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DIFFERENTIATION OF THE SELF, COUPLES' INTIMACY, AND MARITAL SATISFACTION: A SIMILAR MODEL FOR PALESTINIAN AND JEWISH MARRIED COUPLES IN ISRAEL

by Niveen Rizkalla and Giora Rahav¹

ABSTRACT

This study compares Palestinian and Jewish married couples in Israel on the importance of differentiation of the self (DS) and couples' intimacy to marital satisfaction. A comparison of both societies' cultures was conducted on the continuum of individualism and collectivism. Data collection was unique due to the participation of both married partners. The sample included 167 married couples from central and northern Israel. Data analysis was guided by two interlocking strategies: analysis of each spouse separately and dyadic analysis (actor-partner interdependence model, APIM) of the couples as units. The findings situate the diversely perceived intimacy of couples and DS as more important to marital satisfaction than social-cultural variables. Even though Palestinian and Jewish married couples were rated differently on both scales of DS and couples' intimacy, their scores on marital satisfaction were similar. In addition, Palestinian and Jewish couples held different tendencies of both traits of individualism and collectivism, but these tendencies interacted similarly with other study variables, making the model similar for both (i.e., correlations were in the same direction).

Our analysis differs from studies conducted elsewhere in the world with couples and supports Bowen's theory concerning DS as universal. These results have several implications that may contribute to the edification of clinical therapists, improved development of services, and the practice of culturally sensitive therapy in the treatment of Palestinian and Jewish couples. This research may also help Western-oriented therapists for couples and families to better tailor their methodologies to the distinct characteristics of these national groups. Furthermore, the findings may shed new light on

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Eastern- and Western-oriented populations in Israel and elsewhere in the world, encouraging further studies of the challenges that contemporary married couples face.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the contribution of differentiation of the self (DS) in marital satisfaction where couples' intimacy acts as the mediating variable. The study also examines family-related cultural differences between Palestinian and Jewish couples in Israel via the use of another variable, the individualism-collectivism continuum.

Regarding the individualism-collectivism continuum, a review of the literature illuminates two trends. The individualist trend espoused by Western society places the individual at the center. In contrast, non-Western, more collectivist societies tend to embrace distinct and contrasting interactions among individual persons, families, and communities.

Palestinian society is commonly believed to be collectivist and patriarchal, in contrast to individualistic, Western-oriented Jewish Israeli culture. This stereotypical view ignores myriad transformations experienced by both societies in recent decades that have effectively blurred these dichotomies (Ben Shaul, 2003; Florian, Mikulincer, & Weller, 1993; Oyserman, 1993). Thus, in a recent study of individualism-collectivism among Palestinians living in Israel, Palestinian couples were found to be rather widely dispersed along the continuum between the two extremes in line with their levels of DS (Hilo-Monayer, 2007).

Hence the current study examines degrees of individualism and collectivism in couples as a continuum rather than a dichotomy, and with attention to the distinctive social and cultural characteristics of each society. More specifically, our principal research questions are: What are the relationships among differentiation of the self, couples' intimacy, individualism-collectivism, and marital satisfaction? Are there differences between Palestinian and Jewish couples regarding each of these four variables in the model?

II. DIFFERENTIATION OF THE SELF

A. Differentiation as an Intrapsychic Feature

Family systems theory (Bowen, 1978) ascribes to a person two systems with similar power: the intellectual system and the emotional system. When both systems function in a harmonious, balanced manner, emotionally burdening

situations (i.e., highly stressful or crisis situations) require one to choose between intellectual-objective functioning and emotional-subjective functioning. Differentiation is the ability to maintain a sense of self while being physically or emotionally close to significant others. Higher levels of differentiation enable a person to stand for his or her opinions and principles and to respect others' opinions and behaviors without trying to change them. Such persons will mostly use the term *I* rather than *we*. Even in highly stressful situations, emotional control and adaptive functioning will take place (Kerr, 1991).

When the two systems are not well separated, the person may lose the ability to choose, and thoughts and behavior may be dictated either by the individual's emotions or by others' emotions. In stressful situations, a person may become either dependent or emotionally detached. This emotional reactivity can be expressed through the tendency either to please others or to rebel against their wishes. Therefore, lower levels of differentiation generate difficulties in balancing conflicting emotions that emerge from within a person (Bowen, 1978; Kerr, 1991). Apple (1997) expands Bowen's (1978) two dimensions of differentiation to three: *fusion* and *cutoff* as features of low levels of differentiation, and *balanced involvement*, which balances the polarity between fusion and cutoff, as a feature that parallels Bowen's definition of high-level DS.

Many studies have examined the association between DS and well-being. They generally found that higher levels of differentiation predict better social skills in problem solving (Skowron, 2004), lower chronic anxiety, better psychological adjustment, and higher marital satisfaction (Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Married couples with higher levels of differentiation experienced less stress (Bartle-Haring & Lal, 2010) and less separation anxiety when faced with severely stressful situations (Peleg & Yitzhak, 2011).

B. Differentiation as an Interpersonal Feature

Bowen (1978) maintains that humans act according to two inherent and contradictory needs that constantly balance each other: autonomy, or individuality, and fusion, or togetherness. The balance between these two forces in a relationship can determine a person's level of differentiation.

Karpel (1976) addresses the complexity between fusion and individuality by means of a two-dimensional matrix. The first dimension explains the complex duality of a person's ability to be distant from others, *I*, relative to the ability to be connected to others, *we*. The second dimension describes the

maturity of a person, which is characterized by the acceptance of others' differences. Therefore, mature relationships of couples with high levels of differentiation are founded on dialogue and acceptance of the other and his or her uniqueness, which differs from the self.

Schnarch (1997) describes differentiation on a vertical axis, where differentiation is situated in the middle and at each end of the axis are fusion and individuality. Fusion is an emotionally suffocating connection with the other that doesn't allow separation, while individuality is an emotional cutoff (detachment) from the other (Schnarch, 1997). A couple with high levels of differentiation typically has a relationship characterized by dialogue, and thus founded on trust, sensitivity to the other's needs, and mutual giving to the separate advancement of each of them. These couples take responsibility for their own lives and allow profound ground for the development and growth of the two (Karpel, 1976).

