ,  $SD = 7.3$ )
- Ethnicity: 87.2% European American, 11% Hispanic, 3.7% Asian American
- $M = 12.12$  ( $SD = 9.08$ ) years on the force
- $M = 8.56$  ( $SD = 6.03$ ) years married/partnered

### Procedure

- Recruited through announcements at precincts, social media, and word of mouth
- Filled out an online survey administered through a secure website, SurveyMonkey.com

### Data Analysis

- Mediation analysis via regression in SPSS PROCESS v3.4 was used to test whether perceived spousal job misunderstanding was associated with relationship dissatisfaction, and whether LEOs hiding their feelings from their spouse mediated this relationship. Emotion suppression (ERQ-suppression subscale) was included as a covariate.

### Measures

#### Table 1

#### Survey Measures

<b>Spousal Job Understanding Measure:</b> Spousal Job Understanding Questionnaire	In-lab developed measure comprised of 10 items rated on a Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time). Lower scores reflect lower levels of perceived spousal job understanding.
<b>LEO Hiding Feelings Measure:</b> LEO Hiding Feelings Questionnaire	In-lab developed measure comprised of 5 items rated on a Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (all the time). Higher scores reflect a greater tendency to hide one's feelings from their spouse.
<b>Trait-like Emotion Suppression:</b> Emotion Regulation Questionnaire	Trait-like emotion suppression was measured using the 5-item expressive suppression subscale of the 10-item Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross and John, 2003). The items are rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).
<b>Relationship Satisfaction Measure:</b> ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale	Relationship satisfaction was measured using the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (Fowers and Olson, 1993). The EMS is a 10-item scale that measures different aspects of relationship quality. The items are rated on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher EMS scores reflect higher relationship satisfaction

## Descriptive Results

**Table 2**

### Pearson Correlations

Variable	Scale	Mean	SD	Correlation Coefficient (r)			
				1	2	3	4
1. Lack of Perceived Spousal Job Understanding	1-5	2.42	.89	—			
2. Hiding Feelings from Spouse	1-5	2.53	1.01	.75**	—		
3. Relationship Satisfaction	1-7	3.61	.84	-.52**	-.60**	—	
4. Trait-like Suppression	1-5	4.19	1.33	.45**	.52**	-.23*	—

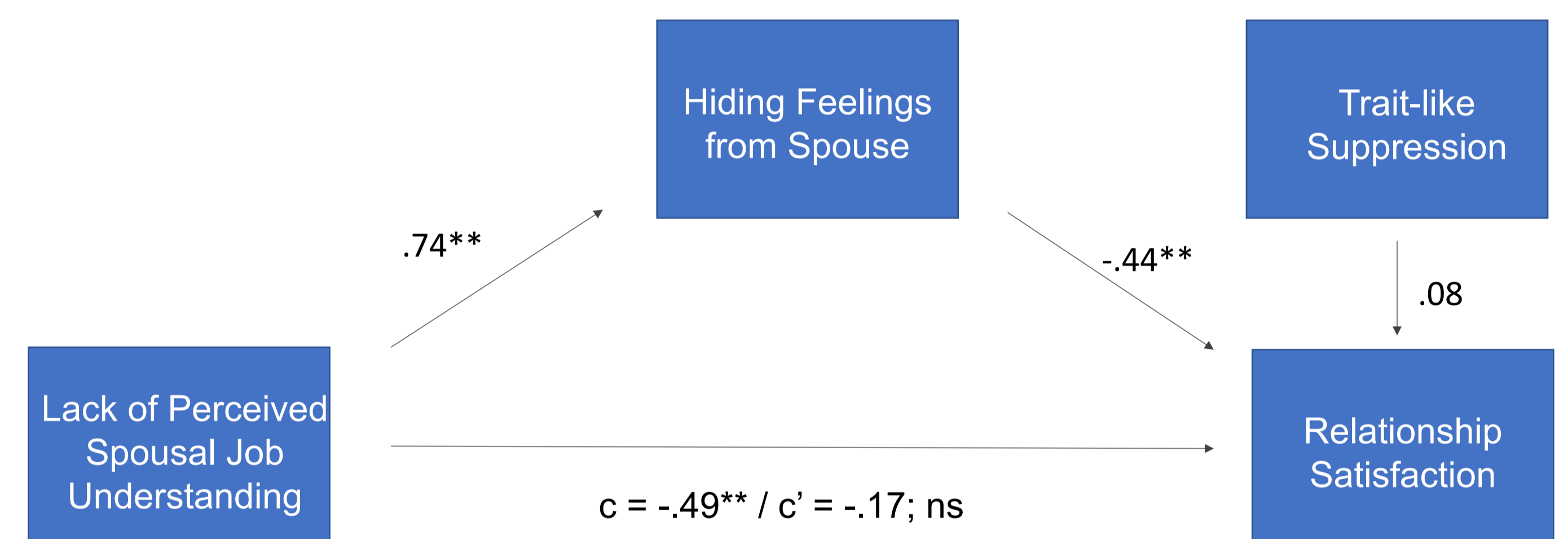
Note.  $N = 109$ , \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

## Hypothesis Testing

- Among LEOs, perceived spousal job misunderstanding was associated with relationship dissatisfaction.
- The extent that LEOs hid their feelings from their spouse mediated the relationship between LEO spouses understanding their partner's job and relationship satisfaction.

**Figure 1**

### Mediating Effects of Hiding Feelings



Note.  $N = 109$ ;  $R^2 = 0.38$ \*\*; \*\* $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

- We investigated whether the emotional culture of law enforcement work potentially contributes to relationship dissatisfaction among officers (LEOs) by measuring two processes: perceived lack of job understanding by one's spouse, and perceived need to hide one's feelings from one's spouse.
- Hiding negative feelings from one's spouse -- including pretending to feel more energetic or interested than one actually feels -- was associated with lower marital satisfaction, even beyond habitual use of emotion suppression as a regulation strategy (which is known to predict poor relationship quality).
- Perceptions that one's spouse does not understand the LEO's job -- which, anecdotally, is a common sentiment among LEOs (and was borne out in our data) -- in turn may result in the officer hiding their true feelings and deriving less satisfaction from the relationship.
- Limitations of this study include its cross-sectional, correlational design, because of which causality cannot be inferred, and the potential lack of generalizability of the sample. We also were under-powered to fully examine gender differences, although findings were consistent among the male and female officers in our sample. Neither did we examine the job or emotion regulation strategies of spouses; findings are based solely on officers' perspectives.
- Nevertheless, consistent with prior findings (Roberts et al., 2013), we suggest that officers' efforts to "protect" themselves or their marriages by shielding their own emotions may backfire, reducing the potential benefits that come from a satisfying spousal relationship.

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