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QUARRELS; A Multidimensional Assessment of Romantic Relationship Quality and its Relationship to Adult Attachment Dimensions

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Abstract: ***The present study aims to preliminary examine the psychometric properties of the QUAlity of Romantic RELationships Scale (QUARRELS). In two studies involving a total of 950 individuals across Europe, it was revealed that the QUARRELS is a tool of good overall reliability (a=.94). It comprises of a set of 6 reliable factors (Support, Emotional Intimacy, Sexual Intimacy, Rapport, Pacifism & Trust) and a composite factor of a total quality of romantic relationship score. Indications of construct validity were provided after revealing significant negative correlations between adult attachment dimensions from (-.18 to-.53) and both adult attachment anxiety and avoidance shared significant negative correlations with overall quality of romantic relationships (r=-.46) and (r=-.59). The QUARRELS has promising qualities which could be useful both in future research and in clinical settings.***

Keywords: Romantic Relationships, Support, Emotional Intimacy, Sexual Intimacy, Rapport, Pacifism, Trust, QUARRELS

1. Introduction

Romantic relationships have always attracted the interest of the scientific community due to their significance for personal and family well-being (Bradbury, Fincham & Beach, 2000). Nevertheless, scientific research often fails to examine the quality of romantic relationships as a dynamic interplay among various emotional, social or sexual aspects that co-exist within a relationship and are unique to each couple. Psychometric tools assessing the quality of romantic relationships tend to be unidimensional, centering solely on the experiencing of romantic relationship quality or satisfaction as a single construct. This may lead researchers to use multiple scales to address distinct factors of romantic relationship quality (e. g. Cho et al., 2020).

In addition, since romantic relationships represent a constellation of various factors, relationship satisfaction, happiness, adjustment and quality should be treated as distinct theoretical entities. Although these terms are often used interchangeably or are considered overlapping (e. g. Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994, Spanier, 1976) and common sense dictates that they indeed share close links, it neglects to account for relationships that may be of high quality but are not necessarily experienced as emotionally satisfying, due to mediating variables such as depression or perfectionism (McKinnon et al., 2012).

Adult attachment has been traditionally associated with various relationship variables and is considered the main theoretical framework through which romantic relationships may be systematically examined. A plethora of studies have identified adult attachment as a consistent predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction (e. g., Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Cann, Norman, Welbourne, & Calhoun, 2008; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney, 1999; Simpson, 1990) and meta-analyses of such studies have also succeeded in validating the effect of attachment on relationship variables linked to romantic satisfaction (Haden, Smith & Webster, 2013 & Li & Chan, 2012).

The aim of the present research was to preliminarily examine the psychometric properties of a new concise measure of romantic relationships quality (QUAlity of Romantic RELationships Scale; QUARRELS) assessing relationship quality as a distinct entity from relationship happiness, adjustment and satisfaction. It was designed to assess distinct quality-related subscales and was further examined for convergence with a measure of adult attachment, since it has been repeatedly shown that relationship satisfaction is sensitive to measures of adult attachment.

2. Method

Design

The first study is of psychometric nature assessing the reliability and the factor validity of the QUARRELS. To determine a set of reliable factors that compose the QUARRELS, two analytical steps were taken. A Principal Components Analysis (varimax rotation) was completed on the first half of the sample (N=370) and then, the factor structure which emerged from the PCA was validated with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Maximum Likelihood) using the second half (N=370). The second study was a study of correlational nature which aimed to examine the existence of negative correlations among adult attachment anxiety and avoidance with the individual factors as well as the composite score of the QUARRELS. This would verify whether the quality of romantic relationships as measured with the QUARRELS, yields similar correlations that would be consistent with previous findings related to adult

attachment. This would help provide indications of good convergent validity of the scale and expand on the existing literature regarding the adult attachment-quality of relationships measurement.

3. Participants

For the first study, a voluntary, online English-speaking sample of 740 individuals (562 women and 178 men) was employed from various European countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden) with a mean age was 28.1 years of age (SD=4.6). In study two, similarly to study 1, participants were an online sample of 210 English-speaking adults across Europe (160 women and 50 men) with a mean age of 27.9 years (SD=3.9). Participants from both studies used either social media or SurveyMonkey where questionnaire distribution took place and had previously been or currently were involved in romantic relationships.

4. Materials

After a thorough review of the existing literature on aspects of romantic relationships, 19 mental health scientists were informed as to the aims of the study and had a group discussion before identifying 40 items which depicted romantic relationship characteristics that would be relevant to relationship quality. This initial pool of 40 items was then scrutinized by 2 independent psychologists specialized in couples therapy, who were instructed to identify items that did not effectively capture (with specificity) the topic of investigation. Through this process, 24 items with good face validity remained. In addition, for study 2, the finalized version of the QUARRELS was administered accompanied by the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Short Form (ECR-S; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007). The 12-item ECR-S, was derived from the original Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) and was used to assess participants' adult attachment orientation in terms of anxiety and avoidance. Six of the 12 ECR-S items represent attachment avoidance (e. g., "I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back") and six items represent attachment anxiety (e. g., "My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away"). Similarly to the QUARRELS, items are also rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7), and item ratings on each subscale are scored so that higher scores indicate higher levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety.

