

***The Relationships among Couple Bond, Family Responsibility,
And Couple Satisfaction in Thai Couples***

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Abstract

With the increased number of couple relationship problems within Thailand, it becomes necessary to find ways to enhance these relationships. One such way was to clarify the expectation that the partners have regarding their relationships, or relationship standards (Baucom, Epstein, Sayers & Sher, 1989). These standards are generally viewed as relevant to two domains: 1) couple bond and 2) family responsibility (Hiew, Halford, Liu, & van de Vijver, 2015a). Couple bond involves behavior that facilitates emotional closeness and communicates caring within the couple whereas family responsibility involves representing the partner's and family's face and maintaining relationship harmony with the partner's extended family. This research study hence aims to examine how relationship standards are associated with couple satisfaction in Thai couples. How the association is manifested in male and female will be compared. Data was collected in 260 Thai individuals who had been in intimate relationship at least for a year (age 18 – 40 years). Participants responded to relevant measures. Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted. Findings suggested that, for male participants, couple bond and family responsibility are significantly and positively correlated with couple satisfaction ($r=.51$, $p<.01$ and $r=.32$, $p<.01$ respectively) and accounted for 26 percent of the total variance of couple satisfaction ($R^2=.264$, $p<.001$). In their female counterparts, the two factors significantly and positively correlated with couple satisfaction ($r=.32$, $p<.01$ and $r=.24$, $p<.01$ respectively) and accounted for 10 percent of its total variance ($R^2=.104$, $p<.01$). Findings were discussed in terms of research contribution and clinical implication in couple relationship enhancement.

Keywords: Couple bond, Family responsibility and Couple satisfaction

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Introduction

In the present, Thailand, a Southeast Asian country, encounters with many couple relationship problems. Thailand National Statistic Institution reported that divorced couple had been increased for 27 percent in nine years (from 2004 to 2013; National Statistical Office of Thailand, 2013). Couple relationship problems can cause some disadvantages for couples. For the example, Beach, Arias and O'Leary (1986) found that poor quality of the marital relationship is significantly related to depression symptomatology for both men and women. Marital distress is also associated with suppressed immune function, cardiovascular arousal and an increase of stress-related hormones (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). Past research has identified a number of factors that influence relationship satisfaction. For example, investigations by Gottman (1979) indicated communication and problem-solving styles play a role in determining relationship satisfaction. Similarly, other researchers showed that personal dispositions, such as emotional intelligence (Malouff, Schutte, & Thorsteinsson, 2014), empathy (Davis & Oathout, 1987), and private self-consciousness and perspective-taking (Franzoi, Davis, & Young, 1985), also contribute to relationship satisfaction.

Recently, research studies indicated that understanding couple relationship standard, the beliefs that couples hold about what their relationships or partners should be like (Baucom, et. al., 1989), can enhance couple relationship (Baucom, Epstein, Rankin, & Burnett, 1996); Wunderer & Schneewind, 2008; Hiew, Halford, Vijver, & Liu, 2015b). The endorsement of standards by spouses, and the similarity of the standards endorsed by the two spouses, are associated with relationship satisfaction (Hiew, Halford, Vijver, & Liu, 2015b). Hence, this research study aims to examine how relationship standards are associated with couple satisfaction in Thai couples.

Relationship Standards

Within psychological research, several measures have been developed to assess relationship standards. The Inventory of Specific Relationship Standards (ISRS; Baucom et al., 1996) is a 60-item self-reported measure of relationship standards. The scale captures three broad areas of relationship standards: boundaries, power-control, and investment. Boundaries refer to the extent to which partners act independently or interdependently to each other (e.g., time spent together, degree of self-disclosure, and shared activities). Power-control refers to the extent to which partners should exert their power or control over another in relationships. Finally, investment refers to the extent to which partners should explicitly invest in their relationships. The ISRS was validated in a sample of 386 couples in the U.S. Results revealed that the scale possessed moderate degree of internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha for each sub-scale ranging from .65 to .77. Moreover, the scale also possess convergent validity to some extent as results showed positive correlation with other relationship standard scale (i.e., the Relationship Standard Measure; RSM; Vangelisti & Daly, 1997) and marital functioning (e.g., marital adjustment).

