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The Construct of Relationship Quality

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Relationships form the essence of personality and contribute to the individual's wellbeing. Keeping in view the significance that relationships may have on an individual, it becomes compelling to examine relationship quality, the central guiding force of relationships. Relationship quality — the positive or negative feelings about a relationship — is termed an ambiguous concept. The purpose of this article is to review the literature of relationship quality to develop a deep understanding of the construct, by exploring its various determinants. The article begins with a description of the construct followed by a detailed exploration of the factors that determine relationship quality. Research suggests that a wide range of factors have an influence on relationship quality. These include, among others, self-verification and self-enhancement, personality, emotional intelligence, interaction patterns, and partner support. Economic factors also play an important role in determining relationship quality. Previous research also suggests that most of the research on relationship quality has been done on either marital relationships or dating relationships. Further, the determinants of relationship quality may be different with respect to different types of relationships. Additionally, research suggests that relationship quality has been examined using multiple methods, which strengthens the claim of relationship quality being a complex and ambiguous construct.

■ **Keywords:** relationships, relationship quality, determinants of relationship quality

'Relationship' is defined as an enduring association between two persons (Reis, 2001). A relationship is characterised by a stable pattern of interaction between at least two individuals (Asendorpf & Banse, 2000; Hinde, 1993). Two people are said to be in a relationship with one another if they impact on each other and if they are interdependent in the sense that a change in one person causes a change in the other and vice versa (Kelly et al., 1983).

The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry (Sullivan, 1953) suggests that relationships form the essence of personality. The theory proposes that personality is the relatively enduring pattern of recurrent interpersonal situations that characterises a person's life. Sullivan, in his theory, further suggests that significant psychosocial threats to an individual's wellbeing are inherently social in nature. These threats, mainly, are loneliness, isolation, and rejection. Interpersonal loss or failure to form close, supportive relationships contributes to clinical symptomatology (Sullivan, 1953); thus, Sullivan locates healthy or unhealthy psychological development in reactions of one's relationships.

Neyer and Lenhart (2006) suggest that relationships generate the social context of personality development, and that personality and relationships have a continuous interaction, which in turn may initiate or foster change in personality characteristics. In the long run, continuous reciprocal interactions have strong impacts on health in its broadest sense, including wellbeing, life satisfaction, and longevity (Neyer & Lenhart, 2006).

It is this aspect of relationships, as proposed by the interpersonal theory of psychiatry (1953) and Neyer and Lenhart (2006) that makes it compelling to explore individuals' evaluation of their relationships, which is termed 'relationship quality'. Relationship quality is an ambiguous term, potentially encompassing all objective and subjective measures of a relationship (Hardie & Lucas, 2010). The purpose of this article is to develop a deep understanding of the construct of relationship quality by undertaking an extensive review of researches that have shed light on the various determinants of relationship quality.

The article looks into the research of more than two decades to explore a wide range of determinants of relationship quality. As relationships determine personality

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and wellbeing, this makes relationship quality an important aspect to study.

The ambiguous nature of relationship quality is further reflected in the fact that it may differ, depending on the specific relationship. However, irrespective of the relationship, relationship quality becomes an important factor in determining the future course of the relationship, and thus can be termed as the central guiding force of the relationship. Therefore, in trying to obtain a wider perspective of relationship quality, this article does not focus on any one specific relationship, but will cover research on the relationship quality of various relationships.

This article begins with a description of relationship quality as a concept; then, on the basis of previous researches, it explores the various factors that determine relationship quality. Finally, the article derives some inferences about the construct of relationship quality.

Relationship Quality: Definition and Description

Relationship quality refers to how positively or negatively individuals feel about their relationships (Morry, Reich, & Keito, 2010). It is the evaluation of an individual's relationship, which is comprised of relationship awareness, and consists of relational foci of attention. It includes focusing attention on one's relationship or on interaction patterns, comparisons, and contrasts between individuals in a relationship, including attending to the relationship as an entity. It also includes internal representations and conscious reflections about a particular relationship (Acitelli, 2008).

Relationships that foster wellbeing are said to have high relationship quality (Clark & Grote, 2003). High relationship quality involves subjective experiences such as affection, intimacy, and nurturance, while low relationship quality is characterised by conflict, irritation, and antagonism (Dush & Amato, 2005). Goleman (2006) suggests that nurturing and satisfying relationships are an enormous boon to our health and wellbeing, while stressful and contentious relationships are toxic to our system.

