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, Cemal, & Aydınlı-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 an 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: χ² (7) =9.20, p = .24; CFI = .995; NFI = .98; RMSEA = .04
  • Turkish data: χ² (7) = 8.59, p = .28; CFI = .995; NFI = .98; RMSEA = .03
  • Pakistan data: χ² (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.