The RSM (Vangelisti & Daly, 1997) is a self-reported measure of 30 relationship standards. The scale requires participants to rate these standard along two dimensions: importance and fulfillment. Results obtained from 122 adults revealed that the standards load onto seven factors which are labelled: relational identity, integration,

affective accessibility, trust, future orientation, role fulfillment, and flexibility. In terms of importance and fulfillment, alpha coefficient for each factor range from .63 to .82 and .62 to .88, respectively. These data indicate that the RSM possess moderate to high internal consistency.

The Relationship Brief Inventory (RBI; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982) is an 8-item self-reported measure of endorsement of standards which are either irrational or predictive of relationship distress. These include “argument is destructive;” “mind-ready is expected;” “partners cannot change;” “the sexes are different;” and “sexual perfectionism.” The scale was administered to 100 clinical and non-clinical participants along with several other measures. Results showed that the scale possessed good internal consistency with alpha coefficients of its sub-scale ranging from .72 to .81. The RBI also showed convergent and construct validity. All of its sub-scales, except from “the sexes are different” were mildly but positively correlated with a measure of irrational beliefs. They were also mildly to moderately positively correlate with an index of marital satisfaction.

Hiew, Halford, van de Vijver, and Liu (2015a) recently developed an intercultural measure of relationship standards. The Chinese-Western Intercultural Couple Standard Scale (CWICSS) is a 69-item self-reported measure of relationship standards. The scale contains two factors: couple bond and family responsibility. These two factors in turn consist of four sub-scale each. Couple bond refers to romantic love and psychological intimacy between partners, and includes demonstration of love, demonstration of caring, intimacy expression, and intimacy responsiveness. Demonstration of love is the expressions of love through behavior and sexual activities; demonstration of caring is the expression of caring to each other (e.g., providing emotional support to one’s partner in time of distress); intimacy expression is behavior which conveys personal feelings to each other (e.g., telling positive or negative thoughts about one’s partner to partner); and intimacy responsiveness is reaction to partners’ expressions of love, caring, and intimacy (e.g., expressing happiness in response to partner’s birthday present).

Research showed that these standards are beneficial to relationships, at least within Western contexts. For example, demonstration of love through discussion of sexual intercourse facilitates the development of romantic intimacy (Harvey, Wenzel, & Sprecher, 2004). Likewise, demonstration of caring in the form of emotional support for one’s partner promotes warm feelings towards each other (Erickson, 2005). Expressing genuine emotions to one’s partner was positively associated with relationship satisfaction (Halford, 2011). Finally, responding to one’s partner contributes to positive relationship growth (Berg, 1987).

Family responsibility refers to relations between one and one’s partner’s family and social circles after marriage, and involves relations to extended family, face/Mian Zi, relationship harmony, and gender roles. Relations with extended family refer to the relationships between one and one’s partner’s family and include implicit responsibilities such as taking care of partner’s parents or siblings. Face refers to the responsibility to protect and promote honor and dignity of family. Relationship harmony refers to cooperative relationships within family. Finally, gender role refers to expected responsibility and behavior that partners should commit to according to

their gender. Research showed that these standards are more valued among Chinese than Westerners (e.g., Cardon & Scott, 2003; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997).

Thai Culture and Relationship Standards

Thailand is located in the South East Asia, and is a unique blend of cultures. There is a substantial portion of Thais with Chinese ancestry. There is also a strong influence of Indian culture and of Buddhism, which is the Thai national religion. Thailand is identified as a culture of collectivism rather than individualism (Hofstede, 2001). It is also a tight culture which means Thais have high value of importance on adherence to socially normative behavior (Gelfand et al., 2011). In terms of economy, Thailand is a developing country, with substantially lower levels of Gross Domestic Product relative to Western countries; and poverty still posts significant threat within the country (The World Bank, 2017). This context likely accounts for the high valuing of fulfilling basic survival needs, such as the need to provide for family, and lesser valuing of individual needs for freedom (The World Values Survey, 2016).