The more dominant the fusion in the relationship, the greater the dilemma between distance and closeness (and thus the greater the difficulty of balancing them), and the greater the level of anxiety experienced in the relationship (Kerr, 1991). Couples with high levels of fusion suffer from fear of engulfment, on the one hand, and fear of being alone when separated, on the other. They are constantly in conflict between separation or withdrawal and fusion (Karpel, 1976). When chronic or acute stress accumulates in a marriage, couples react via four possible mechanisms: emotional cutoff, marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse (who attempts to keep the relationship in harmony), and impairment of one or more children (projection of the couple's problems onto children). Each of these mechanisms blurs the couple's focus on the dyad and eventually helps to maintain the stability of the individual and the family system by projecting the imbalance via these four mechanisms (Kerr, 1991). Emotional distance is a behavioral expression of the fear of engulfment, the fear of losing oneself by being swallowed into the other. Emotional reactivity derives from separation anxiety and the fear of losing the relationship with a significant other (Guerin, Fogarty, Fay, & Kautto, 1996).

C. Differentiation as a Feature of the Family System

Differentiation as a feature of the family system is the connection or attachment between the family of origin and previous generations (Framo, 1976). The degree of attachment that each of the partners had to one or more parents in his or her family of origin is similar to the couple's attachment in their own nuclear family. Differentiation in the family system occurs in a "family pro-

jection process," where the differentiation of the parents in a nuclear family is projected towards the children (Bowen, 1978). The parents' projected emotions towards their children and the extent of their emotional reactivity dictate certain features or capacities of their children (Kerr, 1991). Thus, the children's capacity to be involved in an intimate relationship with a spouse becomes similar to that of their parents (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). This emotional process may continue for generations in a family, thus forming a multigenerational transmission process (Bowen, 1978; Kerr, 1991).

In order for a person to reach maturity and independence from the family of origin, one needs first to leave the parents' house, psychologically, by gaining control over one's life and releasing the self from patterns related to the family system. At the same time, a person needs to continue being in an intimate relationship with parents and family members. Balance between these forces is called personal authority in the family system. Second, one needs to develop the capacities to initiate intimacy, which requires receiving or refusal to receive intimacy, and to accept the wishes of others while taking into account one's personal boundaries. Finally, one needs the capacity to connect to all people, including one's parents, as equal human beings (Bray, 1991).

D. Differentiation of the Self and Couples' Intimacy

Couples with high levels of DS can choose to be in contact with each other out of affection and love (Schnarch, 1997). Such couples are more likely to enjoy open communication founded on acceptance of the other despite differences, and enjoy high levels of intimacy and closeness without feelings of threat, abandonment anxiety, or engulfment anxiety (Bowen, 1978). Family systems theory suggests that DS is a basic condition for intimacy in long-term and mature marriages (Guerin et al., 1996; Titelman, 1998).

E. Differentiation of the Self and Marital Satisfaction

Skowron and Friedlander (1998) found that individuals who have higher levels of DS report significantly higher relational satisfaction with their spouses and better adjustment in their marriages. Skowron (2000) has found that the higher the levels of differentiation of both partners, the higher their marital satisfaction, whereas couples with lower levels of differentiation reported higher levels of marital distress.

In Israel, Hayot (1990) found that higher levels of DS are related to high levels of marital adjustment and satisfaction. Another Israeli study found that

the higher the “balanced involvement” (high DS), the higher the marital adjustment, whereas fusion and cutoff (low DS) were related to lower marital adjustment, greater tendency to seek help in therapy, and greater likelihood to consider divorce (Apple, 1997).

Yet, despite the theoretical literature and research presented above, many other studies failed to find any correlation between DS and marital satisfaction (e.g., Patrick, Sells, Giordano, & Tollerud, 2007; Shawn, 2002; Timm & Keiley, 2011). In Shawn’s study, a significant correlation was found between couples’ intimacy and marital satisfaction, but no correlation was found between DS and marital satisfaction. Patrick et al. found that intimacy and spouse’s support were the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction. A significant correlation between DS and marital satisfaction was not found in that study, either.

III. INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM

Individualism and collectivism are basic traits that distinguish cultures (Triandis, 1995). Triandis defined individualism as reliance on the self (independence), competition, hedonism, and emotional distance from others or groups, whereas collectivism features mutual dependence and familial and social cohesion. While some authors consider collectivism and individualism to be rather stable characteristics of cultures and individuals, others consider them to be conditional: Dimensions of individualism and collectivism may be simultaneously present in a particular culture or an individual according to the context in which they occur (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). Thus, Oyserman (1993) conducted a number of studies in Israel and found that both Palestinians and Jews use cultural orientations of individualism and collectivism, according to how they interpret their situations. She suggests that a dichotomous view of individualism and collectivism is inadequate for grasping persons’ everyday experiences in ethnically divided Israel, since both Palestinians and Jews have collectivist roots and traditions while living in a Western culture that encourages individualism.

Triandis and Gelfand (1998) have suggested a more complex and multi-dimensional model that classifies cultures on four dimensions of individualism and collectivism, each of which can be horizontal or vertical. The horizontal dimensions emphasize equality (a person is more or less similar to others), while the vertical dimensions emphasize hierarchy (a person is rated as high or low in the hierarchy according to social or economic status). This classification allows more fluidity in examining individuals and societies from diverse cultural influences and backgrounds, rather than observing them

as unidimensional in a dichotomy. The four dimensions in the model are (Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998):

1. Vertical individualism (VI), which is characterized by the desire of people to be differentiated from others and acquire status through individual competition with others. The United States can represent this dimension of social expression.

2. Horizontal individualism (HI), which is characterized by the desire to be special and different from groups, but not by hierarchy or competition. This feature is characteristic of people who rely on themselves and do not wish to stand out or reach high status (independent from others result of reluctance to burden others). Sweden and Australia can represent this dimension of social expression.

3. Vertical collectivism (VC), which is characterized by emphasis on belonging or cohesion within the group, being willing to sacrifice personal goals for the sake of group goals, supporting one's group in competition with outside groups, and accepting the authority and rules of one's own group. Fascism, communes and cooperatives, and traditional companies that accept the authority of a strong leader can represent this dimension of social expression.

4. Horizontal collectivism (HC), which describes people who see themselves as similar to others, and emphasize common goals, interdependence, and sociability, but do not accept authority easily. The old Israeli kibbutzim could represent an expression of this social dimension.

These distinctions among cultures may be relevant to the distinctions mentioned previously among personality and family types with respect to differentiation. Thus, while Bowen (1978) claims that DS is a universal feature and is not affected by social or cultural orientations, some investigators maintain that populations of Western, individualistic cultures emphasize independence, while more collectivistic cultures emphasize the value of dependency on others (Florian et al., 1993; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

These apparent contradictions may be explained at least in part by Triandis's (1995) claim that all contemporary people have internalized the four dimensions of individualism-collectivism and can use them in various combinations and strengths depending on situation and context. Other researchers claim that the simultaneous use of various dimensions characterizes multicultural societies (Gelfand, Triandis, & Chan, 1996). Examples are societies affected by immigration, Western invasions, and wars, such as Lebanon (Ayyash-Abdo, 2001); multi-cultural societies such as Israel (Florian et al., 1993); and societies with natives and minorities living in a

larger society, such as the Palestinian society in Israel (Hilo-Monayer, 2007; Oyserman, 1993).

