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**Relational Competence Theory:
Can Respect, Authenticity, and Re-
sponsibility for the Relationship Predict
Relationship Quality?**

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Abstract

Positive relationships are considered to be one of the most important protective factors in the development of the individual. Relational Competence Theory states that there are competencies that promote the establishment and maintenance of positive relationships. Danish family therapist and writer Jesper Juul defined relational competence as a loosely interconnected set of relational values and attitudes. The current study examines if relational values and attitudes can be used to predict relationship quality. A survey conducted with a small sample ($N = 51$) of parents of junior high school students in Central Switzerland was used to measure the predictor variables *Respect for the Other's Individuality*, *Authenticity*, and *Responsibility for the Relationship*, as well as two different measures of relationship quality. The variables were measured both for the relationships between parents and their children and romantic partner relationships. A regression analysis showed that the three predictors significantly predicted relationship quality in both types of relationship. The effect sizes varied from medium to large. Even though these findings are not causal in their nature, they suggest that these three variables may be part of a wider set of relational values and attitudes that promote positive relational outcomes. One possible implication may be that individuals can improve their relationships by reconsidering their relational attitudes and values.

Relational Competence Theory: Can Respect, Authenticity, and Responsibility for the Relationship Predict Relationship Quality?

More than a century of psychological research and theory building stresses the importance of social encounters for human development. Psychologists from nearly every branch of research state that social relationships strongly influence how human beings develop, both physically and psychologically. For instance, positive social relationships are considered one of the most important protective factors against mental disorders (Uchino, 2004), and the absence of positive social relationships is linked to mental disorders (Berkman, 1995; Englund, I-Chun Kuo, Puig & Collins, 2011). The same is true for physical health (Uchino, Cacioppo & Kacolt-Glaser, 1996). Social relationships are linked to wellbeing, happiness, mental health, physical health, and low mortality (Perlman, 2007). About two decades ago, social neuroscientists started to reveal the effects of social relationships for brain development. For instance, the quality of relationships influences the size and the structure of the developing human brain (for reviews see Gerhart, 2013; Siegel, 1999). The quality of social processes within the family is the single most important factor for the development of the individual (Golombok, 2008). As Wilson and Gottman (2002) point out, research has shown that relational processes within the family are linked to children's pro-social behavior, social and cognitive competencies, aggression, conduct disorders, criminality, antisocial behavior, depression, anxiety, and so forth.

In this context, it is important to distinguish between different functions of social relationships. One important function of social relationships described in the psychological literature is social support. Social support includes social encounters providing individuals with resources, practical help, advice, information, and so forth, which strengthen the individual's situation in life and buffer against struggles. This kind of social contact is important for the individual's development because it directly or indirectly supports positive economical, private, and health-related outcomes. However, it is evident that these more "superficial" or "instrumental" forms of social contact are insufficient to explain all the beneficial effects of social relationships. Some evidence suggests that it isn't in the first place the quantity of social contact that matters for the positive effects of social relationships, but the quality (e.g., Lucas & Dyrenforth, 2006; Uchida, Endo & Shibana, 2012). For instance, an analysis of different forms of social support conducted by Reinhardt, Boerner, and Horowitz (2006) shows that emotional support is more important for an individual's wellbeing than instrumental support. Furthermore, it shows that it is more important for individuals to know that they could get support than to actually receive it. A positive close relationship to another person evidently is the main condition for knowing that one could receive support in case he or she actually needed it. Therefore, much interest has been directed to more "personal" or "intimate" forms of social encounters and the role they play for the development of the individual. At least some research suggests that emotional and cognitive closeness is necessary for the positive effects attributed to relationships (Smith, Loving, Crockett & Campell, 2009). It has also been suggested that closeness is the most important condition for a relationship to be of high quality (Dibble, Levine & Park, 2012; Myers & Diener, 1995). It isn't easy to define what "closeness" means in a relationship, and a commonly accepted definition is still missing (for a discussion of the issue see Clark & Grote, 2012). Closeness is often defined in terms of social roles: Close relationships usually exist between parents and their children, siblings, relatives, romantic partners, good friends and possibly between teachers/coaches and students. This study will follow this definition and focus on the two most common close relationships: Parent-children-relationships and romantic partner relationships.

