

Relationship quality and anxiety: Associations with self-construal family-of-origin experiences

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Abstract

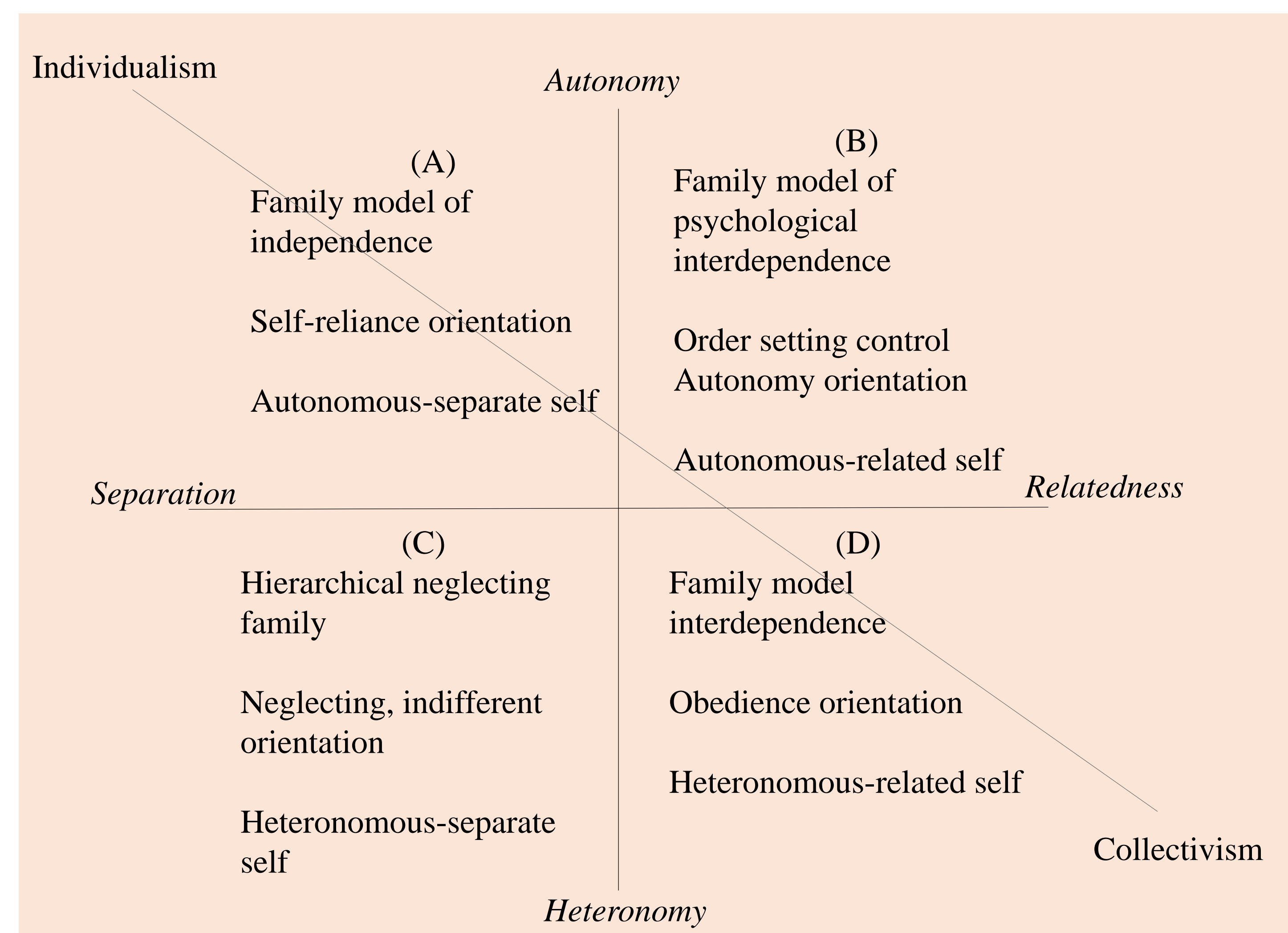
The present study explored how self-construal as proposed by Bowen's Family Systems Theory (1974, 1993) and Kağıtçıbaşı's Family Change Theory (2007) impacts young adults' non-marital romantic relationship satisfaction, relationship quality, and anxiety in three distinct cultures: USA, Turkey, and Pakistan. Findings were mixed for how the types of self-construal influenced relationship experiences and anxiety across cultures.

Introduction

- The quality of romantic relationships is beneficial to one's physical and psychological health (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010).
- Not much is known about the ways in which romantic relationships in young adulthood differ across cultures (Dion & Dion, 1993).

Hypotheses

- Bowen's differentiation of self (DoS) was expected to be associated with relationship outcomes and anxiety.
- Cultures high in collectivism (Pakistan) or cultures that show both aspects of individualism and collectivism (Turkey) were hypothesized to show contradictory results to BFST.