IV. COUPLES' INTIMACY

Building and maintaining close relationships with others has been identified as a basic human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Most individuals perceive marriage as the most intimate and mature relationship they experience, and their primary source of affection and support (Levinger & Huston, 1990). Core components of intimacy are good communication, affectionate feelings, and solidarity between the partners (Sternberg, 1986). Other researchers claim that intimacy includes communication, involvement, and mutual friendship between partners (Moore, McCabe, & Stockdale, 1998), or feelings of friendship, mutuality, support, trust, understanding, and acceptance (Rabin, 1991). Others define intimacy as a relationship built on honesty, respect, confidence, generosity, loyalty, stability, and acceptance (Sternberg, 2003).

Theoretically and clinically, it seems that there are nine dimensions of intimacy: emotional, psychological, intellectual, sexual, physical (non-sexual), spiritual, experiential, social and recreational, and temporal intimacy, which is the amount of time that each partner likes to be intimately involved with the other partner (Bagarozzi, 2001). However, only five of these dimensions have been empirically validated and measured via the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR) questionnaire: emotional, social, intellectual, sexual, and recreational (Schaefer & Olson, 1981).

Despite the many definitions of intimacy in the literature, the sense of closeness and connection that develops through communication within the couple is the most common component to all definitions of intimacy (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005). Emotional self-exposure was found to be more significant for creating intimacy than exposure of information (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). In addition, the intimacy that participants experience is related to emotional exposure and perception of the partner's understanding of the situation described by the exposing partner (Lippert & Prager, 2001). Furthermore, self-exposure and reactivity that lead to intimacy cause general positive assessment of the relationship and greater satisfaction and confidence in the marriage (Reis & Shaver, 1988). A partner's reactivity, as demonstrated in small gestures, strongly affects the sense of intimacy and quality of the relationship for both partners (Debrot, Cook, Perrez, & Horn, 2012). Thus, intimacy improves dyadic adjustment for both men and women (Moore et al., 1998).

The association between one's individualism-collectivism and intimacy seems to be complex. On the one hand, individualism stresses one's personal choices, one's identity, and a strong sense of self. On the other, collectivism seems to enable emotional security, closeness, and intimacy with significant others (Gushue & Constantine, 2003). This may partly explain the inconsistent and negative findings about the relationship between intimacy and individualism-collectivism. For instance, a study comparing the United States, France, and Japan in intimacy expressions found no significant interaction effect for the cultural variable (Ting-Toomey, 1991). In another study, which examined peers' intimacy and the autonomy of Palestinian and Jewish female students in Israel, no contribution of individualism-collectivism was found for predicting intimacy (Ben Shaul, 2003).

V. MARITAL SATISFACTION

Spanier (1976) addresses marital adjustment as one of the components of couples' relationship satisfaction. Dyadic adjustment is an ongoing process in which couples try to reach agreement in the following areas: consensus, cohesion, expressions of affection, and dyadic satisfaction.

Studies and the theoretical literature describe numerous factors that may influence marital satisfaction, and present different models to explain the connections among variables. A meta-analysis of studies suggested categorizing the factors that influence marital satisfaction into five constructs: communication and conflict resolution, dyadic support, emotional closeness and intimacy, sensuality and sexuality, and decision making and power-control relations (Lawrence et al., 2008).

Many factors were identified as potential predictors of marital adjustment. Thus, Florian and Mikulincer (1998) maintained that communication in a relationship can be translated into feelings of trust, security, and gaining support from a partner, which lead to better marital satisfaction. Married couples rated the most important components of a successful marriage in the following order: love, understanding, respect, sexuality, and trust (Lavee, 1997). The ability of both partners to identify and express feelings is related to marital adjustment. The sense of security in the intimate relationship was found to be the mediating variable between emotional exposure and marital adjustment (Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005). Love and intimacy are personal, basic needs. A difference between the levels of intimacy perceived by the partners may affect the degree of marital dissatisfaction of both partners (Bagarozzi, 2001).

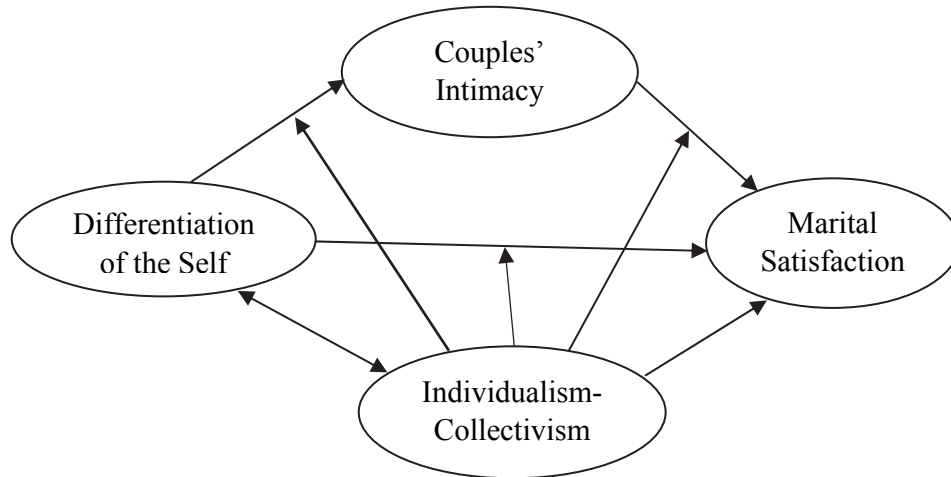
To sum up, DS has been studied only in recent decades, and few studies have investigated this variable in collectivist societies in general and in Palestinian society within Israel in particular.

This study examines two hypotheses:

1. Palestinian and Jewish married couples will differ in levels of differentiation of the self, couples' intimacy, and marital satisfaction.
2. Positive correlations will be found among differentiation of the self, couples' intimacy, and marital satisfaction in both Palestinian and Jewish married couples.

The following is a graphic illustration of the study's simplified model (Figure 1). The arrows demonstrate the hypothesized connections between variables. Even though the variable individualism-collectivism has four dimensions, in this graph it is illustrated as unidimensional. Differentiation of the self is the independent variable, marital satisfaction is the dependent variable, couples' intimacy is the mediator variable, and individualism-collectivism is the moderator variable.

Figure 1
Simplified Study Model



Note. Arrows symbolize hypothesized connections between variables. Independent Variable = Differentiation of the Self; Dependent Variable = Marital Satisfaction; Mediator Variable = Couples' Intimacy; Moderator Variable = Individualism-Collectivism.

