Predictors of Marital Satisfaction in Individualistic and Collectivist Cultures: A Mini Review

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights key empirical and conceptual progress in understanding of predictors of marital satisfaction. The article brings together studies in this area summarizing the key findings, and then focuses on comparison of marital satisfaction predictors across individualistic and collectivist cultures. The researches on marital relationships currently addresses the concepts like satisfaction, marital success, consensus, companionship, adjustment, quality or some concepts relevant to satisfaction of marital life. All the common and different predictors of marital satisfaction are identified and compared with the existing body of literature in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Although there are some conflicting findings that hinder drawing of conclusive evidence, we found predictors of marital satisfaction among that are shared between individualistic and collectivist cultures. Hence some universal predictors of marital happiness are highlighted through cultural comparison. After this review the future researchers and counselors will be well aware of cross-cultural predictors of marital satisfaction which will help them in future conductance of researches and couple’s counseling.

Keywords: Marital satisfaction, individualistic, collectivistic culture, cross culture comparison

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to crucial role of marriage in society, marriage and quality of marriage has been a focus of research. The system of Marriage and factors related to its success and satisfying outcomes may be influenced by culture, hence certain factors may be similar or may vary across cultures. The perception of marriage is a lawful and socially accepted union, which is lifelong, and entail socio-economic, sexual, social rights and obligations for the both husband and wife (Bachrach, Hindin & Thomson, 2000) however, the subjective outcome of both individuals according to their criteria and components of marriage expectations is marital satisfaction (Durodoye, 1997; Iqbal &Amjad, 2015).Though, marital satisfaction literature across cultures is worth studying, but researchers find few reviews of cross
cultural evidence on marital satisfaction. Many researches and theories have presented various models to describe specific areas which need to function well in order for relationships to thrive (Kamp Dush & Taylor, 2012). Still, a comprehensive updated review is needed to compare evidence of these models across cultures. This review attempted to summarize and review the existing body of literature on marital satisfaction in collectivistic and individualistic cultures. This review has focused specifically on the following research questions: 1) What factors uniquely contribute to marital satisfaction in collectivistic cultures; 2) what are the unique predictors of marital satisfaction in individualistic cultures? 3) How marital satisfaction is predicted by factors similar across both cultures?

**Marital relationships in Individualistic & Collectivistic cultures**

Due to the increase in the individualistic drift of modern life, many Americans has taken relationships in broad-spectrum and exclusively marriage in a self-centered sense, where in a relationship, each spouse is intentionally looking for to get the most out of their own personal fulfillment (Amato, 2009; Bellah et al., 1985; Cherlin, 2010). According to the “individualistic” model of marriage, as Amato (2009, p. 79) notes, “Close relationships exist primarily to enhance happiness and maximize psychological growth” (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2008). However, there is not much room in this model for generosity and sacrifice like virtues which are essential for married persons in order to put the necessities of their spouse by their own needs (Fowers, 2000) which are only explained by the collectivist model of marital satisfaction.

**Predictors of Marital Satisfaction: Cross Cultural Comparison**

The reason for reviewing the literature on marital satisfaction cross culturally is due to the fact that marital satisfaction is directly related to individual and family wellbeing, from the advantages that gather to society when solid marital unions are framed and looked after and from the need to develop interventions for couples that would be universal in the light of similar predictors cross culturally that prevent marital distress and divorce. This section reviews and identifies those similar predictors of satisfaction.

**Personality traits**

Success of marital relationship in both cultures is related with the personality characteristics of the dyad. Many researches has paid attention on the effects of personality on marital satisfaction by highlighting that satisfaction has resulted from the mix up of different personality traits across cultures considering personality as an adaptive process that blossoms happiness and success of a marital bond (Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004).

A good number of studies in both cultures employed Big Five Personality Traits to explore the different personality traits impact on the relationship satisfaction so the similarities are quite visible among these five personality traits. As in individualistic cultures partners high
on agreeableness and openness to experience along with extroversion and consciousness plus low on neuroticism showed improved quality of relationship (Claxton, O’Rourke, Smith, & DeLongis, 2011) and this pattern is consistent in collectivistic culture too (Javanmard & Garegozlo, 2012; Zaidi & Amjad, 2015; Mahmood & Najeeb, 2013; Asnari & Kausar, 2003). Furthermore, besides separate influence of basic personality traits, the combined effect of different personality characteristics were also highlighted by the both cultures literature (Gattis et al., 2004; Watson et al., 2000; Fani, Nasaghchi & Kheirabadi, 2011).