Relational competence theory

Considering the positive effects of positive close relationships on the individual, it makes sense to investigate the factors promoting positive close relationship development.

Questions like “How can one increase the probability for a positive close relationship to develop?” matter for parents, teachers, therapists, leaders, and other people who aim to improve their relationships. Moreover, for a variety of professionals who work on a daily basis with individuals, families, or organizations, an important issue is, whether individuals can be trained to create and maintain positive close relationships. About ten years ago, Ryff and Singer (2000) stressed the importance of more extensive research and theory building on processes and factors promoting positive relationship development. They point out that until recently research has focused too much on the negative side of relationship development – factors that disturb the development of flourishing relationships. According to them, it’s time that researchers begin to focus on the promoting factors instead. A similar conclusion was presented by Snyder and Lopez in their textbook on positive psychology (2007). However, some recent studies show that the focus has started to change (e.g., Canevello & Crocker, 2010). Ryff and Singer (2000) have stressed that it is important that the different traditions within the field of social relationships meet in order to develop a common framework for the understanding of positive close relationship development. L’Abate (2009) has recently made similar claims. He argues that time has come for a unified theory of relationships and the processes that influence relationship quality. As Levitt and Cici-Gokaltun (2010) point out, there is hardly any empirical and theoretical material describing the processes common to different kinds of close relationships (e.g., parent-child relationships and romantic relationships). So far, fundamental differences concerning social roles, power differences, and so forth, have been standing in the way. One attempt to combine different theories of close relationships was made by an Italian research team: L’Abate, Cusinato, Maino, Colesso & Scilletta (2010) started the search for what they call *relational competence*. Central issues in Relational Competence Theory are whether there are competencies that lead to positive relationship development, what these competencies may be, and if they can be trained.

For children and their development, these considerations are crucial. Howe (2005) points out that the infant is born with a fundamental need to closely relate to other human beings, and that the quality of these relationships defines how the child’s brain, psychological self and consciousness develop. As he states, in the end, it is always the caretaker with his thoughts, values, beliefs, feelings, emotions and memories who matters most for the development of the child. The same reasoning lies at the heart of attachment theory and other research areas considering parent-child-relationships (e.g., child maltreatment, different parenting styles, etc.). The way adults interact with children influences greatly how the children develop and who they are to become.

Relational values and attitudes in relational competence

The Danish family therapist and writer Juul (1995, 2006) has argued that relational competence is something like an “ethical code”, which means that it has to do with values and attitudes. He defined relational competence as a loosely interconnected set of relational attitudes and values. According to Juul (1995, 2006), three of the central components of relational competence are equal-worth/respect, authenticity, and responsibility for the relationship. The first one, *equal-worth/respect*, describes an individual’s attitude regarding differences between the own cognitions, intentions and emotions and the ones of the other. It is a measure of an individual’s willingness and openness to learn to know the other’s feelings, intentions, and thoughts and to respect them and take them as seriously as the own ones. The underlying value may be called equal-worth and considers every individual as valuable as the other. Any expression of someone’s individuality in form of intentions, emotions, thoughts, and so forth, is considered to be meaningful and should be taken seriously, even in case of disagreement. In a relationship, this attitude implies that one pays attention to the other’s expressions without condemning or depreciating.

The second component of relational competence, *authenticity*, describes an individual’s willingness and openness to honestly, authentically, and openly express emotions, intentions

and thoughts to the other in the relationship. Instead of keeping the own inner and outer experiences secret, they are made transparent for the other in order to make it possible for him/her to know, understand and share the experience. The underlying assumption is that close relationships only develop if two people share their individual experiences in an authentic manner. In combination with an attitude of respect for the other's individuality, authenticity generates a higher degree of sharing and caring.