With the increased number of couple relationship problems within Thailand, it becomes necessary to find ways to enhance couple relationships. One such way was to clarify the expectation that the partners have regarding their relationships, or relationship standards. This study aims to examine relationships among couple relationship standards, namely couple bond, and family responsibility, and couple satisfaction in Thai couples.

Aims of the Research

The aim in the present study was to examine the relationship between couple bond, family responsibility as in couple relationship standards, and couple satisfaction in Thai male and female couples.

Method

Participants

Participants were 260 volunteers (130 males and 130 females) residents of Thailand, who aged between 18 to 40 years old (male: $M = 26.27$, $SD = 5.19$ and female: $M = 25.84$, $SD = 5.02$). They had been in intimate relationship at least 12 months, because this period would pass early relationship development and cross to the intimacy stage (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). The mean of intimate relationship period for males was 59.59 months ($SD = 40.06$) and females was 45.72 months ($SD = 41.52$). Two hundred and fourteen (92.7%) of the sample were Buddhist and 212 of the sample had a university degree or higher. The entire sample was born in Thailand.

Measures

All measures were originally in English and were translated into Thai and then independently back translated to English. The questionnaires could be completed online and paper-pencil.

The CWICSS (Hiew et al., 2015a) assesses endorsement of two couple relationship standards: Couple Bond, 32 items describing behavior that facilitates emotional closeness and communicates caring within the couple relationship (e.g., “Express their love for each other in words every day” and Family Responsibility, 37 items describing responsibilities toward the extended family, supporting the partner’s and family’s face, maintaining relationship harmony and fulfilling gender roles (e.g., “Do not disagree with family elders”, “Do not disagree with each other in public”, “Do not speak about things that may lead to conflict” and “The man financially supports his partner and children”). All items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 0 (not important) to 5 (extremely important). The Couple Bond and Family Responsibility factors have high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = .89 and .92 respectively) in Thai version.

The Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI: Funk & Rogge, 2007) is a 32-item measure of couple satisfaction (e.g., “In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?”). The CSI has good internal consistency and high construct validity. In the Thai couple sample, the CSI had excellent internal consistency, Cronbach’s alpha = .96)

Procedure

An online questionnaire was administered by the couple-related websites. The focus of the present study was the self-report measures of couple relationship standards and couple satisfaction.

Results

First we conducted correlation analysis between Couple Bond, Family Responsibility and Couple Satisfaction. Then Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted.

Table 2

Mean and standard deviation of Couple bond, Family Responsibility and Couple Satisfaction in Thai male and female couples

Variable	Male		Female	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Couple Bond	131.69	17.27	136.23	18.61
Family Responsibility	133.39	24.67	138.44	23.30
Couple Satisfaction	119.40	25.78	118.04	33.42

Correlation

The resulted, presented in Table 3, indicated that for male participants, the couple bond was positively correlated with couple satisfaction (.51, $p < .01$), while the family responsibility was positively associated with couple satisfaction (.32, $p < .01$).

Table 3

Summary of correlation statistic between Couple Satisfaction, Couple Bond and Family Responsibility in Thai male couples

Variable	1	2	3
1. Couple Satisfaction	-		
2. Couple Bond	.51*	-	
3. Family Responsibility	.32*	.48*	-

Note. * $p < .01$

The resulted of Thai female couples (Table 4) shown in the similar way of male couples that the couple bond was positively correlated with couple satisfaction (.32, $p < .01$), while the family responsibility was positively associated with couple satisfaction (.24, $p < .01$).

Table 4

Summary of correlation statistic between Couple Satisfaction, Couple Bond and Family Responsibility in Thai female couples

Variable	1	2	3
1. Couple Satisfaction	-		
2. Couple Bond	.32*	-	
3. Family Responsibility	.24*	.74*	-

Note. * $p < .01$

Multiple Regression Analysis

The multiple regression model for male couples with two predictors, couple bond and family responsibility, produced $R^2 = .264$, $F(2, 127) = 22.776$, $p < .001$. As can be seen in Table 5, couple bond had significant positive regression weights, indicating Thai male couples with higher scores on these scales were expected to have couple satisfaction, after controlling for the Family Responsibility in the model. In the contrary, family responsibility did not contribute to the multiple regression model.