VI. METHOD

A. Participant Characteristics and Sampling Procedure

The sample consisted of 167 couples (84 Palestinian and 83 Jewish; 166 Jews, 88 Muslims, and 80 Christians), with and without children, from central and northern Israel. The first author unsystematically chose couples in various public spaces, such as workplaces, community centers, and recreation areas (e.g., the beach). Couples who agreed to participate met with the researcher at a scheduled date and time, according to their convenience. Meetings took place in the couples' homes in cities, towns, villages and kibbutzim, where each partner individually completed a questionnaire, a process that lasted fifty to sixty minutes. The questionnaires of both partners were sealed in an envelope after completion. Participants who could not read the questionnaires (due to language or vision problems) received the researcher's assistance.

Table 1 presents basic socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the couples.

Table 1
Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 167)

Variable	Nationality & Gender	N	M	SD	F
Age	Palestinian men	84	41.23	10.93	6.61**
	Jewish men	83	45.87	12.35	
	Palestinian women	84	36.61	10.07	15.16**
	Jewish women	83	43.33	12.13	
Years together before marriage	Palestinian couples	84	1.75	1.95	11.41**
	Jewish couples	83	2.85	2.23	
Years of cohabiting	Palestinian couples	84	0	0	54.82**
	Jewish couples	83	1.10	1.36	
Years of marriage	Palestinian couples	84	14.01	11.06	7.83**
	Jewish couples	83	19.26	13.05	
Age at marriage	Palestinian men	84	26.78	3.81	0.42
	Jewish men	83	26.36	4.51	
	Palestinian women	84	22.26	3.31	9.20**
	Jewish women	83	23.94	3.81	
Number of children	Palestinian couples	84	2.31	1.43	1.74
	Jewish couples	83	2.59	1.31	
Education	Palestinian men	83	12.73	2.78	22.42**
	Jewish men	83	14.98	3.31	

Table 1, *continued*

	Palestinian women	83	13.93	3.03	7.98**
	Jewish women	83	15.22	2.87	
Persons in the household	Palestinian couples	84	3.98	1.44	0.07
	Jewish couples	83	3.92	1.54	
Rooms in the residence	Palestinian couples	83	3.86	.93	15.50**
	Jewish couples	83	4.51	1.18	

Note. ** One-way analysis of variance for the equality of means is significant at the .01 level. No asterisks = not significant.

B. Measures

The data were collected using five instruments for self-reporting:

1. Sociodemographic questionnaire.
2. Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised (DSI-R) (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003). The scale examines intrapsychic features of “emotional reactivity” and “I position” and interpersonal features of “emotional cutoff” and “fusion with others.” The scale contains 46 items ranging from 1 (*not true at all*) to 6 (*very true*). Cronbach’s alpha (α) reliability of the total DSI-R scores was $\alpha = .87$ for women and $\alpha = .85$ for men.
3. Individualism-Collectivism Scale developed by Singelis et al. (1995). In this study, the shorter version was used (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). The scale contains 16 items measured by a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The scale measures four subscales, and their Cronbach’s alphas were low to moderate: HI ($\alpha = .65$), VI ($\alpha = .70$), HC ($\alpha = .52$), and VC ($\alpha = .70$).
4. Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR) (Schaefer & Olson, 1981). This scale examines perceptions of couples’ intimacy as each partner experiences it in the present. The original scale contains 36 items, ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Thirty items are related to the five levels of intimacy (emotional, social, intellectual, sexual, and recreational); six items that examine social desirability were excluded from the analysis. Reliability of the total PAIR scores was $\alpha = .90$ for women and $\alpha = .88$ for men.
5. Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), developed by Spanier (1976), includes 36 diverse items. The scale examines the quality of dyadic adjustment in four dimensions: consensus, cohesion, dyadic satisfaction, and affectionate expression. Reliability of the total DAS scores was $\alpha = .92$ for women and $\alpha = .90$ for men.

VII. RESULTS

Data analysis followed two interlocking strategies: analysis of each spouse separately and dyadic analysis (APIM) of the couples as units (Kashy & Kenny, 2000). Hypothesis 1—that Palestinian and Jewish married couples will differ in their levels of differentiation of the self, couples' intimacy, and marital satisfaction—was tested by comparing the means of the four ethnic and gender groups via one-way analysis of variance.

The hypothesis was partially confirmed (Table 2). Jewish married couples show significantly higher scores in DS and couples' intimacy than Palestinian married couples. Despite these differences, there were no significant differences between the two national groups in marital satisfaction. Table 2 shows the significant differences between the Jewish and the Palestinian couples.

Table 2
Means and one-way analysis of variance of differentiation of the self, couples' intimacy, and marital satisfaction by nationality and gender

Variables	<i>M</i> Palestinian women	<i>M</i> Jewish women	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i> Palestinian men	<i>M</i> Jewish men	<i>F</i>
Differentiation of the self	3.64	3.96	12.52**	3.86	4.15	10.77**
Couple's intimacy	2.68	2.90	5.94*	2.59	2.89	12.01**
Marital satisfaction	3.64	3.84	4.35	3.73	3.87	2.69

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. No asterisks = nonsignificant.

To better understand these differences, the APIM was used to compare the two models of Palestinian and Jewish married couples while controlling for the sociodemographic variables. The demographic variables controlled were length of marriage, education, number of children, socioeconomic status, and living near the family of origin (of either spouse). Surprisingly, no significant correlations were found between the sociodemographic variables and marital satisfaction, in all four models of individualism-collectivism.

Hypothesis 2 was that positive correlations would be found among differentiation of the self, couples' intimacy, and marital satisfaction in both Palestinian and Jewish married couples. Dyadic relationships are characterized by interdependence and contain mutual influences and multiple correlations (Laursen, 2005). Yet most studies still analyze data of couples in the