The third component of relational competence, *responsibility for the relationship* is a concept, which describes an individual's ability and willingness to see himself as a decisive and influential part of the relationship. For instance, this concept implies that the individual is taking active steps to induce change when problems arise, instead of just putting the blame on the other. Furthermore, an individual who accepts his or her responsibility for the relationship is prone to reflect the own relationship-specific behavior, because he or she knows that it always takes two for a relationship to succeed. The assumption is that relationships improve if both partners see themselves as responsible parts of the relationship and express the willingness to self-reflect and change in times problems occur.

Unfortunately, few studies have investigated the relationship between relational attitudes and values and the quality of close relationships (one early example is the one of Huston & Rempel, 1989). Harvey and Omarzu (1997) analyzed close relationships and the factors leading to a positive relationship development. They concluded that aspects like mutual self-disclosure, other forms of goal-oriented behavior aimed at facilitating the relationship, and attributions about own and other's motivations, intentions, and effort in the relationship are essential steps in bonding among humans. According to this work, creating positive close relationships involves several components: (a) behavior aimed at knowing the other (e.g., self-disclosure on the part of one and listening, observing, and asking questions on the part of other), (b) attributions about and perceptions of a partner's qualities and predispositions to behave in certain ways, (c) acceptance of and respect for what is learned about the other via the knowing and self-disclosure process, and (d) reciprocity in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors between partners. The similarities between Harvey and Omarzu's work and the claims made by Juul (2006) are obvious. The process of learning to know the other requires that each one of the partners is expressing his/her individuality in an authentic manner. If one is "playing a role", just saying what is expected, or faking emotions, it is hard to learn to know whom he or she is. Moreover, it can be argued that to be able to accept and respect, what is learned about the other, an attitude of respect for the other's individuality is essential. If one accepts that the other has emotions, thoughts, and intentions, which may differ from the own ones, he is prepared to listen and accept them instead of condemning or depreciating, even if they seem to be irrational or strange. Confronted with this attitude, the other will feel safe to express his private thoughts, intentions, and emotions. Eventually, the combination of these relational attitudes and values may lead to intimacy and closeness in the relationship.

The concepts investigated in the current study

This study will analyze if and in what manner measures of *Respect for the Other's Individuality*, *Authenticity*, and *Responsibility for the Relationship* can predict relationship quality. Initial evidence suggests that these concepts influence relational outcomes: During the last decade, *Respect* as a relevant concept for relationship characteristics and development has been defined (Frei & Shaver, 2002; Langdon, 2007) and operationalized (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2007). It is possible to predict negative social processes by using measures of respect (Langdon & Preble, 2008). The problem is that respect can be defined in many different ways and none of these studies have used a measure of respect corresponding to the concept as it is described above (respect for the other's individuality). However, Barber's (1996) notion of "psychological autonomy" closely resembles respect as defined by Juul (2006). Psychological autonomy has been studied extensively and results suggest that parents who respect their children as existentially liberate and valuable individuals with their own intentions and characteristics support