**Intimacy**

The concept of intimacy in marital relationships is multicomponent that covers both behavioral and emotions aspects of one’s life. Behavioral components comprised of activities in which partners are engaged like talking and touching while emotional component involve feeling of belongingness and love (Carandang, & Guda, 2015). Moreover, Intimacy is considered to be the backbone of the marital relationship because without the closeness among dyadic partners both physically and emotionally one could not survive longer in that relationship so that factor is universally accepted as a predictor underlying relationship satisfaction (Nimtz, 2011).

The cross-cultural literature highlighted that the more related component with marital satisfaction is intimacy than behavioral component because feelings of being understood and love is more important universally (Patrick, Sells, Giordano & Tollerud, 2007; Schmitt, Kliegel, Shapiro, 2007). The lack of association of behavioral facet of intimacy with satisfaction might be due to the lack of consensus on the role of sexual satisfaction predicting marital quality (Faulkner, Davey, & Davey, 2007) in collectivistic cultures because of pertinent religious or cultural influences. Gender wise comparison also reveals a positive association among the level of passion, intimacy, commitment, and marital satisfaction among gender (Carandang, & Guda, 2015) but they experienced differences in sexual and recreational intimacy (Abraham & Greeff, 2011).

**Interpersonal Communication**

Sufficient empirical strength is available indicating that well-adjusted partners and better-established marital relations are efficient in encoding and decoding non-verbal as well verbal communication of each other however the non-verbal cues accuracy is more important than verbal cues (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Furthermore, study by Rehman and Holtzworth-Munroe, (2007) while discussing marital problem among Pakistani and American couples, a distinction between negative and positive marital communication behavior. The findings highlighted that in American marriages, marital communication behavior is strongly linked with marital satisfaction, and it was not considered as much important for the marriages belonging to collectivistic cultures in Pakistan (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007).
Additionally, another cross-cultural study (Christensen et al., 2006) based on US and Taiwan, explain that constructive communication was positively associated while withdraw/demand communication was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. Hence, cross culturally, it is evident that a successful interpersonal communication skill draws a line between satisfied and unsatisfied marital relationships (Boyd & Roach, 2000; Litzinger, & Gordon, 2005; Vanlear, 2009; Gottman, 1979; Noller, 1980; Snyder, 1979; Saddiqua & Tariq, 2014; Iqbal & Nazia, 2013).

**Emotional Intelligence**

As compare to others emotional intelligence is a new behavioral model that is gaining attention which refers to the aptitude to perceive, manage and emotional regulation to promote personal development (Salvery, & Mayers, 1997). Since marriage is the most important relationship that accompanies an emotional and legal commitment among dyadic members so having an adequate emotional intelligence works best to achieve relationship satisfaction (Fardis, 2005). The most influential cross-cultural model of emotional intelligence is the one provided by Salover and Mayer’s (1997). This model is frequently employed to investigate emotional intelligence predicting marital satisfaction among collectivist (Arshad & Fatima, 2013; Dildar, Bashir, Shoaib, Sultan & Saeed, 2012; Batool, & Khalid, 2012; Joshi, & Thingujam, 2006; Saleem, & Tariq, 2013) and individualistic cultures.

**Relationship Expectations**

Scientists by and large recognize that every correspondence message has a social and substance portion, while substance messages are the ramifications of explanation; interact ants use social messages to portray their associations and themselves. These social definitions grant individuals to edge seeks and enter associations with some sentiment what open practices are suitable for the sort of relationship they anticipate. This is very essential to explain that relational expectations might be predictive or prescriptive in nature (Staines & Libby, 2000) and as marital satisfaction depends upon role of the partners in the family similar expectations of work roles and spouse roles are important factors in marriage. If spouses are contemporary, that works wonderfully as it does if they are traditional. The utmost conflict occurs wives consider the “right” roles for spouses and are more contemporary. The expectations of relationship are the significant predictor of marital stability across both collectivist and individualistic cultures (Markman 2002; Quek & Fitzpatrick, 2013; Huber, Navarro, Womble & Mumme, 2010).