Relationship quality involves trust, feeling of security, and satisfaction. It also involves understanding, validation and care (Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986), expression of emotions (Feeney, 1995, 1999; Clark, Fitness, & Brissette, 2001), and forgivingness (McCullough, 2000). Therefore, relationship quality involves a range of positive feelings and emotions that may consequently have a significant impact on the relationship.

Determinants of Relationship Quality

Relationship quality as a construct has been found to be determined by a number of other psychological factors. A discussion of these factors is given as follows.

Love Styles

In their study, Davis and Latty-Man (1987) examined how Lee's color-of-love model (1973) is associated with the five clusters of Davis and Todd's (1982, 1985) relationship assessment scale, which includes the dimensions of viability, intimacy, care, passion, and a series of negative feelings, exemplified by conflict and ambivalence. The color-of-love model suggests six love styles — Eros (romantic, passionate love), Storge (friendship love), Pragma (rational love), Ludus (game-playing love), Mania (possessive, dependent love), and Agape (all-giving, selfless love). The study showed that Eros, Agape, and Ludus strongly predicted the six global clusters — viability, intimacy, passion, care, satisfaction, and conflict/ambivalence — whereas Pragma, Mania, and Storge made little contribution to their prediction.

Richardson, Medvin, and Hammock (1988) examined the association of Lee's six love styles with relationship satisfaction. It was found that Ludus was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. Eros was positively associated with relationship satisfaction. Agape showed the same pattern as Eros. Storge and Pragma were found to be unrelated to relationship satisfaction, and Mania was found to be negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction.

In exploring the association of love styles with relationship satisfaction, Hendrick, Hendrick, and Adler (1988) found that the perception of a partner's love style (especially Eros, Ludus, and Agape) was substantially correlated with the individual's own relationship satisfaction. The individual's own love styles were also highly predictive of the individual's relationship satisfaction. For men, relationship satisfaction was best predicted by passionate love (Eros) and self-esteem, and the absence of game-playing love (Ludus). For women, passionate love and the absence of both game-playing and possessive love (Mania) best predicted relationship satisfaction (Hendrick et al., 1988). The same study found that dating couples who stayed together versus those who broke up were higher in passionate love and lower in game-playing love.

Meeks, Hendrick, and Hendrick (1998) found Eros, Agape, Storge, and Mania to be positively related with relationship satisfaction, and Ludus to be negatively related to relationship satisfaction. Eros, Agape, Storge, and Ludus (negatively) were all found to predict relationship satisfaction.

Self-Verification and Self-Enhancement

Researchers have shown a lot of interest in examining the impact of self-verifying and self-enhancing feedback from partners in close relationships. Research has documented significant effects of partner self-verification (Katz, Anderson, & Beach, 1996; Schafer, Wickrama, & Keith, 1996; Swann, Hixon, & De La Ronde, 1992) and self-enhancement (Katz et al., 1996; Swann, De La

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Ronde, & Hixon, 1994) on measures of relationship quality.

Self-verification theory suggests that individuals prefer information that is consistent with their self-concept. Self-enhancement theory suggests that individuals prefer positive feedback about the self.

Adopting a self-enhancement perspective, Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996a, 1996b) demonstrated that people are most satisfied when their partners perceive them more positively than they perceive themselves. Other research guided by a self-verification perspective shows that people are sometimes more intimate and committed in their relationships when their partners verify their self-conceptions, or when their partners view them in a fashion consistent with how they view themselves, even when they view themselves negatively (Swann, 1983; Swann et al., 1994).

A number of studies show that people who are verified by their partners are characterised by higher levels of relationship quality than non-verified persons. More specifically, individuals receiving self-verifying partner feedback report greater intimacy (Katz et al., 1996; Swann et al., 1994), satisfaction (Katz et al., 1996), commitment (Swann et al., 1992), and marital happiness (Schafer et al., 1996) than non-verified counterparts.

A key factor in maintaining successful social relations is recognising others' perception towards oneself and being able to respond appropriately. Swann et al. (1994) and Murray et al. (1996a) found that individuals in short-term dating relationships reported greater intimacy in their relationships the more positively they were perceived by their partners, whereas verifying appraisals were not related to intimacy. Conversely, as the relationship matures and the relationship's future is no longer a central concern, Swann et al. (1994) argued that the relationship becomes less evaluative and that verifying feedback, particularly of negative self-views, becomes an asset instead of being a threat to the stability of the relationship.