a positive development in their children (e.g., Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011; Mantzouranis, Zimmermann, Mahaim & Favez, 2012; Shek, 2007). Although they didn't explicitly focus on respect for the other's individuality, there are several other traditions within psychology that have investigated respect for the other's individuality in an indirect manner. Attachment theory, for instance, has focused on factors in parent-child-relationships, which lead to a secure attachment pattern. A recent review of the precursors of attachment security has stressed the importance of parental behaviors like responsiveness, sensitivity, warmth, love, and so forth (Belsky & Pasco Fearon, 2008). It can be argued that these behaviors often evolve from an attitude of respect for the other's individuality. Parents who do not respect their children for whom they are, have difficulty to be responsive, sensitive, and warm. Similar findings are presented by researchers who used the attachment framework to understand and explain processes in relationships between adults (e.g., Caron, Lafontaine, Bureau, Levesque & Johnson, 2012; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Work on mentalizing or reflexive function of caregivers, partners, and therapists has shown that an individual's ability and willingness to perceive other persons as separate beings with own intentions, emotions, and cognitions promote secure attachment patterns and positive psychological development (Fonagy et al., 1995; Wallin, 2007). Additionally, research on romantic relationships and marriages suggests that a respectful attitude towards the partner promotes positive relationship development (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Wilson & Gottman, 2002). Gottman (1994) identified "the four horsemen of the apocalypse" – four behaviors leading to negative relationship development: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. Criticism involves attacking the partner's personality or character, usually with the intent of making someone right and someone wrong. Contempt involves attacking the partner's sense of self with the intention to insult or psychologically abuse him/her. Defensiveness involve that at least one of the two people in the relationship sees himself as the victim, and tends to ward off a perceived attack by making excuses, cross-complaining, yes-butting, whining, and so forth. Stonewalling describes behavior patterns involving withdrawal from the relationship as a way to avoid conflict. In the long run, positive relationship development demands that these behaviors do not take place (Gottman, 1994). These findings are similar to the ones discussed above – they describe the beneficial effects of an underlying attitude of respect for the other. If a parent or partner is having an attitude of respect for the other's individual expressions of feelings, thoughts, and intentions, he or she will behave in a responsive, warm, and sensitive manner (instead of insulting, condemning, criticizing, etc.). Similar conclusions are suggested by research focusing on parenting styles (one recent example is given by Alegre, 2011): Positive relationship development is generally linked to authoritative parenting. Authoritative parents exert firm control over the child's behavior, but emphasize the independence and individuality of the child. They have a clear notion of present and future standards of behavior for the child, but still they are rational, flexible, and attentive to the needs and preferences of the child. The parental influence on the child's behavior happens rather through negotiation than punishment and exertion of power. Again, it can be argued that parental behaviors like these are developing on the basis of an attitude of respect for the other. However, the attitude of respect for the other's individuality has not yet been studied directly.

Authenticity has also received some attention. Several researchers have developed measures of the concept (e.g. Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis & Joseph, 2008). Ever since, authenticity has been related to positive romantic relationships (Brunell et al., 2010), self-esteem (Impett, Schooler, Sorsoli, Henson & Tolman 2008), verbal defensiveness (Lakey, Kernis, Heppner & Lance, 2008), and depressive symptoms (Theran, 2011). However, a variety of definitions and operationalizations make it difficult to compare different studies. Close to the concept of authenticity is the one of self-disclosure. Research has shown that the ability and willingness to show "oneself", e.g. the own emotions and cognitions, to a partner is related to positive outcomes in close relationships (Bauminger, Rinzi-Dottan, Chason & Har-Even, 2008). The notion

of self-disclosure is similar to authenticity as described by Juul (2006). Even if this cannot be taken as evidence, it may suggest that authenticity promotes positive close relationship development.

Responsibility for the Relationship has not yet been defined in the scientific literature nor studied with scientific methods, but several researchers have stressed the importance of “reparation processes” for the development and maintenance of positive close relationships. The feeling of responsibility for the relationship, for instance by taking active steps to induce reparation processes after conflicts, appears to be an important factor for the maintenance of positive close relationships (see for example Wilson & Gottman, 2002). Additionally, Gottman’s “horsemen” *defensiveness* and *stonewalling* are typical examples for not taking responsibility for the relationship and research showed that both of them hinder positive relationship development (Gottman, 1994).

Research Questions and Hypotheses in the Current Study

Relational Competence Theory states that there are competencies that promote positive relationship development in different types of relationships. Juul has several times stressed that this is the case (1995; 2006), but scientific evidence is sparse. This study aims at assessing if the measures of relational competence are associated with each other, a precondition for the causal relationship proposed by theoretical considerations. Moreover, it aims at investigating if the variables of relational competence in one type of relationship correlate with relational competence in the other type of relationship. Thus, the variables are measured for both the parent-child-relationship and the relationship to the partner.

Research Question (RQ) 1: Are the three measures of relational competence associated with each other - within and between the two types of relationships?

Despite the limitations related to varying definitions and operationalizations, theoretical considerations suggest that relational values and attitudes matter for relationship outcomes and that the three relational attitudes and values *Respect for the Other’s Individuality*, *Authenticity*, and *Responsibility for the Relationship* promote flourishing relationships. Thus, the current study aims to investigate if the following hypothesis is true:

Hypothesis 1: Respect for the Other’s Individuality, Authenticity, and Responsibility for the Relationship predict relationship quality.

