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Summary
Perceived Partner Responsiveness in Personal and Relational Contexts: A Review Study

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Perceived partner responsiveness (PPR) is one of the most functional factors contributing to one's personal well-being and close relationships. Partners are expected to be responsive in times of need. In fact, the interpretation of partner responsiveness determines the actual effect of responsiveness on their outcomes. Both parties sometimes need to be understood, validated, and cared by partner that makes PPR into a dyadic process. The purpose of the current paper is to present a comprehensive literature review about the role of PPR in personal context and romantic relationships. In the first section, the characteristics of PPR are defined and assessment methods are introduced. In the second section, the studies examining the role of PPR in intrapersonal and interpersonal processes are discussed and the models of PPR are presented. Finally, some recommendations are suggested for further studies.

The Definition and the Importance of Perceived Partner Responsiveness

PPR is the evaluation process of partner's[1] reactions as responsive or unresponsive in times of need. PPR depends on three major qualities, namely, sense of being understood, validated, and cared for by the partner (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Reis & Shaver, 1988). More specifically, "feeling understood" refers to the belief that partners are aware of self-related characteristics. "Feeling validated" corresponds to the belief that partners respect personal desires and goals. "Feeling cared for" stands for the belief that partners help fulfill personal and psychological needs (Reis, 2007).

The three major components of PPR were mentioned first by Reis and Shaver's (1988) model of intimacy process. They proposed that intimacy occurs depending on two factors: Personal self-disclosure and perceived partner responsiveness to that disclosure. Following the actor's sharing of personal experiences or feelings, the partner shows emotional or behavioral reactions. The actors' personal motives, needs, goals, and fears affect their personal disclosures and interpretations of partner reactions while the partners' motives, needs, goals, and fears form their own interpretations of disclosure and reactions to disclosure. Then, partner's reactions are assessed through the actor's sense of being understood, validated, and cared for, referring to PPR. Perceiving the partner to be responsive is expected to result in intimacy between partners. Since intimacy is a dyadic process, both dyads can take the actor or partner roles in time of disclosure. In this way, as reciprocal PPR increases, the mutual intimacy level also increases (Reis & Shaver, 1988). In fact, intimacy is necessary to maintain relationship welfare and adaptive relations. Because self-disclosure and responsiveness exchange leads to a change in intimacy, the lack of one component automatically reduces intimacy. Importantly, unless having strong intimate bonds, relationships may result in dissatisfaction or even separation/divorce (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the sequence of self-disclosure-responsiveness-PPR to establish intimate bonds and even to solve the reasons of disputes in a relationship.

Measurement of PPR

In the light of Reis and Shaver's (1988) pioneering article, the recent studies used many analogues scales directly measuring the major components of PPR (Reis, 2007). Most of the studies mentioned in the following sections have used this assessment method. Some of them have compared observer ratings and actor reports to detect, if any, perceptual differences.

1 It is critical to note that authors who conducted studies on this topic use various terms to describe the support-receiver (e.g., perceiver, actor, respondent) and support-provider (e.g., supporter, partner, responder). In this paper, "actor" was used referring to support-receiver/perceiver and "partner" was used referring to support-provider for ease of reading and avoiding potential confusion.

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Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Outcomes of PPR

Several theoretical approaches (e.g., attachment theory, interdependence theory, self-determination theory) support the main premises of PPR which are essential for maintaining personal and relational well-being. For instance, attachment theory suggests that people whose attachment figures are sensitive and responsive to their needs have stable and positive mental representations of self and others. However, when availability and responsiveness of attachment figures fail to satisfy the needs, the sense of insecurity increases and negative mental representations of self and others are activated (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In other words, an insecurely attached individual may perceive partner as unresponsive that may project negatively to emotion regulation processes.

PPR and Psychological Well-Being

It is presumable that partners provide people to feel better, and improve the quality of life. The positive contributions of PPR to psychological well-being (e.g., eudaimonic well-being; Selçuk, Günaydın, Ong, & Almeida, 2015) and physical well-being (e.g., sleep quality; Selçuk, Stanton, Slatcher, & Ong, 2017) have been demonstrated in the recent studies.

Lemay (2014) suggested that there are both accurate and biased perceptions influencing personal well-being through PPR. Supporting this argument, a recent study revealed that if the actor values the partner and if the partner acts responsively, then the actor tends to perceive the partner to be highly responsive, which in turn, enhances actor's well-being (Lemay & Neal, 2014).

PPR and Self-Regulation Processes

The research findings showed that PPR influences and shapes self-regulation processes which are necessary to regulate defensiveness to failure (Caprariello & Reis, 2011) and achieve personal goals (Tomlinson, Feeney, & Van Vleet, 2016; Winterheld & Simpson, 2016).

PPR and Relationship Functioning

A number of studies were conducted to clarify the role of PPR in relationship-specific mechanisms, such as intimacy (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998), attractiveness (Berrios, Totterdell, & Niven, 2015), sexual interest (Birnbaum, Reis, Mizrahi, Kanat-Maymon, Sass, & Granovski-Milner, 2016), satisfaction (Algoe & Zhaoyang, 2016), forgiveness (Pansera & La Guardia, 2012), and affect regulation (Kane, McCall, Collins, & Blascovich, 2012). Some of these findings have addressed the other interpersonal situations affecting PPR apart from self-disclosure (e.g., conflict, Gordon & Chen, 2016). In addition, the potential effects of the actor's personal characteristics on PPR, such as self-esteem (Forest & Wood, 2011), social anxiety (Bar-Kalifa, Hen-Weissberg, & Rafaeli, 2015), mindfulness (Adair, Boulton, & Algoe, 2018), attachment dynamics (Beck, Pietromonaco, DeVito, Powers, & Boyle, 2014), and gender roles (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005) have been investigated.