Research has demonstrated that individuals in long-term dating relationships may also respond positively to verification of their global self-concept. Katz et al. (1997) found that women in long-term dating relationships reported greater satisfaction and intimacy with their partners when there was greater congruence between their reported global self-esteem and perceived partner appraisals.

Campbell, Lackenbauer, and Muise (2006) found that for people with negative self-perceptions, verifying feedback resulted in more positive evaluations of the partner and relationship for people in long-term versus short-term relationships, but the results were mixed regarding the effects of enhancing feedback.

Past research has demonstrated that how people are perceived by their romantic partners, in relation to their self-perceptions, is strongly related to how satisfied they are in their relationships (Murray et al., 1996a), how close and intimate they feel in their relationships (Swann et al., 1994), and even how they alter their self-perceptions over time (Murray et al., 1996b).

Swan et al. (1994) found that self-verification from the partner was not associated with relationship intimacy among dating couples. Rather, dating individuals reported greater intimacy when partner feedback was more positive or self-enhancing, even when feedback was non-verifying.

Self-enhancing feedback has also been found to influence marital quality. Self-enhancement theory suggests that people are motivated to view themselves favourably (Jones, 1973). Katz et al. (1996) found that married individuals who received self-esteem enhancement reported greater satisfaction and greater intimacy than their counterparts. They further found that self-esteem verification from the spouse also impacted marital quality. Married individuals who reported higher levels of self-esteem verification evidenced greater satisfaction and greater intimacy than married individuals who reported lower levels of self-esteem verification.

Personality

Social and personality psychologists have long been interested in understanding how personality traits influence the quality of relationships (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005). A number of researches, over the years, reveal unambiguously that there is a reliable association between self-reported personality traits and relationship quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000, 2002; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000).

Many studies have examined which specific personality traits are most highly correlated with relationship satisfaction. For instance, low levels of negative personality traits such as neuroticism and negative emotionality have been consistently associated with self-reports of relationship quality and satisfaction (Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; Robins et al., 2002; Watson et al., 2000). A meta-analysis (Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004) found that overall neuroticism is the strongest personality correlate of marital satisfaction. Additionally, Karney and Bradbury (1997) have found that negative personality traits such as neuroticism are associated with decreased satisfaction from the onset of marriage.

Gattis, Berns, Simpson, and Christensen (2004) found that neuroticism was significantly higher in a sample of distressed couples than in a sample of non-distressed couples. A study by Caughlin et al. (2000) found that trait anxiety is associated with marital satisfaction, and this association was largely explained by self-reports of communication patterns between partners. It is therefore clearly evident that the presence of highly neurotic individuals in relationships may have important implications for self-reported relationship quality and satisfaction (Robins et al., 2000).

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Positive emotionality and other positive personality traits have also been frequently examined with respect to self-reported relationship quality. Robins et al. (2002) found that positive emotionality was related to higher quality relationships and also low levels of negative relationship outcomes, such as self-reported conflict and abuse. Likewise, Watson et al. (2000) examined personality and relationship satisfaction in a sample that included both married couples and a sample of dating couples. Specifically, they found that extraversion is associated with satisfaction in married couples and that conscientiousness and agreeableness are associated with satisfaction in dating couples. In another study (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997), conscientious wives had husbands who were more sexually satisfied and conscientious husbands had wives who were more generally satisfied with their relationships.

Watson et al. (2000) examined both self- and partner-reports of personality in dating and marital couples. In the sample of dating couples, conscientiousness and agreeableness, irrespective of who provided the data on personality (self or partner), were associated with both the males' and females' relationship satisfaction. Significant associations were also found for neuroticism and extraversion. In the sample of married couples, self-reports of extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism were all associated with self-reports of satisfaction, results that were corroborated by partners' reports of personality.

Donnellan, Conger, and Bryant (2004), in a sample of long-term married couples, found that for female participants, agreeableness, neuroticism, and openness were associated with observed negative interactions. For the male participants, only neuroticism was significantly associated with observed quality. Another report drawn from the same study (Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005) examined committed relationships with a majority of married couples. In this study, positive emotionality was negatively correlated, and negative emotionality was positively associated, with negative interactions. Thus, some evidence for an association between personality and observed quality has emerged.