Because relationship quality is multidimensional and evaluations of relationship quality vary from one individual to another, two different measures of relationship quality are used in this study. One has emerged from the functionality tradition and aims at measuring relationship quality on the basis of behavioral and functional elements. The second one has been specifically developed for assessing the respondent’s feelings only, without references to the other’s behaviors. It aims at measuring relationship quality on the basis of the emotional experience and interpretation of the other in the context of the relationship. In this study, it is assumed that positive relationships include both, experiences of positive relationship function and positive feelings for the other. Thus, it states that:

Hypothesis 2: The two measures of relationship quality correlate with each other.

Hypothesis 2 has evolved from methodical concerns. It is considered a precondition for valid investigations of Hypothesis 1 and Research Question 1. Thus, it will be assessed before turning to the other issues. It is assumed that albeit from different theoretical perspective, both measures target relationship quality and thus should be correlated.

Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of 51 parents of junior high school students in a small village in Central Switzerland. The students were between 12 and 16 years old. In this region, it is highly common to attend the local public junior high school and the participants are representative for parents of teen-aged children in this area. The population in this area can be described as relatively conservative and ethnically homogeneous. The sample consisted of native Swiss people, belonging to lower and middle class. Information about the participants' age has not been collected, because it was not considered relevant for this study and because of the risk that potential participants might fear that providing the age would allow for identifying them, resulting in a loss of participants. Forty-seven (92 %) of the participants were female. The parents were asked to focus on the relationship to their oldest child. Even though most of them were describing their relationship to a teenage child, some had an oldest child, who was slightly above twenty. They have not been excluded from the sample, since comparisons showed that the results did not vary substantially due to this small difference in age.

Procedure

Envelopes consisting of a letter of invitation, the survey, and a stamped return envelope were handed out to the students at school. The letter informed the parents that participation was voluntary. It also explained the objectives of the study. Furthermore, absolute anonymity was guaranteed. The instructions asked only one of the parents to fill out the survey. The participants were instructed to not discuss the survey with the partner or the children. Furthermore, the participants were instructed to fill out the respective parts of the questionnaire with respect to the relationship to their oldest child and their current or most recent romantic relationship, respectively.

Measures

The survey consisted of five different scales, which were used for two different types of close relationships – the relationship between a parent and a teenage child and the relationship between two romantic partners. Each one of the scales consisted of seven or eight four-step Likert-type items. The participants were asked to indicate to what degree various statements were true for them and their relationship with the child or the partner, respectively. The answers ranged from *is completely true* (4), over *is quite true* (3), to *is rather not true* (2), and *is not at all true* (1). About half of the items were reversed. The items of the three scales for the predictors were presented in random order, as well as the items of the two scales measuring relationship quality.

Respect for the Other's Individuality (ROI) consisted of eight items. The items were developed for this study on a theoretical basis, following the descriptions presented by Juul (1995; 2006), Gottman (1994), and attachment theory (Belsky & Pasco Fearon, 2008). The scale comprises various aspects of a respectful attitude – behavior, emotions, and cognitions. Examples for the items are “I try to always be attentive to my child's/partners feelings, and to take them seriously.” or “It happens often that I condemn my child's feelings or statements (-)” or “I am open for my child's/partner's ideas and suggestions, and let them influence our life”. Cronbach's alpha for the scale in parent-child relationships was .78, and for the romantic partner relationship .67.

Authenticity (A) also consisted of eight items. The scale was developed on the basis of theoretical considerations, too. The items focused on behavioral, emotional and cognitive aspects and aimed at assessing if a person is willing to express his/her “true” feelings, intentions, opinions, and thoughts for the other. Examples of items are: “It is important for me that my child/partner knows my feelings and thoughts.” or “My child/partner knows my opinions and

views.” Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was .76 for the parent-child-relationship, and .86 for the romantic partner relationship.

Responsibility for the Relationship (RR) consisted of seven items. The scale was developed for this study and measured two main issues: First, if a person regards himself as a decisive and responsible part of the relationship, and second, if he or she is willing to take responsibility for the initiation of reparation processes. Examples of items are: “It happens often that I blame my child/partner for problems in the relationship. (-)” or “After we had an argument, I usually wait for my child/partner to take the first step toward reconciliation. (-)” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .68 for the parent-child relationship, and .74 for the romantic partner relationship.