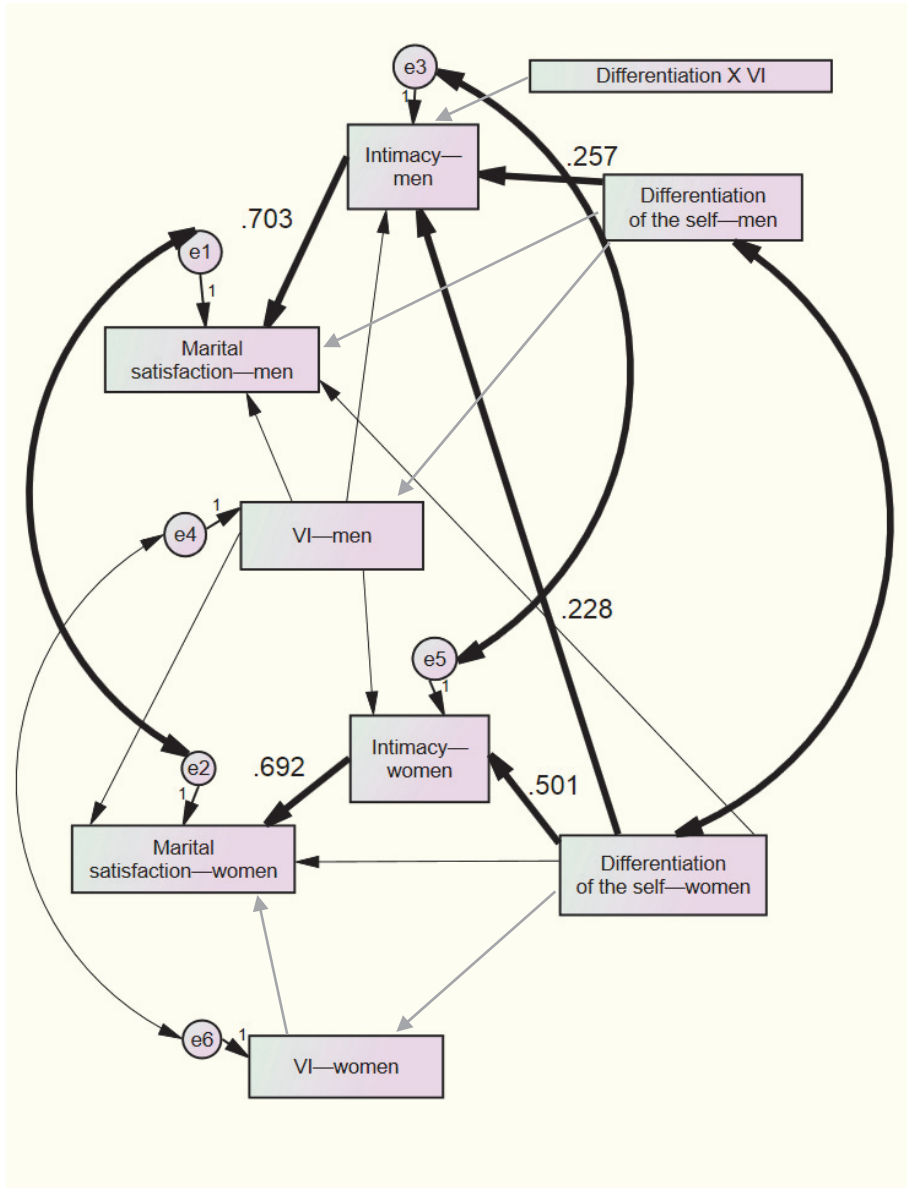
traditional analysis of each spouse separately, not taking into account the interdependence of partners and its influences. Today such analyses are considered deficient and inappropriate (Laursen, 2005; Campbell & Kashy, 2002). Therefore, the APIM was used in the present study. This model was employed in the analysis of the study's data via the AMOS statistical package (Byrne, 2010). AMOS, developed specifically for dyadic analysis, was used to examine all variables in the model and to test variable correlations for each partner (actor effects) and correlations between partners (partner effects) via the APIM method.

Causal models were analyzed for the Palestinian and Jewish respondents separately. These models were analyzed for each of the four dimensions of individualism-collectivism: vertical and horizontal individualism and vertical and horizontal collectivism. Still, model analysis (four models for each dimension) indicates that both Palestinian and Jewish societies/cultures/nations behave similarly in all of the study's variables.

A. Vertical Individualism

In the analysis of VI, there was a significant positive correlation between DS and couples' intimacy in both partners (men, $p < .001$, $\beta = .257$; women, $p < .001$, $\beta = .501$). In addition, there was a strong positive correlation between couples' intimacy and marital satisfaction (men, $p < .001$, $\beta = .703$; women, $p < .001$, $\beta = .692$).

Figure 2
The Study's Model with Vertical Individualism, Differentiation of Self, Intimacy, and Marital Satisfaction for Women and Men