5. Procedure

Respondents were given the following description:

"Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements below regarding aspects of your present romantic relationship. If you are currently not involved in a relationship, please respond based on your latest relationship. " Participants were given the right to drop out if they felt uncomfortable with the content of the scale.

6. Results

The data set was divided into two groups using the odds and evens split method by keeping gender and geographic location proportionately represented in both samples of study 1. A principal component analysis (PCA with varimax rotation) was completed on the first dataset (N=370) and taking into consideration the Keiser criterion and Cattell's screeplot, 6 factors of 4 items each were yielded. These factors explained 76, 64% of the variance in the scale. The Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale indicated excellent internal consistency with a=.94. Factor loadings for each item may be viewed in table 1. Subscale reliabilities were all above the reliability threshold of.70 and ranged from.71 to.94. Finally, corrected item-total correlations were all above the.30 threshold. For study 2, bivariate correlations were examined.

Table 1: Factor Loadings and Corrected Item-Total Correlations of QUARRELS Items

QUARRELS Items (.94)	Loadings	Item-Total R
Factor 1 (S): **Support (.94)**		
S1. We are there for each other.	, 804	, 78
S2. We can count on one another in times of need.	, 789	, 74
S3. We support each other.	, 750	, 77
S4. We take good care of each other.	, 747	, 76
Factor 2 (E): **Emotional Intimacy (.93)**		
E1. We enjoy being affectionate to one another.	, 834	, 64
E2. We say loving things to each other.	, 824	, 66
E3. We enjoy physical expressions of affection (e. g. hugs, kisses etc.).	, 803	, 71
E4. Our relationship is not characterized by emotional intimacy. (r)	, 789	, 75
Factor 3 (SI): **Sexual Intimacy (.91)**		
SI1. We share a sexually satisfying relationship.	, 885	, 50
SI2. We have good chemistry when it comes to sex.	, 877	, 50
SI3. Our sex life is emotionally satisfying.	, 789	, 64
SI4. During sex, we experience feelings of warmth and intimacy.	, 788	, 62
Factor 4 (R): **Rapport (.89)**		
R1. We have fun when we hang out.	, 682	, 78
R2. We can be ourselves with each other.	, 608	, 60
R3. We enjoy spending time together.	, 589	, 75
R4. We rarely seek each other's company. (r)	, 547	, 79
Factor 5 (P): **Pacifism (.71)**		
P1. Our relationship can get very competitive. (r)	, 801	, 43
P2. We hold grudges. (r)	, 770	, 48
P3. We engage in power games. (r)	, 664	, 49
P4. We exclusivelyfight over things of great importance.	, 527	, 40
Factor 6 (T): **Trust (.85)**		
T1. Infidelity has never been an issue for us.	, 820	, 34
T2. We trust each other blindly.	, 789	, 63
T3. There is an atmosphere of absolute trust between us.	, 735	, 70

T4. We get jealous and possessive. (r)	, 704	, 49

Note. Cronbach's alphas for each factor are presented in bold parentheses. (r) = items to be reversed prior to analysis. Factors were abbreviated: S= Support, E= Emotional Intimacy, SI= Sexual Intimacy, R= Rapport, P= Pacifism and T= Trust.

Next, a CFA which corresponded to the 6 factors obtained by the PCA was completed. The 6-factor model was then tested against a single factor and a bifactor model. The estimation method used was Maximum Likelihood (ML), using the variance-covariance matrix. No missing data existed in the dataset. Based on model-testing guidelines, the following indices were employed: (1) the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom (CMIN/Df) (values lower than 3 indicating acceptable fit); (2) the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) (values of 0.6 and below indicating good model fit); (3) the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) and the comparative fit index (CFI) (values equal or higher than.95 indicative of good fit); (3) the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (values below.08 indicate good fit) (Brown, 2015).

As it may be seen in table 2. the bifactor model of a composite score for general «Romantic Relationship Quality» as well as individual factors (Support, Emotional Intimacy, Sexual Intimacy, Rapport, Pacifism and Trust) produced the most satisfactory results, indicating good model fit across all fit indices.

Table 2: Model Fit Indices for the Proposed Models.