Relationship Functioning (RF) consisted of eight items, which describe relationship quality on the basis of the experience of relationship-specific behaviors. Examples of the items are: “I can always have a good chat with my partner/child.” or “I know exactly what my partner/child means when he/she says something”. The scale was developed by Masche, based on older scales aiming at measuring family strengths. It was used in two German studies (Masche, 2003; Masche, 2006). As the present sample was German-speaking, it could be used without translation. In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .77 for the parent-child relationship and .87 for romantic partner relationship, which is somewhat lower than in these previous studies.

Relationship Satisfaction (RS) consisted of seven items and examples of items are: “It is easy for me to say something positive about him/her.” or “When I think of him/her I am getting a good mood.” The scale has recently been developed by Masche at Kristianstad University and has just been used for the first time in a study with 1,281 junior high school and high school students in Kristianstad, Degeberga, and Fjälkestad in Sweden (J. G. Masche, personal communication, May 3, 2013). The adequacy of the German translation of the scale was controlled by two independent bi-lingual experts, namely the author of the present study and the supervisor who also has developed the scale. In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha for the parent-child relationship was .82 and for the romantic partner relationship .90, which are similar numbers to the ones found in a reliability analysis conducted by Masche for the study in Kristianstad.

Results

Table 1 and 2 provide descriptive statistics for the variables under study. To be seen in Table 3, hypothesis 2 was confirmed, since the two measures of relationship quality correlated

Table 1
Descriptives Parent-Child-Relationship

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Respect for the Other’s Individuality	50	3.17	0.35
Authenticity	49	3.13	0.41
Responsibility for the Relationship	49	3.18	0.38
Relationship Quality I	50	3.22	0.39
Relationship Quality II	50	3.70	0.33

Note. Values are means on a 4-point scale (1 = is not true at all, 4 = is completely true)

significantly for both types of relationships. In parent-child relationships, the two different measures of relationship quality were strongly correlated, in romantic partner relationships the two measures were almost perfectly correlated.

Table 2
Descriptives Romantic Partner Relationship

Variables	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Respect for the Other's Individuality	51	3.18	0.32
Authenticity	51	3.25	0.55
Responsibility for the Relationship	51	3.10	0.42
Relationship Quality I	51	3.14	0.54
Relationship Quality II	51	3.44	0.57

Note. Values are means on a 4-point scale (1 = is not true at all, 4 = is completely true)

Results concerning Research Question 1 are also to be seen in Table 3: All of the three measures of relational competence correlated significantly with each other in parent-child relationships (with effect sizes ranging from $r = .39$; $p < .05$ to $r = .75$; $p < .05$) as well as in romantic relationships (with effect sizes ranging from $r = .42$; $p < .05$ to $r = .70$; $p < .05$). Furthermore, the three measures of relational competence correlated significantly with both measures of relational quality (with the exception of the correlation between *Authenticity* and *Relationship Satisfaction*, which failed to reach significance in the parent-child relationship). The effect sizes varied from medium to large in parent-child relationships (from $r = .46$; $p < .05$ to $r = .70$; $p < .05$) as well as in romantic partner relationships (from $r = .46$; $p < .05$ to $r = .54$; $p < .05$).

Table 3
Correlations between Respect for the Other's Individuality, Authenticity, Responsibility for the Relationship, Relationship Functioning, and Relationship Satisfaction

	1 ROI	2 A	3 RR	4 RF	5 RS
1 ROI	.41**	.52***	.75***	.70***	.52**
2 A	.61***	.55***	.39**	.46**	.22
3 RR	.70***	.65***	.16	.68***	.47**
4 RF	.42***	.50***	.46***	.05	.69***
5 RS	.46***	.54***	.54***	.83***	.18

Note. Above the diagonal, correlations for the parent-child relationship are shown; below the diagonal, correlations for the romantic partner relationship are shown; in the diagonal, correlations between the two types of relationships are shown. ROI = Respect for the Other's Individuality. A = Authenticity. RR = Responsibility for the Relationship. RF = Relationship Functioning. RS = Relationship Satisfaction. $N = 48-50$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Some of the results to be seen in Table 3 are also concerning Hypothesis 1: In parent-child relationships, the three measures of relational competence correlated stronger with *Relationship Functioning* than *Relationship Satisfaction*, and the two measures *ROI* and *RR* correlated stronger with both measures of relationship quality than *Authenticity*. In romantic partner relationships, the three measures of relational competence correlated stronger with *Relationship Satisfaction* than *Relationship Functioning*.