Holland and Roisman (2008), in their study using multiple methods of relationship quality (self-report, observation, and physiological response), found that significant associations were identified between personality (in aggregate) and self-reported quality. In contrast, few significant associations were identified for both observed emotional tone and physiological responding. Moreover, the overall magnitude of the effect of personality traits in aggregate on non-self-report indicators of relationship quality was trivial across dating, engaged, and married couples. Few significant effects were found for each of the personality traits, a consistent pattern across informants, and indicators of quality did not clearly emerge for any specific personality trait. In addition, there was some heterogeneity in unique effects across couple type. The most consistent unique effects were found in the domain of self-reported quality — and conscientiousness was the most consistent predictor of this dependent measure. For example, among dating and engaged couples, individuals who were more conscientious reported higher quality relationships. In addition, married couples reported greater conscientiousness and also exhibited higher levels of skin conductance.

Interaction Patterns

Meeks, Hendrick, and Hendrick (1998), in their study, found that individual's distributive conflict tactics (destructive statements, include criticism, showing anger, and sarcasm) predicted relationship satisfaction. The findings also showed that integrative conflict tactics (constructive statements, tactics that involve information sharing), and avoidant conflict tactics (topic shifting, denial of conflict, and semantic focus) were related to relationship satisfaction.

Gavin and Furman (1996), in their study of adolescent girls' relationships with mothers and same-sex best friends, posited harmony as an essential construct in understanding close relationships. Harmony is defined by frequent supportive interactions and infrequent conflictual interactions (p. 375), and is related to the level of cooperation and positive affect expressed in videotaped interactions. Gavin and Furman (1996) even found that both mother-daughter dyads and best friend dyads in harmonious relationships were also better able to negotiate power in their interactions.

A construct similar to harmony in parent-child and best friend relationships has been found to have emerged in marital relationships. Gottman, Coan, Carrere, and Swanson (1998) tested the ratio-model or balance model that examines the level of positive affect relative to the level of negative affect. They found that couples who demonstrated a higher ratio of positive to negative affect in videotaped interactions described their marriages as happier.

Gottman et al. (1998) also conceptualised husband-wife interaction in terms of interpersonal power. A pattern in which low-level negativity by the wives triggered defensive negative behavior by the husbands, interpreted as husbands' unwillingness to accept influence from their wives, was associated with deterioration of marital quality.

Galliher, Welsh, Rostosky, and Kawaguchi (2004) examined the perception of four different interactions patterns — positive, negative, harmony, and influence of late adolescent couples in videotaped conversations and their self-report of global relationship quality on the basis of those interaction patterns. The findings showed that girlfriends' perceptions of less conflict and greater harmony displayed by their boyfriends were associated with better overall relationship quality. In contrast, boyfriends' perceptions of their own supportive behaviour and their

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own capacity to accept influence predicted better relationship quality. The findings also showed that girlfriends' reports of relationship quality were predicted from perceptions of their boyfriends' behaviours. In contrast, for boyfriends, it was their own behaviours that were most salient in predicting relationship quality.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Researchers have speculated about potential links between EI and relationship quality among couples (Fitness, 2001; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). Noller, Beach, and Osgarby (1997) reviewed research showing that accuracy in expressing and recognising emotions correlates with couples' reports of marital happiness. Carton, Kessler, and Pape (1999) found that sensitivity and accuracy in non-verbal communication predicts happiness.

Empathy, an important aspect of EI, is very likely one of the key factors that influence relationship satisfaction (Meeks et al., 1998). A significant component of empathy, perspective-taking, has been defined as the capability to understand another person and put oneself in that person's place (Long, 1990).

Individuals hold basic relationship expectations concerning the degree to which their partners should understand their point of view. The failure to fulfill these basic expectations consequently results in decreased relationship satisfaction (Long & Andrews, 1990). Long (1993) investigated perspective taking towards divorce. The findings indicate that individual's perspective-taking behaviour towards the spouse is related to greater relationship satisfaction and disinclination towards divorce.

Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, and Palfai (1995) and Fitness (2001) found a positive association between emotion clarity, measured by the Trait-Meta Mood Scale (TMMS), and relationship satisfaction in couples. Partners with high emotion clarity (i.e., a clear understanding of their feelings when they are experienced) reported less difficulty in forgiving a partner-initiated conflict than those with low emotion clarity.