Actor-Related and Partner-Related Dynamics in Predicting PPR

Some researchers considered that there may be some other actor-related dynamics beyond personal characteristics moderating the effect of PPR on relationship functioning. For instance, supporting their proposed model of projection of responsiveness, Lemay, Clark, and Feeney (2007) found that PPR was predicted by the actor's own responsiveness more strongly than by the partner's actual responsiveness. This study is critical in terms of emphasizing the necessity of evaluating the potential effect of the actor's own behaviors and studying responsiveness in a dyadic framework. Lemay and Neal (2013) also found that the actor's value for partner (i.e., commitment, care, and regard) influences their memories about the partner's responsiveness and called this bias as wishful memory of responsiveness. The actor's daily sexual satisfaction was also found to predict PPR (Gadassi et al., 2015).

Partner-related factors also affect how actors interpret partner responsiveness. The influence of partner's empathy (Winczewski, Bowen, & Collins, 2016) and actual responsive behaviors, as aforementioned, on PPR have been documented in the previous studies.

Coping with Unresponsive Partner

According to Lemay and Melville (2014), past studies disregarded the reverse effect of self-disclosure. People may avoid disclosing personal experiences with the partners if they behave in neglectful, antagonistic, or egocentric manners. If people disclose experiences which are not be reciprocated, there is a risk of rejection that decreases the trust in partner's care and commitment. Therefore, forecasting the outcomes of self-disclosure in unresponsive situations may prevent experiencing the negative consequences of partner unresponsiveness and may contribute to the relationship commitment. Experimental and daily-diary studies conducted among romantic couples supported this argument (Fivecoat, Tomlinson, Aron, & Caprariello, 2015; Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004).

Proposed Models of PPR

Two specific models explaining the mechanisms of PPR have been recently proposed in the light of previ-

ous findings. First, as a result of their studies on accurate and biased motivations of PPR, Lemay and Clark (2015) suggested that in addition to the partner's actual responsiveness, the actor's own feelings toward the partner affect PPR directly and indirectly through biased cognitive processes. Then, PPR increases relationship functioning and personal well-being. To this mechanism, the actor who is motivated to maintain the relationship tends to make positively biased evaluations about partner responsiveness.

Second, Reis and Gable (2015) distinguished the intentions and actual responsiveness of the partner. First, the partner activates his/her intentions to be responsive following a responsiveness-eliciting event is experienced. Then, the intentional responses are exhibited to the actor via verbal or nonverbal cues. The actor tries to find some clues from the partner's responses to perceive the partner to be responsive. In return, the actor's personal and relational functioning takes form depending on PPR. Whereas the partner's own needs and expectations may influence their intentions and expressions, the actor's own needs and expectations may have an impact on their PPR. The actor may not perceive the partner to be responsive if one of four possibilities is observed: (1) If the partner does not recognize the need for responsiveness in a situation, (2) if the partner does not have any intention to perform responsive acts, (3) if the partner cannot enact responsive behaviors as needed, or (4) if the partner's behaviors cannot be recognized as responsive by the actor.

There are both overlapping and distinguishing features of these two models. Although both models consider intrapersonal and interpersonal processes, the former model features the actor's role and the latter model features the partner's role in PPR. In fact, these two models capture complementary dynamics in the process of PPR. The actor's desire to bond and his/her cognitive biases should be converged with partner-specific variables of the second model and tested simultaneously. In addition to the actor- and partner-related variables whose effects were empirically tested, the role of unexplored third variables, such as cultural variations, culture-based gender roles, proactive-reactive sensitivity, and relational mobility, should be examined to better understand the dynamics of PPR in the future studies.

Overview and Discussion

Overall, it can be concluded that perceived partner responsiveness is critical for people to maintain a high quality of life as well as a functional and satisfactory romantic relationship. Perceiving partner to be highly responsive to one's needs makes positive contributions to the actor's psychological and physiological well-being, and self-regulation processes. PPR is also necessary to uncover many relationship-specific feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Some actor-related and partner-related variables enhance or reduce PPR. In this framework, documented findings have largely corroborated Reis's (2007) argument that PPR is a key organizing principle of the relationship discipline.

Although a great number of studies have supported the functional role of PPR in intimate relationships, some actor- and partner-related predictors, which have not been explored yet could have effects in the paths to PPR. Future researchers should especially consider culture specific actor, partner, and relationship related characteristics to better understand the perceptual differences in the PPR process. For instance, in a society where disclosure behavior is not supported culturally and implicitly expressed needs are expected to be intervened PPR process might take a different trajectory. Supporting the need for cultural studies in this area, the researchers have found that the link between PPR and personal outcomes was stronger in individualist cultures (i.e., the United States) than collectivist cultures (i.e., Japan) (Taşfiliz, Selçuk, Günaydın, Slatcher, Corriero, & Ong, 2018). Similarly, a review study, pointed out that culture is a factor triggering or preventing self-disclosure behavior (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). Confirming this argument, Chen's (1995) study showed that American partners disclose more in various topics as compared to their Chinese counterparts. Accordingly, cross-cultural studies should be conducted to investigate whether the underlying mechanisms of PPR are expressed with culture specific expectations. Anticipation of the needs that actor expressed tacitly might have a direct influence on the actor's interpretive filter of partner responsiveness in collectivist cultures. In contrast, responding the needs that actor expressed explicitly might more strongly predict higher levels of PPR.