A regression analysis was used to assess the ability of the three measures of relational competencies (*ROI*, *Authenticity*, *RR*) to predict levels of *Relationship Functioning* and *Relationship Satisfaction* in both types of close relationships. As table 4 shows, in parent-child relationships, the three predictors explained 56% of the variance in relationship functioning and 30% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. For the relationship between parents and their children, *Respect for the Other's Individuality* and *Responsibility for the Relationship* were the strongest predictors. *Authenticity* was not a good predictor. The models have been tested for outliers, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity.

Table 4

Predictors of relationship quality in parent-child relationships

Variable	Relationship Functioning			Relationship Satisfaction		
	<i>B</i>	95% CI	β	<i>B</i>	95% CI	β
ROI	.41*	[.05, .77]	.37	.39*	[.00, .78]	.42
A	.13	[-.09, .35]	.14	-.06	[-.30, .18]	-.07
RR	.35*	[.04, .66]	.35	.17	[-.16, .50]	.20
R^2	.56***			.30***		
<i>F</i>	18.91			6.20		
<i>df</i>	3, 44			3, 44		

Note. $N = 48-50$. CI = confidence interval. ROI = Respect for the Other's Individuality. A = Authenticity. RR = Responsibility for the Relationship.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

To be seen in Table 5, in romantic partner relationships, the three predictors explained 29% of the variance in relationship functioning and 36% of the variance in relationship satisfaction. For the romantic partner relationship, *Authenticity* and *Responsibility for the Relationship* were the strongest predictors. *Respect for the Other's Individuality* did not predict relationship quality very well. These models have been tested for outliers, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity.

Table 5

Predictors of relationship quality in romantic partner relationships

Variable	Relationship Functioning			Relationship Satisfaction		
	<i>B</i>	95% CI	β	<i>B</i>	95% CI	β
ROI	.15	[-.45, .75]	.09	.13	[-.48, .74]	.07
A	.39	[-.01, .67]	.33	.33	[-.02, .68]	.31
RR	.24	[-.25, .72]	.19	.39	[-.10, .86]	.29
R^2	.29***			.36***		
<i>F</i>	6.30			8.62		
<i>df</i>	3, 47			3, 47		

Note. $N = 48-50$. CI = confidence interval. ROI = Respect for the Other's Individuality. A = Authenticity. RR = Responsibility for the Relationship.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Discussion

Relational Competence Theory states that there are competencies that promote the establishment and maintaining of positive close relationships (L'Abate et al., 2010). Juul proposed that relational competence evolves from having certain kinds of relational values and attitudes. Among others, the concepts *respect/equal-worth*, *authenticity*, and *responsibility for the relationship* have been identified as components of relational competence (Juul, 1995, 2006). This study aimed at assessing, whether these components are associated with each other, both within the same kind of close relationship and different kinds of relationships. Furthermore, on the basis of theoretical considerations and some initial research (e.g., Belsky & Pasco Fearon, 2008; Harvey & Omarzu, 1997; Wilson & Gottman, 2002), this study aimed at confirming that these components can predict relationship quality.

The results indicate that the three components of relational competence are closely related and can be used to predict relationship quality. Together, the three predictors significantly predicted relationship quality, for both the parent-child-relationship and the romantic partner relationship. These findings corresponds with older studies (e.g., Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch & Thogersen-Ntoumani, 2011; Bauminger, Rinzi-Dottan, Chason & Har-Even, 2008; Brunell et al., 2010) and confirm Harvey and Omarzu (1997) suggestion, that individuals' attitudes toward the other and the self in the relationship are significantly linked to relationship quality.

