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A Systematic Review of Heart Rate Variability in Romantic Relationships: Implications for the Link between Marriage and Health.

Objective: The aim of this systematic review was to summarize the associations between heart rate variability (HRV), or an index of the parasympathetic nervous system, and romantic relationship indices (e.g., relationship status, relationship quality). Beyond elucidating the biobehavioral underpinnings of romantic relationships, studying HRV in couples has the potential to increase our understanding of the well-established link between marriage and health. We illustrate possible links among HRV, romantic relationship quality, and health within a theoretical model and make recommendations for future research.

Method: A systematic review resulted in 24 studies that tested associations between HRV and an index of romantic relationships (i.e., relationship satisfaction) in adult participants.

Results: Overall, higher HRV was associated with higher relationship satisfaction, better relationship quality, and positive partner interactions. Findings on HRV and relationship aggression were mixed, suggesting a possible curvilinear relationship. All studies tested concurrent links between HRV and relationship indices, making the directionality of associations unclear.

Conclusion: The current review found evidence suggesting a positive association between higher HRV and better relationship quality. We recommend that future studies take into account directionality and partner effects, and test whether HRV is a possible mechanism in the link between marital quality and health. HRV shows promise as an important but understudied component of both close relationships and the development of health outcomes.
Interventions Targeting Sexism: A Meta-Analysis

As recently as 2014, the underrepresentation of interventions targeting sexism in research on prejudice reduction led to calls for more research on reducing sexism (Becker, Zawadzki, & Shields, 2014). Two years later, there is a small and emerging literature testing these interventions, which provides an opportunity for early research synthesis. This meta-analytic review examines the efficacy of diverse interventions aiming to decrease sexism or increase feminism in 23 unique studies. Across all studies, the interventions produced a medium effect at post-intervention ($d = .48$, $p < .01$), and a slightly smaller effect at follow-up timepoints ($d = .35$, $p < .01$). Experiential interventions produced better outcomes than didactic and dialogical interventions. The hypothesis that interventions must minimize participant reactance and maximize participant self-efficacy in order to be effective (Zawadzki, Danube, & Shields, 2012) was not supported. Studies that assessed sexist behavior had higher effect sizes than those that did not, and studies that assessed sexist attitudes had lower effect sizes than those that did not. Several threats to internal validity, including participant allocation procedures and missing outcome data, moderated intervention efficacy, which raises the possibility of a biased effect size estimate. Studies with low risk of bias due to these factors demonstrated a significant, though smaller, effect size. ($d = .25-.36$, $p$'s < .01). Implications of these findings and limitations of this meta-analysis are discussed.

A Cry in the Dark: How Parents’ Physiological, Behavioral, Cognitive and Affective Responses to Infant Cry Are Linked With Child Abuse Risk

Excessive or inconsolable crying is the strongest predictor of child physical abuse, particularly in the first year of life. Given that the caregiving relationship is paramount to the infant’s survival, it remains unclear why some caregivers react aggressively to their infants call for attention. In the current review, we summarize research on the physiological, behavioral, cognitive and affective responses to infant cry that are linked to risk or incidence of child physical abuse (CPA). We categorized results based on three different CPA risk-groups: at-risk childless adults, at-risk parents, and physically abusive parents. Differences and similarities in response to infant cry across these groups were found, and specific responses are discussed. The similarities across these groups suggest that these responses may be targeted for possible intervention before abuse occurs. Notably, although the context of infant cry has been purported as a critical window for CPA vulnerability, the current review suggests that some responses to positive infant stimuli may also indicate risk for CPA. Future research would benefit from the inclusion of responses to positive and negative infant stimuli in the investigation of CPA-risk, as well as longitudinal follow-up to determine the eventual abuse trajectories of at-risk parents and non-parents.
A large body of research has demonstrated the implications of peer perceptions for social and emotional adjustment. Significantly less is known about children and adolescents’ meta-perceptions (i.e., the impression that youth’s have of how they are perceived by others). The current review addressed three questions: Can youth accurately determine how their peers evaluate their social ability? Does meta-accuracy depend on demographic, psychological and social factors? What are the implications of meta-perception accuracy for adjustment? Findings indicated that most children are able to accurately identify their peers’ perceptions of their social competence. Factors such as ethnicity, the presence of internalizing symptoms, and social functioning appear to, at least to some extent, impact levels of meta-accuracy. Finally, preliminary evidence suggests that accurate meta-perceptions may be a double-edged sword, with both favorable and unfavorable consequences for youth’s adjustment. Future directions for meta-accuracy research are discussed.