Table 5

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Couple Bond and Family Responsibility to Couple Satisfaction in Thai male couples

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>Std. E</i> <i>b</i>	β	<i>R</i>	R^2	<i>Adjusted</i> R^2
Couple Satisfaction				.514	.264	.252
Constant	15.361	15.580				
1. Couple Bond	.679	.130	.455**			
2. Family Responsibility	.110	.091	.105			

Note. *b* = unstandardized beta coefficient, *Std. E* = standard error, β = standardized beta coefficient and Note. ** $p < .001$

The multiple regression model for Thai female couples with two predictors, couple bond and family responsibility, produced $R^2 = .090$, $F(2, 127) = 7.410$, $p = .001$. As can be seen in Table 6, couple bond had significant positive regression weights, indicating Thai female couples with higher scores on these scales were expected to have couple satisfaction, after controlling for the Family Responsibility in the model. In the contrary, family responsibility did not contribute to the multiple regression model.

Table 6

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Couple Bond and Family Responsibility to Couple Satisfaction in Thai female couples

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. E</i>	β	<i>R</i>	R^2	<i>Adjusted</i> R^2
Couple Satisfaction				.323	.104	.090
Constant	38.901	20.841				
1. Couple Bond	.575	.225	.320*			
2. Family Responsibility	.006	.179	.004			

Note. *b* = unstandardized beta coefficient, *Std. E* = standard error, β = standardized beta coefficient and * $p < .01$

Discussion

The current study is the first study in Thailand regarding couple relationship standards. Also, this offers the first examination of how endorsement of couple relationship standards is associated with couple satisfaction in Thai couples. As hypothesized, couple bond and family responsibility, as in couple relationship standards are positively correlated with couple satisfaction in both Thai male and

female couples. This result resonates past studies (Hiew, Halford, Vijver, & Liu, 2015b). For Thai male couples, the association between couple bond and couple satisfaction is stronger than the association between family responsibility and couple satisfaction. These results suggested that Thai male partners might focus more on relationship within the couple more than the relationship that the couple had with their environment. Similar findings were found in Thai female partners. However, the associations were lower in these participants, both in terms of couple bond and family responsibility. As suggested by Vangelisti and Daly (1997), female couple relationship standards were less fully met than their male counterparts; therefore, couple bond and family responsibility appeared to affect couple satisfaction in females to a lesser extent than in males.

Based on the outcomes of the regression analysis, only couple bond was found to significantly predict couple satisfaction in both Thai male and female couples (26.4 % and 10.4% of variance respectively). These results partially support previous studies. Based on Hiew, Halford, Vijver, and Liu's investigation of (2015b) couple bond and family responsibility in Australian and Chinese couples, both couple bond and family responsibility predicted couple satisfaction. Two explanations might be viewed as relevant to the current results. Firstly, Thailand has been classified as collectivistic culture and prioritized social and family's needs to individual's needs (Gelfand et al., 2011). Based on this cultural orientation, couple bond and family responsibility might not be fully interdependent to each other. The second plausible reason is that most of participant (80%) has high education, at least college graduation. This could expose them to Westernized culture and lead them to be more individualistic and place more important to individual couple relationship.

Limitation and Future Directions

Despite various promises, findings from the current study should be viewed in light of the study unique characteristics. All of the participants in the current study were recruited online. Without information regarding their existing relationship, it is possible that some partners of the same couples were among the respondents; and this could potentially violate the assumptions of factor analysis, despite the attempts of the screening checklist on the first page of the survey. Additional unique characteristics of the participants could be viewed as the aforementioned relatively high level of education of the participant, various groups of participants need to be addressed in future studies so as to expand the finding generalization. Lastly, a qualitative study should be further conducted.

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