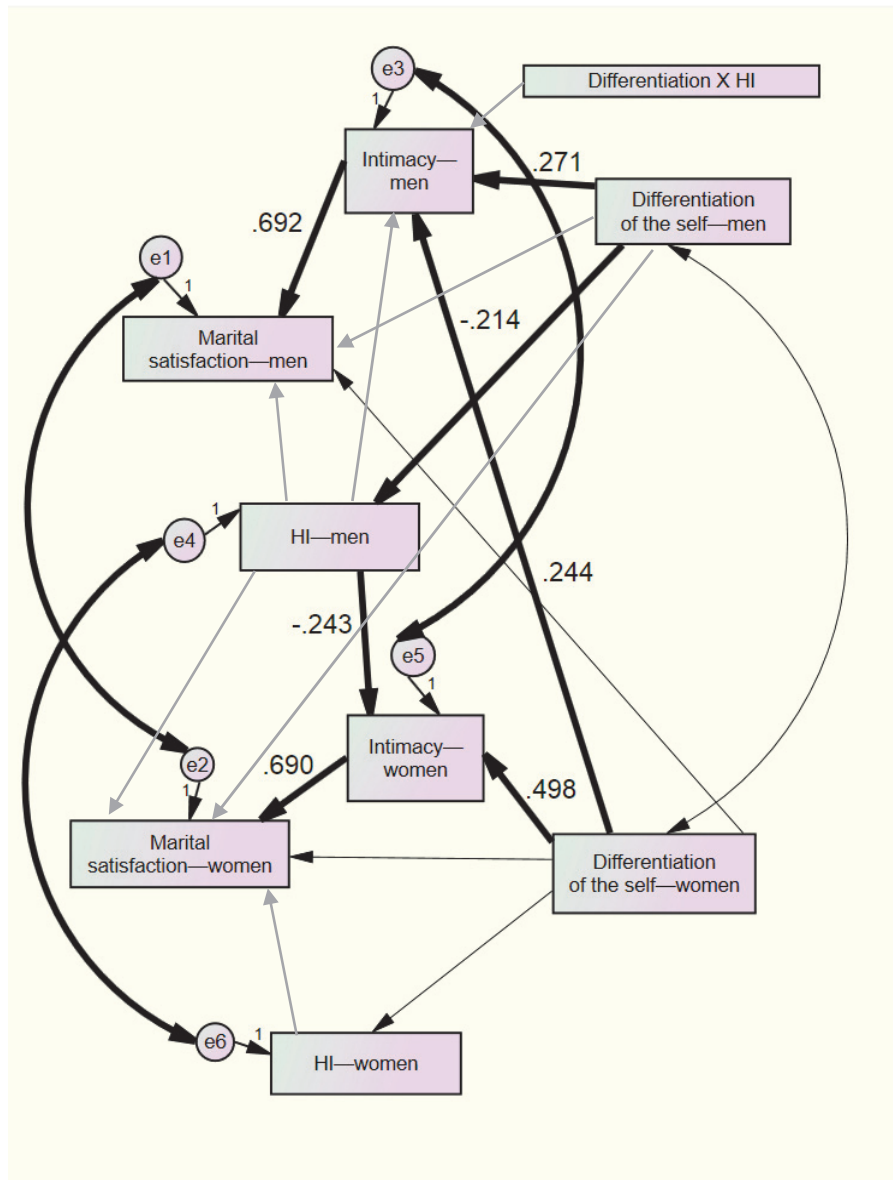


Note. VI, total sample. Thick line = significant effect size greater than .2; thin line = significant effect size less than .2; gray line = non-significant effect size. CFI = .980; TLI = .955; NFI = .945; RMSEA = .055; $p < .055$; $df = 24$; $\chi^2 = 1.49$

B. Horizontal Individualism

In the analysis of HI, there was a significant positive correlation between DS and couples' intimacy in both partners (men, $p < .001$, $\beta = .271$; women, $p < .001$, $\beta = .498$). In addition, there was a strong positive correlation between couples' intimacy and marital satisfaction (men, $p < .001$, $\beta = .692$; women, $p < .001$, $\beta = .690$).

Figure 3
The Study's Model with Horizontal Individualism, Differentiation of Self, Intimacy, and Marital Satisfaction for Women and Men

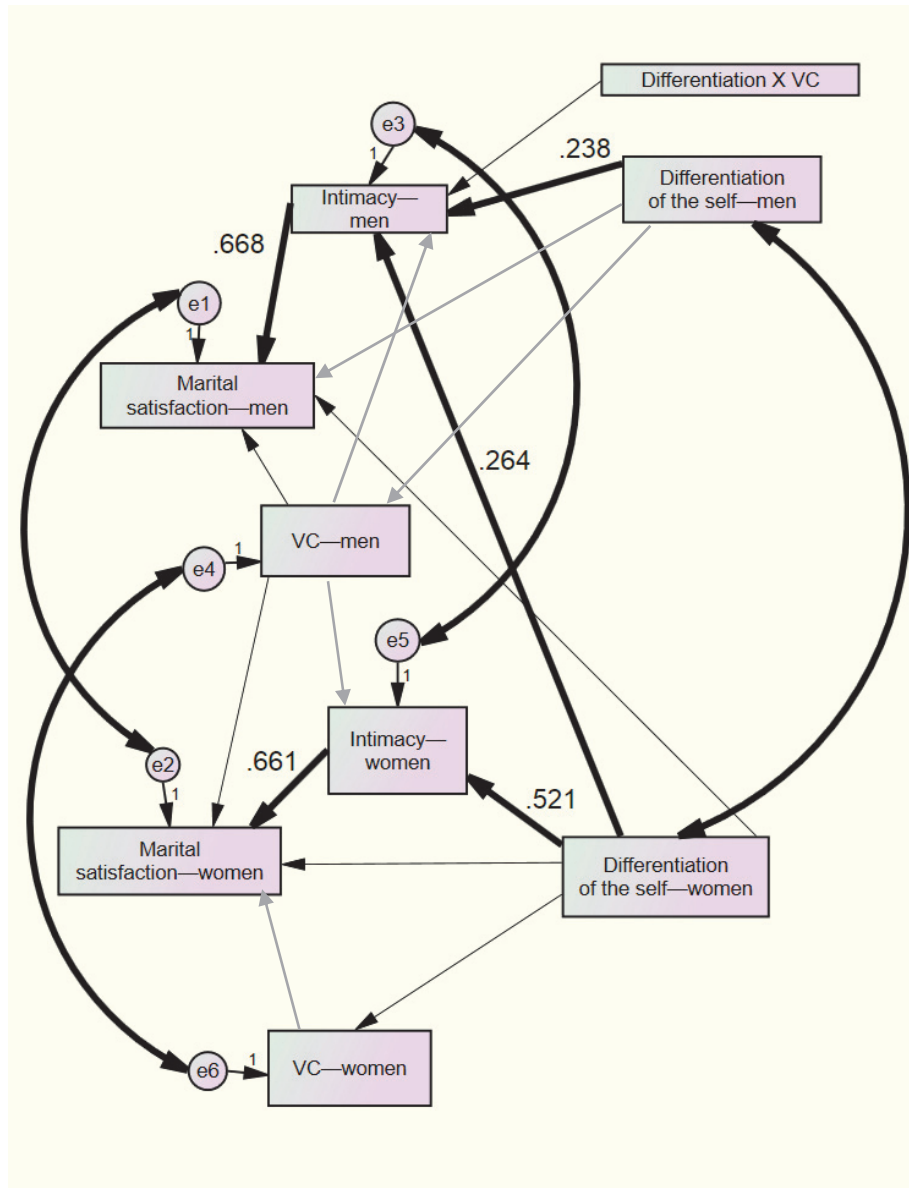


Note. HI, total sample. Thick line = significant effect size greater than .2; thin line = significant effect size less than .2; gray line = non-significant effect size. CFI = .982; TLI = .957; NFI = .950; RMSEA = .055; $p < .057$; $df = 23$; $\chi^2 = 1.50$.

C. Vertical Collectivism

In the analysis of VC, there was a significant positive correlation between DS and couples' intimacy in both partners (men, $p < .001$, $\beta = .238$; women, $p < .001$, $\beta = .521$). In addition, there was a strong, significant positive correlation between couples' intimacy and marital satisfaction (men, $p < .001$, $\beta = .668$; women, $p < .001$, $\beta = .661$ women).