According to Fitness (2001), higher EI might enable people to more effectively manage the delicate emotional negotiations involved in seeking and granting forgiveness. Therefore, by implication, higher EI may lead to better management of disagreements, which in turn might predict less conflict and higher relationship satisfaction. Rusbult, Bissonnette, and Arriaga (1998) also noted the importance of emotion regulation in marital satisfaction. Their work showed that in comparison with unhappy spouses, happy spouses are more likely to accommodate than to retaliate during conflict.

Schutte, Malouff, Bobik, Coston, and Greeson (2001) found that EI correlated with reports of marital satisfaction. They also showed that individuals who perceived their partners to have higher EI reported significantly greater marital satisfaction. Brackett, Warner, and Bosco (2005) examined the association of EI with relationship quality outcomes. The study concludes that couples with both partners low in EI tended to have less positive relationship outcomes than couples in which at least one partner had high EI.

Partner Support

Brunstein, Dangelmayer, and Schultheiss (1996) found that people who reported greater goal support from their partners evaluated their relationships more positively. The support component most strongly related to relationship satisfaction, however, was how much partners directly contributed to or impeded goal accomplishment.

Fitzsimmons and Shah (2008) also presented experimental evidence that others who are instrumental to goal success are evaluated more positively. In their studies, individuals reported greater closeness and displayed stronger approach tendencies towards people who were previously identified as helpful in achieving primed goals.

Cross-sectional associations between observed support behaviour and relationship wellbeing suggest that people who are more satisfied behave more positively and less negatively during support interactions (Lawrence et al., 2008; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). In a longitudinal study comparing the interaction behaviour of couples whose relationships were classified as distressed (separated, divorced, or low in satisfaction) versus satisfied two years later, Pasch and Bradbury (1998) found that women in distressed couples offered less positive support and behaved more negatively. This longitudinal evidence indicates that lower levels of support by women reduces relationship satisfaction and increases instability.

According to Reis, Clark, and Holmes (2004), supportive behaviours have a positive influence on relationship security and satisfaction when partners are responsive, understanding, and validating. Cutrona, Shaffer, Wesner, and Gardner (2007) found that support that did not match recipients' needs was associated with poorer concurrent satisfaction precisely because partners were judged to be less understanding.

Overall, Fletcher, and Simpson (2010), in their study of the role of partner support in relationship quality, found that partners evaluated their relationships more positively when they behaved less negatively and provided more nurturant and action-facilitating support. The study further showed that this supportive behaviour of partners predicted recipients' evaluations of relationship quality across the year.

Thus, the degree to which relationship partners actively assist and foster personal growth seems to be an important

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determinant of relationship wellbeing. When partners are less helpful, in contrast, people become less satisfied with their relationships (Overall et al., 2010).

Positive Bias and Accuracy

Most individuals are positively biased when evaluating their romantic relationships. This is supported by a large body of research showing that people systematically evaluate their own relationship as being more positive than what reality may suggest (Agnew, Loving, & Drigotas, 2001; MacDonald & Ross, 1999; Murray & Holmes, 1997; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b).

The ability of individuals to see their relationships and loved ones in an overly positive light appears to be the hallmark of most satisfying and enduring relationships (Murray, 1999; Murray & Holmes, 1996). Dating and married individuals who idealise their romantic partners report greater relationship satisfaction (Fowers, Lyons, & Montel, 1996; Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b), greater commitment to their relationships (Martz, Verette, Arriaga, Slovik, Cox, & Rusbult, 1998), greater love, greater trust, and less ambivalence and conflict in their relationships (Murray & Holmes, 1997). In general, the perception that one's relationship is consistent with one's ideals appears to foster higher perceptions of relationship quality (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999).

Longitudinal research also shows that relationships are more likely to persist when people idealise their relationships (Fletcher et al., 2000; Helgeson, 1994; Murray et al., 1996b; Murray & Holmes, 1997; Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000). Furthermore, early idealisation seems to forecast later increases in satisfaction (Murray et al., 1996b; Murray & Holmes, 1997; Rusbult et al., 2000), love, and trust (Murray & Holmes, 1997), and later decreases in doubt and conflict in the relationship (Murray et al., 1996b; Murray & Holmes, 1997).

On the whole, research suggests that positively biased evaluations of a romantic relationship help people feel good about their relationships (Fletcher & Thomas, 1996). Such bias allows individuals to maintain their conviction that their relationship is worth keeping, especially when the relationship may be threatened by feelings of doubt and uncertainty (Murray, 1999).