**Autonomy**

Although the concept of autonomy, process of individuation varies a bit among people due to their cultural beliefs and practices but it is undoubtedly found significant determinant
of marital satisfaction (Goodman, 1999). Few studies have also investigated the balancing 
effect of autonomy with intimacy among partners. Women high and men low in autonomy 
are found a greater cause of marital violence among partners. This salient issue effects on 
life domains and wellness in all relations (Ryan & Deci, 2006; Tufail, & Amjad, 2013). Studies 
also revealed that couples of autonomous marriages and practicing autonomy in their 
relationship were more satisfied as compared to others across cultures (Dinna, & Manisha, 
2006).

**Romantic Love**

There is a common attitude in west that romantic love doesn’t exist in collectivist culture 
and it is not universal. (Aries, 1962, cited in Jankowiak & Fisher, 1992). Similarly, Medora, 
Larson, Horacsu and Dave (2002) made a comparison of attitude towards their preferences 
for qualities in prospective couples and romanticism in Turkey, India and USA. “American 
young adults scored highest on the romantic love scale, than Turkish and at last the Indians. 
In regard to future mate-selection Americans thought similar interests, intelligent and 
being affectionate the most important, whereas Turkish participants thought being well 
educated and having a sense of humor was most important in a relationship” (Medora et 
al., 2002). While keeping in mind that Turkey and USA have collectivist and individualistic 
culture respectively (Triandis et al., 1988), it can be said that form both cultures young 
couples, who are married or in a relationship think otherwise about love which might 
demonstrate that romantic love is an existential universal. Another similar study by Vries 
(2011) also supported, “love seems to exist in every culture, but differs in frequency, function 
and need. Also, this review reflects that there are differences but also similarities in attitudes 
towards love between a collectivistic and individualistic culture and love are a necessary 
component in any marital relationship”.

**Gratitude & Forgiveness**

Gratitude is another important component of marital satisfaction. An increase in feelings 
of connection with spouse, personal worth and happiness occurs when you are receiving 
the favors, respect, expressions of affection and forgiveness. This way of getting indulges 
with one’s wife and what make her happy can itself improve marital quality (Gottman & 
Silver, 1999). As Zaidi and Amjad (2012) study argued that a married person’s gratitude has 
same positive relationship among happiness of both partners and his/her own happiness, 
while other personality extents have negative relationship. Wife’s own gratitude was 
positively related with happiness moreover her happiness has positive relationship with her 
husband’s happiness, while husband’s happiness has significant positive correlation with 
his own gratitude and similar findings were revealed by the previous literature too (Fatima, 
& Ajmal, 2012).

**Marital Satisfaction & Harmonious Marital Relations**
Though harmonious marital relationship is a significant feature in a marriage from both collectivist and individualistic cultures and some other characters can also influence marital satisfaction. In UK, Beijing and Hong Kong, stable family finances, spousal support, partnership with spouse and a stable relationship are important factors that contributed to marital satisfaction (Wong & Goodwin, 2009). Another research suggests that arranged marriages brings no less and sometimes even more marital satisfaction than love marriages (Vries, 2011).

**Shared Leisure Time**

Marital satisfaction is significantly correlated with satisfaction with shared leisure time, activities, the decision making regarding them and similarity of leisure interests between spouses (Henry, Hood, Johnson & Al Carlozzi, 2002; Knowles, 2004). Despite early researches presumed, but the relationship between leisure and marital satisfaction is much more complex Major factors in leisure time are communication (Crawford et al., 2002), affiliation (Finucane & Horvath, 2000), compatibility (Crawford et al., 2002), gender (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000; Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003) and race (Hibbler & Shinew, 2002). Moreover, couples who spend more time with each other before child's birth possess higher levels of “feeling close or belongingness” with their spouses after their child's birth (Claxton, & Perry-Jenkin, 2008).

**Conflict Resolution**

Conflict and conflict resolution techniques may play a vital role in success of a marriage. Here may be some differences as well some similarities in conflict resolution between individualistic and collectivist societies. Quetz & Fitzpatrick (2014) found conflict as a significant predictor of a successful marriage. They worked on a collectivist-individualistic model and collected data from Singapore and USA which included 160 couples. This study shows resemblance in cultures in case of conflicts and conflict resolution.