Figure 4
The Study's Model with Vertical Collectivism, Differentiation of Self, Intimacy, and Marital Satisfaction for Women and Men

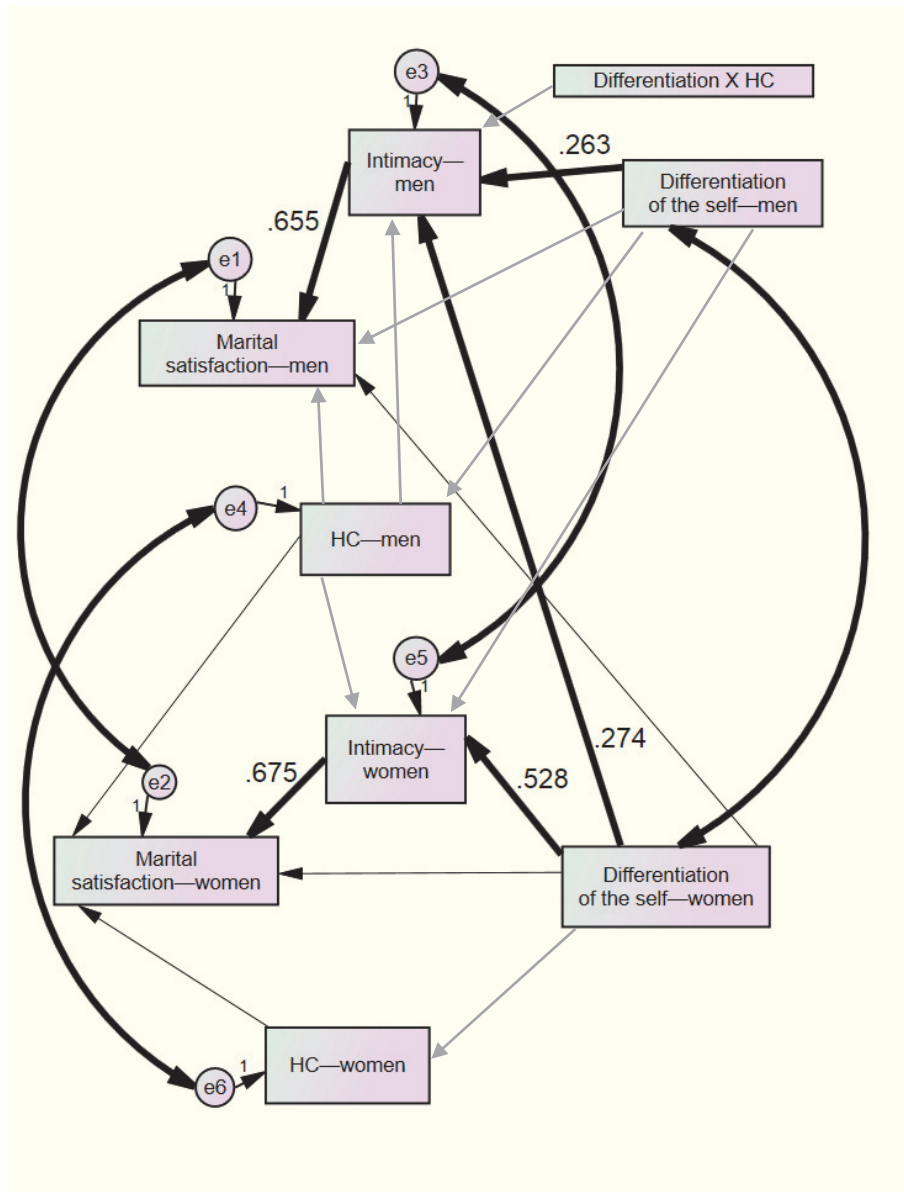


Note. VC, total sample. Thick line = significant effect size greater than .2; thin line = significant effect size less than .2; gray line = non-significant effect size. CFI = .992; TLI = .981; NFI = .956; RMSEA = .035; $p < .220$; $df = 24$; $\chi^2 = 1.20$.

D. Horizontal Collectivism

In the analysis of HC, there was a significant positive correlation between DS and couples' intimacy in both partners (men, $p < .001$, $\beta = .263$; women, $p < .001$, $\beta = .528$). There was also a positive and strong correlation between couples' intimacy and marital satisfaction (men, $p < .001$, $\beta = .655$; women, $p < .001$, $\beta = .675$).

Figure 5
The Study's Model with Horizontal Collectivism, Differentiation of Self, Intimacy, and Marital Satisfaction for Women and Men



Note: Horizontal collectivism, total sample. Thick line = significant effect size greater than .2; thin line = significant effect size less than .2; gray line = non-significant effect size. CFI = .970; TLI = .920; NFI = .943; RMSEA = .076; $p < .005$; $df = 21$; $\chi^2 = 1.96$.

DISCUSSION

This study's three principal findings are summarized here. First, regardless of the dimension of individualism-collectivism measured, there was a clear positive effect of DS on intimacy and of intimacy on marital satisfaction. Second, while Jewish couples scored higher than Palestinian couples on DS and couples' intimacy, there were no significant differences between Palestinian and Jewish couples in marital satisfaction. Third, the models describing the relationships among DS, individualism-collectivism, couples' intimacy, and marital satisfaction are very similar for Palestinian and Jewish married couples.

The first finding of this study shows a clear effect of DS on intimacy and of intimacy on marital satisfaction, across all dimensions of individualism-collectivism. In other words, the dyadic connection is of more significance to couples than social, cultural, or national characteristics.

In Israel, Palestinian and Jewish couples are currently in a transitional phase, shifting from traditional society to a modern one. In general, all couples' values of marital relations derive from Europe or North Africa. Most couples don't want to see marriage as an institution, or an organized match, preferring instead to choose a partner and to be chosen based on love and romance. In these partnership marriages, then, the quality of the relationship is significant and depends on the ability of both partners to invest in and commit to it (Rabin, 1991).

According to other authors (Avnon, 1997; Haj-Yahia, 1995; Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2003), perceived marital satisfaction is not only affected by the couple's DS, but also by factors related to their parents, families, children, and the social and financial support gained from their surroundings. This study suggests that couples' happiness is mainly affected by their dyadic and intimate relationship.

A study in the United States that examined the correlation between individualism-collectivism, attachment styles, dyadic satisfaction, and love styles, found that dyadic dynamics, more than cultural variables, are significantly connected to perceptions of love (Guarascio, 2005). Another study compared Americans and Lebanese and found that most couples believed the quality of their marriage to be related to the core of their dyad and emphasized romance, emotional intimacy, and physical intimacy (Ghandour, 2009). These two studies reinforce the present study's finding that the dyadic relationship is more significant for couples than cultural characteristics such as individualism-collectivism.

The second finding of this study indicates that Jewish couples scored higher than Palestinian couples on DS and intimacy, but no differences were found in marital satisfaction. In another study conducted in Israel, there were no significant differences between Druze and Jewish mothers in some of the subscales of DS (Peleg, Halby, & Whaby, 2006). In another recent study, Palestinian women reported higher levels on two subscales of DS than Jewish women. DS was also found to be associated with life satisfaction in both groups (Biadisy-Ashkar & Peleg, 2013). Peleg & Rahal (2012) suggest that DS could be valued differently from one ethnic group to another. These studies demonstrate controversial findings that reflect the complexity and diversity of the social and cultural fabric of Palestinians and Jews in Israel. Further complexity is added when studying couples rather than individuals.