Model	CMIN/df	SRMR	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Single-factor solution	11, 597	.11	.59	.63	.17
6-factor solution	2, 769	.06	.93	.94	.07
Bi-factor Solution	2, 191	.04	.95	.96	.06

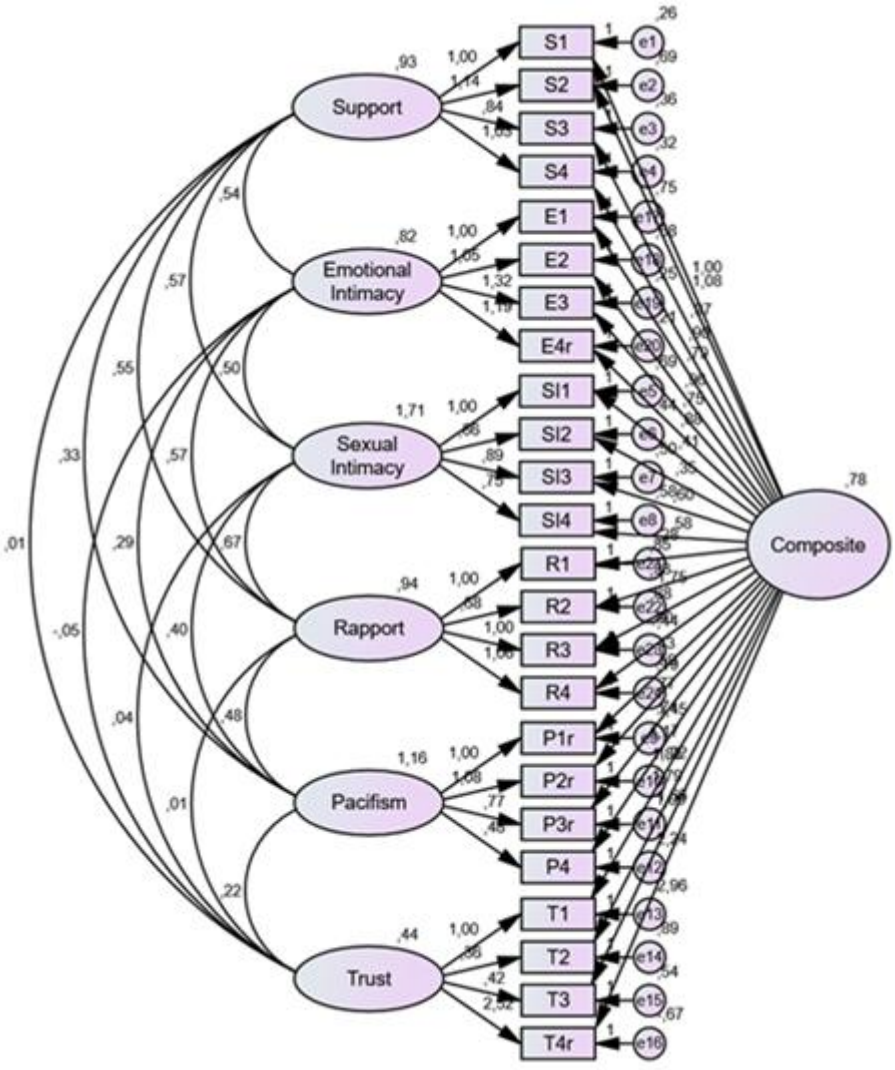

Figure 1: The Bifactor Model of the QUARRELS

As far as adult attachment dimensions and their correlates across factors were concerned, as well as the composite score of the QUARRELS, weak to moderate negative significant correlations were found for individual factors ranging from (-.18 to-.53) and both adult attachment anxiety and avoidance shared a significant negative correlation with overall quality of romantic relationships (r=-.46) and (r=-.59) as it may be seen in table 3.

Table 3: Correlations between QUARRELS Factors and Adult Attachment Dimensions

N=210	S	E	SI	R	P	T	Overall
Attachment Avoidance	- .42	- .33	- .22	- .53	- .25	- .43	- .59
Attachment Anxiety	- .47	- .38	- .18	- .35	- .52	- .32	- .46

Note: All correlations were significant at.01 level.

7. Discussion

PCA and CFA analyses identified and validated the following romantic relationship characteristics: Support, Emotional Intimacy, Sexual Intimacy, Rapport, Pacifism and Trust as well as a general composite score of general romantic relationship quality. These factors have satisfactory reliabilities and the bifactor model has provided the best fit to the data. Furthermore, the scale yielded negative correlations with adult attachment dimensions as expected, providing indications for construct validity, although further research examining its other psychometric properties is needed (such as test-retest stability).

The use of measures like the QUARRELS could help scientists assess a wider spectrum of romantic relationship characteristics, multidimensionally, without sacrificing the attainment of an overall score of quality for romantic relationships. It is a concise and economical tool with many potential applications in future research endeavors and it has possible clinical applications in couples' therapy.

8. Disclosure

No Conflicts of Interest

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