However, research also suggests contradictory findings. A longitudinal study revealed that the more participants held idealistic beliefs about their relationships, the more difficulty they had adjusting to a later long-distance separation or dissolution (Helgeson, 1994) perhaps because those with the most idealistic beliefs were also most committed to their relationships (Martz et al., 1998). This suggests that a more accurate understanding of the relationship may be more adaptive when relationship beliefs run the risk of being disconfirmed by a harsher reality.

Therefore, on the one hand, there exists considerable evidence in the close relationship literature suggesting that positively biased relationship perceptions are adaptive for the relationship (Murray, 1999; Murray & Holmes, 1997) and on the other hand, this sense of security may be false (Helgeson, 1994).

Researchers have argued that instead of positive bias it is best to accurately understand one's relationship, as accuracy has also been found to foster relationship quality (Kobak & Hazan, 1991; Noller & Ruzzene, 1991; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). There is growing consensus in the close relationship literature that accuracy and bias are independent and that they can co-exist in the evaluations people make about their relationships (Fletcher, 2002; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Murray et al., 1996a).

Gagné and Lydon (2004) believe that positive outcomes in the relationship depend on the presence of both positive bias and accuracy in people's evaluations of their loved ones. Positive bias is important because it sustains felt security; it helps people regulate their relationship feelings through the ups and downs of daily living. Without this bias, it could be difficult to maintain the conviction that the relationship is worth pursuing (Murray, 1999).

Importantly, Gagné and Lydon (2004) believe that positive bias without accuracy, or accuracy without positive bias, can be harmful. Individuals who are positively biased but not accurate are probably very content in their relationships. However, this may result in ignoring epistemic needs, which may very well lead to poor decision making. Conversely, individuals who are accurate but not positively biased are likely to be despondent and resigned to their relationship fate. Therefore, both positive bias and accuracy together make a positive contribution to relationship quality.

Depression

The association between depression and relationship quality has been established by a number of researches (O'Mahen, Beach, & Banawan, 2001; Rehman, Gollan, & Mortimer, 2008; Whisman, 2001). Much work suggests that depressive symptoms are detrimental to relationship quality. Whisman (2001) documented a negative correlation between depressive symptoms and marital satisfaction. Other studies reveal longitudinal and reciprocal effects of depressive symptoms and marital distress over time (Fincham, Beach, Harold, & Osborne, 1997; Kouros, Papp, & Cummings, 2008; Kurdek, 1998).

Knobloch & Knobloch-Feddars (2010) found that people's depressive symptoms were negatively associated with their own dyadic adjustment and positively associated with their own relationship distress. The findings also showed that relational uncertainty — how unsure

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individuals are about their perceptions of a relationship (Knobloch, 2007; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) — may mediate the link between depressive symptoms and relationship quality.

Economic Factors

Economics is a key factor affecting relationship quality. Several studies have linked financial instability to relationship dissolution and divorce (Burstein, 2007; Hoffman & Duncan, 1995; Kalmijn, Loeve, & Manting, 2007; Lewin, 2005; South, 2001). Explanations for this link suggest that economic hardship may place stress on couples, thereby increasing conflict and leading eventually to divorce (Ono, 1998; White & Rogers, 2000). Individuals might fight over limited resources and struggle with disappointment when financial means are meagre. Thus, economic circumstances may diminish relationship quality by increasing conflict and reducing intimacy.

Research suggests that financial strain increases couple-level violence for cohabiting and married couples (Benson, Fox, DeMaris, & Van Wyk, 2003; Fox, Benson, DeMaris, & Van Wyk, 2002). Papp, Cummings, and Goeke-Morey (2009) found that married couples' arguments over money were more intense and recurrent than other sources of disagreement. A study using a sample of both cohabiting and married couples found that family harmony was marginally related to income and perceived economic wellbeing (Fox & Chancey, 1998).

Most research on economic factors and violent conflict has combined married and cohabiting couples in one sample (e.g., Benson et al., 2003; Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer, 2002; DeMaris, Benson, Fox, Hill, & Van Wyk, 2003; Fox et al., 2002; Van Wyk, Benson, Fox, & DeMaris, 2003). These researches concluded that economic strain is positively related to violence in relationships, although there is disagreement regarding appropriate measures of economic distress.

De Maris et al. (2003) found that partners' unemployment and neighbourhood disadvantage were related to physical violence, whereas Cunradi et al. (2002) showed that income, but not unemployment, was negatively associated with violent conflict. Other studies have found a relationship between objective and subjective measures of financial strain and violent aggression toward female partners (Benson et al., 2003; Fox et al., 2002; Van Wyk et al., 2003).

