“Understanding the Links Between Social Ties and Health: On Building Stronger Bridges with Relationship Science”

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The quality of one’s social relationships is a robust predictor of disease morbidity and mortality. This epidemiological research, however, has progressed relatively independent of important insights gained from relationship science. This has hindered both literatures as less is known about the more precise psychological and physiological processes responsible for these significant links. In this address, I argue for the importance of more explicit links between relationship science and physical health approaches to the study of social ties. The potential of this approach is illustrated based on two lines of research in our laboratory. The first emphasizes a joint consideration of positive and negative aspects of relationships and its association with health-relevant physiological outcomes. A second, more preliminary line of work, explores links between partner knowledge and cardiovascular function during daily life. The promise and pragmatics of fostering greater integration between relationship science and health-related approaches to the study of social ties are also discussed.