Participants

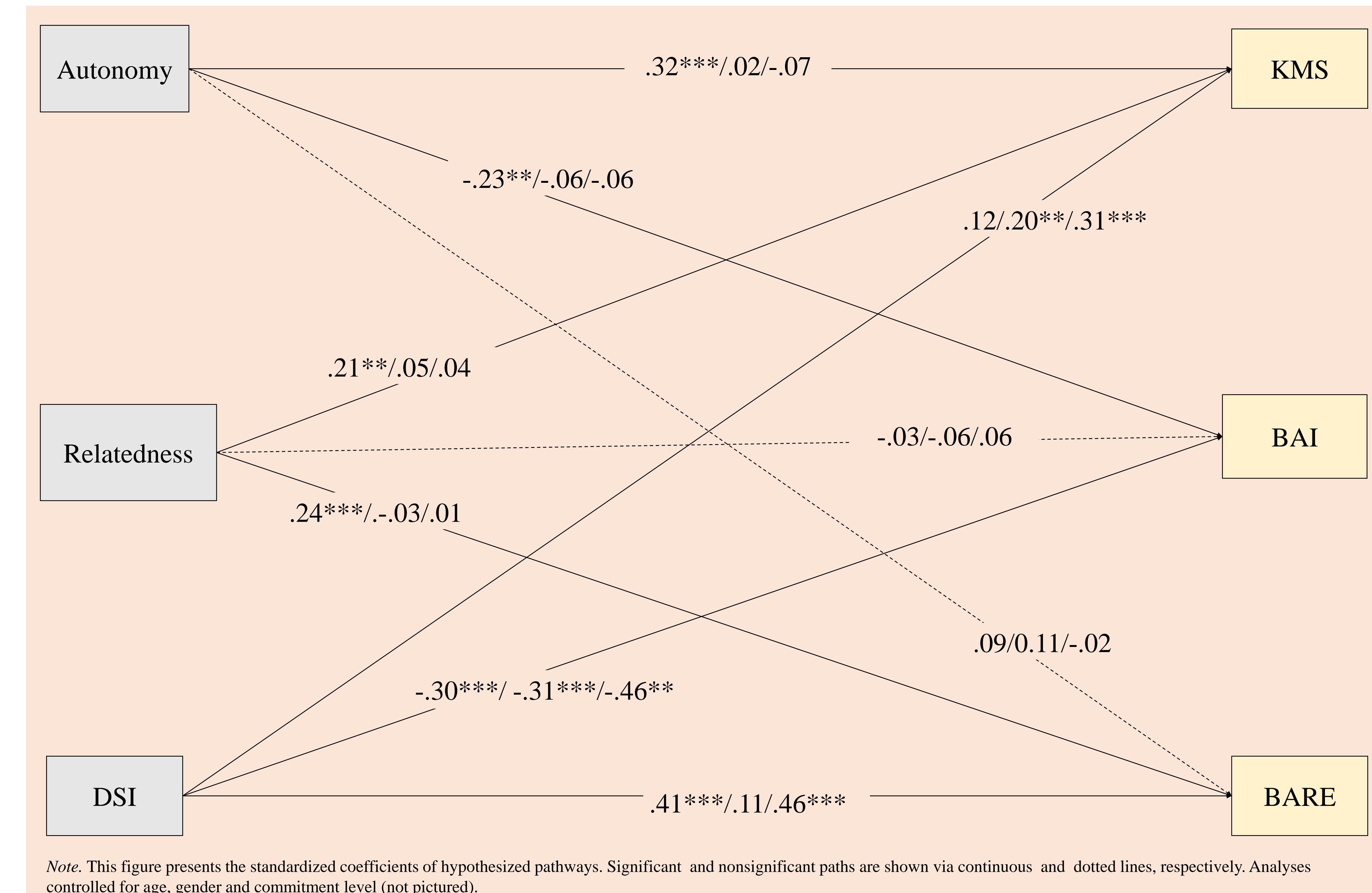
- $N = 555$, from the USA ($n = 200$), Turkey ($n = 196$) & Pakistan ($n = 159$).
- Sample characteristics: $M_{age} = 22$, 62.7% female
- 18-25 years, enrolled in college/university, and in an exclusive, heterosexual relationship for at least 3 months

Measures

- Demographic Questionnaire:** gender, age, ethnicity, income, and educational level.
- Relationship Questionnaire:** gender of partner, relationship duration, perceived commitment, long-distance relationship (Y/N).
- The Autonomy and Relatedness Scale (A-R;** Kağıtçıbaşı, Baydar, Cemalcılar & Aydınli-Karakulak, 2016)
- The Differentiation of Self Inventory-Short Form (DSI-SF;** Drake, Murdock, Marszalek & Barber, 2015)
- The Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (KMS;** Schumm, Nichols, Schectman, & Grigsby, 1983)
- The Brief Accessibility, Responsiveness, and Engagement Scale (BARE;** Sandberg, Busby, Johnson & Yoshida, 2012):
- The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI;** Beck, Epstein, Brown, & Steer, 1988): somatic, cognitive and subjective features of state anxiety.

Procedure

- Recruitment was done via snowball sampling in Turkey and Pakistan and Mechanical TURK (MTURK) in the USA.
- Participants were directed to a Online survey via Qualtrics, 15 minutes to complete
- Hypotheses were tested using Path Analysis and Multiple Group Analysis in a Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) paradigm.



Results

- Model fit indices for the model per country were
 - USA : $\chi^2 (7) = 9.20$, $p = .24$; $CFI = .995$; $NFI = .98$; $RMSEA = .04$
 - Turkish data : $\chi^2 (7) = 8.59$, $p = .28$; $CFI = .995$; $NFI = .98$; $RMSEA = .03$
 - Pakistan data : $\chi^2 (7) = 14.15$, $p = .05$; $CFI = .98$; $NFI = .96$; $RMSEA = .08$
- Negative relationship between anxiety and the differentiation of self (DoS) across all three cultures.
- DoS predicted higher relationship satisfaction and quality only in the USA and Pakistan.
- Autonomy and DoS overlapped greatly in the USA; this association was significantly higher than that of Turkey and Pakistan. DoS overlapped with relatedness in the Turkish sample.

Conclusion

- DoS seemed to operate on a more micro and intrapersonal level whereas autonomy and relatedness (as cultural constructs) operated at a more mesosystemic level.
- The findings support the need for a framework that utilizes BFST concepts along with informed ideas about cultural contexts.