Hardie and Lucas (2010) examined the relationship between economic factors and two dimensions of relationship quality — affection and conflict. The findings show that economic factors play an important role in perceived relationship quality among young cohabiting and married couples.

The findings also suggest that the role of economic factors depends on the dimension of relationship quality that is examined. Affection appears to be particularly responsive to educational attainment. Economic factors play a larger role in the level of reported conflict for both cohabiting and married partners, and this relationship emerged regardless of the type of conflict: generalised or violent. The findings therefore suggest that economic wellbeing can improve positive measures of relationship quality and that economic hardship can play a role in instigating couple conflict (Hardie & Lucas, 2010).

To sum up, a look back at more than two decades of research on relationship quality, love styles, self-verification and self-enhancement, personality, interaction patterns, emotional intelligence, partner support, positive bias and accuracy, depression, and economics are the factors that determine relationship quality.

Conclusion

Relationship quality, the positive and negative feelings about a relationship, is an evaluation of the individual's relationship. Relationship quality involves nurturance, affection, intimacy, wellbeing, understanding, validation, care, and even forgivingness. The ambiguity of the concept of relationship quality is reflected in that it is multidimensional and can be represented by a number of terms, such as relationship satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, and so on. On the basis of this review, conclusions about relationship quality can be drawn on in terms of the determinants of relationship quality, relationship quality in different types of relationships, and the methodology used for examining relationship quality.

Research suggests that there are a wide range of factors that determine relationship quality, which include even economic factors. Factors as extreme as love styles and depression being found as determinants of relationship quality give a good indication of the varied factors that have an influence on relationship quality, as well as the extensive research that has been done on relationship quality.

These factors determining relationship quality help in providing a better understanding of the whole construct of relationship quality. In a way, these factors can be seen as constituting relationship quality, and thus give insight into its various components. It also suggests that on the basis of the nature of their influence on relationship quality, training and intervention programs can be developed to enhance or alleviate these factors in order to improve the relationship quality of individuals.

Further, among all the determinants of relationship quality, a lot of research has been done on self-verification and self-enhancement, personality, interaction patterns, emotional intelligence, partner support, positive bias and accuracy, and economic factors. This suggests that these are the major factors that may determine relationship quality. Economic factors were not expected to be a major determinant of relationship quality, but research suggests

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these to be an important determinant, especially in marital relationships.

Another major finding in reviewing the research on relationship quality shows that it has been examined in varied relationships, such as marital relationships, romantic/dating relationships, cohabitation, friendship, and even parent-child relationships. However, most of the research has been done on either marital relationships or romantic/dating relationships. Other relationships, especially parent-child relationships, have been given little emphasis. Each relationship is significant in its own way. Therefore, future research on relationship quality should focus on the relationships that have been given a comparatively lesser emphasis by researchers.

It is intriguing to find out that the determinants of relationship quality differ when it comes to specific relationships. Love styles, self-verification and self-enhancement, personality, emotional intelligence, partner support, and positive bias and accuracy were found to be common as determinants of relationship quality in both marital and dating relationships. Economic factors were found to be common as determinants of marital relationships and cohabitation. Further, interaction patterns were found to be determinants of relationship quality specifically for friendship and parent-child relationships. This gives a good understanding of the construct of relationship quality, when looking at different types of relationships.

Future research examining factors such as personality, emotional intelligence, and depression in friendship, which were found to be determinants of relationship quality in marital and dating relationships, would be of interest. It would be intriguing to find out how they may differ in these diverse relationships. Similarly, it would be intriguing to examine how interaction patterns found specifically in friendship relate to relationship quality in marital and dating relationships. Examining many of these determinants of relationship quality in cohabitation may also reveal interesting findings, as research in cohabitation is on the rise and many aspects of it are still not very well known.

Finally, the article reveals that different methods have been used to examine relationship quality. Relationship quality has been assessed by using self-reports, observations, and physiological responses. Multiple methods used in examining relationship quality further give an account of the complexity of the construct. Given the ambiguity of the construct of relationship quality, using multiple methods rather than just a single one is a reasonable way to conduct research in relationship quality.

To conclude, therefore, on the basis of this review, relationship quality has a wide range of determinants that may differ with respect to the type of relationship. Additionally, keeping in view its complexity and ambiguity, multiple methods are also used in examining relationship quality.

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