Due to cultural assimilation and modernization processes, Jewish groups have merged and their cultural differences have vanished over the years (Weiss, 2003). Palestinians also cope with modernization processes in addition to their duties and faithfulness to family and friends (Dwairy, 2009). Both Palestinians and Jews perceive familial connections as a source of support and encouragement (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2003).

The Palestinian society in Israel respects a couple's independence as long as their nuclear family keeps its obligations to their extended families and provides assistance that their members need (Haj-Yahia, 1995). Therefore, most of the Muslims and Christians who live in Israel are considered bicultural (Dwairy, 2009).

The findings of this study are similar to those of Simhi-Regev (2006) who found that levels of DS were lower in Jewish Israeli couples of Middle Eastern origins, compared to Ashkenazim (of European origins). Still, no significant difference was found in marital quality between the two groups. It may be that Palestinian couples expect and perceive marital satisfaction differently than Jewish couples, and other components in the dyadic dynamics are the ones that provide support, encouragement, and affection needed for the couple to be happy together.

It could be that Palestinian couples accept the expectations of their families and surrounding society to contribute their share in fulfilling obligations. In addition to social and material obligations, couples also enjoy the assistance of their extended family members in coping with daily stresses as part of these social dynamics (Haj-Yahia, 1995). These obligations, in addition to the needs and stressors of their nuclear families, are inherent to their daily lives; consequently, they may be subject to further stress that reduces their capacity to cope with emotional situations. It could be that a couple's capacity to balance their feelings was lower, despite their families' and friends'

assistance, resulting in lower ability to cope (adapt), and therefore they scored lower in DS and couples' intimacy.

Another Israeli study found that although Jewish and Palestinian women scored differently on the subscales for DS, they were not different in levels of satisfaction with life. The researchers suggest that Palestinian women who work and study in the midst of (often chaotic) political economic transformation may receive partners' support via marriage as helpful in remaining satisfied with life, despite the stresses of daily life (Biadsy-Ashkar & Peleg, 2013).

Lou (2010) argued that Western societies focus more on professional status, whereas Eastern societies focus more on social relationships and emotional support. The increase in Palestinian women's contribution to household income has an influence on most husbands, especially in younger generations, in consulting with their wives and perceiving them as equal partners in decision making (Avitzur, 1987). Women's engagement in work can enhance their self-fulfillment and confidence (Haj-Yahia, 1995), which in turn may increase communication between partners on daily decisions and thereby elevate levels of marital satisfaction.

It may be that Palestinian couples are engaged in more familial-social activities, rather than dyadic-intimate ones, which enhance their marital satisfaction but have no effect on the couples' intimacy. Some of these social obligations may include separation between men and women in social activities, or activities that obligate men to attend but not women (Haj-Yahia, 1995). This can explain the differences between Palestinian and Jewish couples in the intimacy scale. Simhi-Regev (2006) found that familial connections of Eastern Jewish couples were beneficial to the quality of their marriage and perceived as helpful and encouraging, while the Western Jewish couples perceived their familial connections as more stressful and interfering with their dyad and preferred distance from their families of origin. It has also been suggested that the levels of intimacy Palestinian couples experience in their dyadic interactions are sufficient to allow them to feel satisfied in their marriage, because their perception of intimate interactions is different from the perception of Jewish couples.

The third finding of this study shows that the models describing the relationships among DS, individualism-collectivism, couple's intimacy, and marital satisfaction are similar for Palestinian and Jewish married couples.

Bowen (1978) claimed that DS is a universal feature, and thus not affected by social, cultural, or ethnic background. Many studies supported Bowen's universality theory by finding no significant differences among various societies (Jankowski & Hooper, 2012; Skowron, 2004; Skowron &

Friedlander, 1998; Tuason & Friedlander, 2000). However, other studies disputed this conclusion by showing that there was considerable variation in differentiation scores or of certain subscales among couples from different societies (Biadisy-Ashkar & Peleg, 2013; Gushue & Constantine, 2003; Mitchell, 2010; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Various theorists (Holmes & Anderson, 1994; Knudson-Martin, 1994) even attacked Bowen's theory, arguing that it was founded on Western perceptions that encourage individuality and separation.

Few studies have found that social-cultural differences among populations in levels of DS are connected to demographic variables, such as employment, duration of the marriage (Biadisy-Ashkar & Peleg, 2013), years of education, and socioeconomic status of participants (Shawn, 2002). In the present study, such correlations between demographic variables and all other variables were not found to be significant when using the APIM (Kashy & Kenny, 2000).

Furthermore, this study suggests that the similarities between Palestinian society and Israeli-Jewish society surpass differences. In contrast to earlier studies that depict Palestinian society as Eastern collectivist and Israeli-Jewish society as Western individualist (Ben Shaul, 2003; Florian et al., 1993; Hilo-Monayer, 2007; Oyserman, 1993), this study shows that the effects of the individualism-collectivism continuum in both societies/cultures are similar. The two societies were indeed shown to be different in scores of DS and couples' intimacy, but directions of interactions for all variables in the model were similar.

Other Israeli studies suggest that the two societies differ from one another in their values, expectations, and attitudes toward marital difficulties (Lavee, 1991; Savaya & Cohen, 1998). Therefore, after taking into account that couples from both societies are variable on the individualism-collectivism continuum, couples therapy needs to be sensitive and adequate to their social and cultural background, expectations, and sexual and behavioral values.

A. Clinical and Therapeutic Implications

Our results have several implications that may assist clinical therapists and improve the development of services and the practice of culturally sensitive therapy in the treatment of Palestinian and Jewish couples in Israel. This research may also help Western-oriented couple and family therapists to better tailor their methodologies to distinct characteristics of respective national groups. It may also offer couple and family therapists an opportunity to deepen their appreciation for the importance of dyadic features and their contribution to marital satisfaction, especially in times of instability and

insecurity. Furthermore, the research findings may shed new light on Eastern- and Western-oriented populations in Israel and elsewhere in the world. It may also encourage further research and cultural sensitivity in therapy for married couples facing challenges.

B. Limitations

Research biases can result from the nonexhaustive sampling process that excluded various groups in both societies, such as Bedouin, Druze, and Haredi couples. Another bias can result from translation of the questionnaires from English to Arabic and changes in terminology and interpretation of terms that are taken from Western literature, such as intimacy, which are not frequently used in Palestinian society. Another difficulty is the unit of analysis—married couples rather than individuals: one partner refusing to participate meant that both refused. This last difficulty resulted in limited sample size, variety among participants, and complexity of the analysis.

C. Future Research

We highly recommend retesting the same hypotheses in future studies with couples of the same sex, cohabiting couples, and couples in therapy. In addition, it would be fascinating to conduct a longitudinal study of couples through stages of the life cycle to examine changes in differentiation of the self, couples' intimacy, and marital satisfaction.

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