In parent-child-relationships, attitudes of respect for the child as an individual and responsibility for the relationship correlated strongly and positively with relationship quality. In romantic partner relationships, all of the three components of relational competence correlated significantly with relationship quality, too. But when regressing relationship quality on all predictors simultaneously, they were to the largest part spurious. Most possibly, this has to do with the large overlap between predictors, requiring a larger sample to prove each predictor's unique contribution to relationship quality. There is not one single "winner" predictor that would explain the remaining predictors' associations with relationship quality, but it rather appears as if two predictors are predominantly predictive in each type of relationships. Anyways, the regression equations significantly explain large portions of the variance in relationship quality, stressing the potential importance of these competencies.

This study confirms observations made by many different branches of research (e.g., attachment theory, parenting style, etc.) and adds some new insights by focusing explicitly on attitudes, rather than capacities. As proposed by Harvey and Omarzu (1997) and Juul (1995), the attitude individuals have toward a certain behavior seems to be as important as capacities needed for executing the behavior. For instance, responsiveness, which is identified as one of the most important precursors of secure attachment patterns (Belsky & Pasco Fearon, 2008), is something individuals intend to do, rather than a capacity.

This study also generated some unexpected findings. For instance, in parent-child relationships, *Respect for the Other's Individuality* and *Responsibility for the Relationship* have clearly been the strongest predictors for both measures of relationship quality. In romantic partner relationships, the results were quite different. *Respect for the Other's Individuality* was not a good predictor for relationship quality. Instead, *Authenticity* was a strong predictor. Thus, it must be considered if the scales should be slightly adapted for different types of close relationship. Respect might be expressed differently in the relationship between two romantic partners than in the relationship between parents and their children. It is also possible that relationships between people of the same generation are affected differently than the complementary (partly hierarchical) relation to one's children. The somewhat low Cronbach's alpha for just one type of close relationships may be another argument for reconsidering the use of the scales.

There are several limitations to this study. First, the sample is relatively small and specific regarding the cultural and geographical background of the participants. The conclusions drawn from this study might not generalize to other countries, regions, or cultural settings. An-

other limitation is that the great majority of the answers came from women. The reason for this overweight of female participants was that only one of the parents was asked to respond to the survey. This instruction, in combination with the fact that in Switzerland most women stay at home as housewives, has led to a limited participation of men. Unfortunately, it is impossible to say if the results of this study are valid for male individuals as well. Further research should be conducted with larger samples that are of higher diversity. It is important that male individuals participate, too. Moreover, research designs that examine relational competencies of both partners at the same time, could add information. For instance, it would make it possible to see if the combination of both partner's relational competence is better suited to predict relationship outcomes than individual relational competence. Furthermore, the self-report measures of the participant's own relational competence could be compared with evaluations made by the partner or independent observers. Such an investigation makes sense, since it can be argued that the perceived relational competence by the other may be more important for relationship quality than self-evaluations made by the person himself.

It must be stressed that the current study is based on correlations, which means that causal conclusions cannot be drawn. The theoretical background of this study suggests that the three relational attitudes and values investigated in this study causally affect relationship quality. The precondition for a causal effect is to find an association. After the association has been established, further research can do the next step and explore causal relationships. Experimental designs with repeated measures and control groups as well as longitudinal studies will rule out the alternative explanations of the findings that there might be a third variable or other directionality. Furthermore, it may be possible to develop intervention programs, which positively influence relational values and attitudes. Investigations of the effects of such a manipulation could provide additional evidence for a causal effect of relational values and attitudes on relationship quality.

This study has shown that *Respect for the Other's Individuality, Authenticity, and Responsibility for the Relationship* predict relationship quality for at least two types of close relationships. These findings support the claims made by Juul (2006). This is important, since Juul has been one of Europe's most influential writers on child rearing for almost two decades, even though scientific evaluations of his assumptions and theories were lacking. Given that Juul's theses have affected a large audience and probably have influenced even counseling, it is important to know that these ideas are supported by first empirical evidence.

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