**Trust & Relationship Commitment**

Commitment is on which marriages are based as marriage actually means staying committed to each other. There are some differences and some similarities in commitment as predictor of marital satisfaction in individualistic and collectivist cultures. Sabatelli and Cecil-Pigo (1985) have found commitment and interdependence significantly predicting the marriage success across both individualistic and collectivist cultures. Their data included American couples and Asian couples. Additionally, relationship commitment, interest in the relationship and interpersonal commitment were found better predictors of success in marriages. Moreover, self-disclosure and exit conflict tactics (destructive or active responses), compensative experiences, social supports and adaptive appraisal were also related to healthier marital satisfaction (Stanley & Markman, 1992; Whitton, Stanley, and Markman 2002; Quek & Fitzpatrick, 2013; Huber, Navarro, Womble & Mumme, 2010).
Courtship

The length of courtship has been studied infrequently in the relation of marital satisfaction. A study by Pimentel, Robb and Houser (2006) reported that length of marriage predicts marital satisfaction as couples who were recently married and their marriage was not above one year were seem to be happier, maybe these couples have yet to face many difficulties in their marriage; couples who are married longer have had much more time to come across hardships and the challenges that come with marriage. Although scarce, but the latest research literature indicates positive correlation between courtship period and marital satisfaction and a negative correlation between courtship period and incidences of divorce (Hansen, 2006). Although there are differences in duration of marriage in individualistic and collectivist cultures, duration is a good predictor of marital success and happiness in both cultures (VanLalingham & Johnson, 2001; Pardo et al., 2013).

Social Support

Social support satisfaction predicted marital satisfaction but, as compared to men women provide more social support. So, for women the important indicator of marital satisfaction was spouse support as compare to men. In men, Job satisfaction had an expounding effect on marital satisfaction. (Rostami, Ghazinour & Richter, 2013).

Previous literature indicated that among demographic correlates; income, age, prior cohabitation, and division of labor were not predictors of satisfaction (Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007) while husband’s race, gender, educational, number of children and health condition contribute to marital satisfaction (Guo & Huang, 2005) Some qualitative studies showed that stable relationship with spouse, spousal support, partnership with spouse, and stable family finances (Wong & Goodwin, 2009) togetherness (Nimtz, 2011), marital expectations, couple dynamics and systemic factors (Chen & Lim, 2012) and children education (Madanian, Mansor, & Omar, 2013) were contributing factors for satisfaction. Kiecolt Glasser and Newton (2001) met-analysis of 64 studies (individualistic &collectivist cultures) showed that health of both husband and wife play vital role in prospects of marriage. Research shows less differences and more similarities in optimism as predictor of marriage success in both individualistic and collectivist cultures (Carnelley, 1992; Batool & Khalid, 2012; Lin & Raghubir, 2014). Collectively, predictors of marital satisfaction can be summarized as; relationship dynamics, personal and external factors cross culturally.

2. CONCLUSION

This review attempts to provide evidence for similar and contrasting dynamics of marital satisfaction in couples from both individualistic and collectivist culture. One of the most pertinent findings of this review is the identification of universal predictors of marital satisfaction in couples these were; Romantic Love, Intimacy, Interpersonal Communication, Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Resolution, Relationship Expectations, Trust & Relationship
Commitment, Autonomy, Gratitude, & Forgiveness, Shared Leisure Time, Courtship, and Social Support. Moreover, another prominent finding is the negation of the stereotypic thought of individual culture that people in arranged marriages cannot live happily and don’t experience marital satisfaction. As during the review when we took a look at the arranged marriages, it was quite clear that not only they are satisfied with their marriages but they are experiencing more happiness than the people who had free choice marriage. (Xiaohé & Whyte, 1990; Madathil & Tingle, 2005; Hania & Amjad, 2014; Hassan & Amjad, 2014). Hence, through this review practitioners and future counselors should be aware of cultural differences in couple’s predictors of marital satisfaction. Moreover, future reviews should be conducted for the predictors of cross-cultural couples, particularly Asian with non-Asian partners

3. REFERENCES


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