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Couples relationship standards and satisfaction in Pakistani couples

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Abstract

Relationship standards are beliefs about what is important in a satisfying couple relationship, which vary considerably between cultures, and might mean that what couples seek from couple therapy differs across cultures. We assessed the standards of $n = 49$ Pakistani couples and whether those standards predicted couple satisfaction. To provide referents for the Pakistani standards, we also assessed self-reported relationship standards in $n = 33$ Western couples and $n = 30$ Chinese couples. Pakistani couples endorsed couple bond standards (e.g., expressions of love) as similarly important, and family responsibility (e.g., extended family relations) standards as more important, than Western or Chinese couples. In Pakistani couples, Couple Bond predicted couples' relationship satisfaction, but family responsibility and Religion predicted only wives' satisfaction. Modest sample sizes necessitate caution in interpreting results but suggest existing couple therapies might need modification to address the distinctive relationship standards of Pakistani couples.

KEYWORDS
couple relationship, couple satisfaction, marriage, Pakistan, relationship standards

INTRODUCTION

Couple relationship satisfaction is the extent to which someone's relationship meets their standards of what a quality relationship should be like (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020). The importance of standards like relations with extended family, adherence to traditional gender roles, and the role of religion in the relationship vary substantially between culturally diverse countries (Hiew et al., 2015a; Iqbal et al., 2019; Skellern et al., 2021). These different relationship standards might mean different standards predict relationship satisfaction in different cultures, and possibly that the goals couples seek to achieve from couple therapy might differ across cultures. The current study assessed the relationship standards of Pakistani couples, who were culturally distinctive from previously studied samples of couples. We compared the Pakistani couples' relationship standards with those of Australian couples of European or Western heritage (hereafter referred to as Western couples) and Chinese couples. We also tested the association of relationship standards with relationship satisfaction in the Pakistani couples.

Relationship standards

Epstein and Baucom (2002, p. 72) defined couple relationship standards as: "...personal beliefs about the characteristics an intimate relationship ... should have." Most research on couple relationship standards has been done within Western cultures (e.g., Baucom et al., 1996; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, et al., 1999) and, understandably, assessed relationship standards reflecting values in the society in which they were conducted. Specifically, all these researchers assessed standards reflecting aspects of romantic love (e.g., attraction, expressions of love, and psychological intimacy) as central to couple relationships, which reflects Western ideals but does not address other ideals in non-Western cultures (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020).

Recent work has used the Cross-Cultural Couple Relationship Standards Scale (CCCRSS) (Halford et al., 2018; Hiew et al., 2015a) to assess a range of relationship standards likely to be differentially important across diverse cultures. To describe the scope of the standards that might be relevant in diverse cultures, we summarize the content of the CCCRSS. The original CCCRSS assessed two superordinate standards. The first is couple bond, which includes demonstration of love, (e.g., "Express their love for each other in words every day"), demonstration of caring, and expressing and being receptive to intimate communication (e.g., "Ask each other about their thoughts"). The second standard was family responsibility, which includes relations with the extended family (e.g., "Do not disagree with family elders"), face (e.g., "Avoid doing things that might lower others' opinions of their partner or the couple"), relational harmony (e.g., "Do not speak about things that may lead to conflict"), and traditional gender roles (e.g., "The man financially supports his partner and children.")

Later versions of the CCCRSS added two more standards (Iqbal et al., 2019; Skellern et al., 2021): Relationship effort and religion. Relationship effort refers to working on your relationship (e.g., "Persist in trying to make things better when the relationship has problems"). Relationship effort seems likely to be associated with relationship satisfaction, but this hypothesis was untested till the current study. The religion relationship standard includes beliefs that one's marriage should be blessed by a divine being, that spouses should communicate about religion, and that partners should share religious practices (Skellern et al., 2021). More religious people tend to have more satisfying marriages, both among Christians (Mahoney et al., 2008) and Muslims (Yeganeh & Shaikhmahmoodi, 2013).

Perhaps endorsing relationship standards about religion in the relationship is associated with satisfaction, but this hypothesis was untested till the current study.

Culture and relationship standards

The mean endorsement of couple bond standards is high, and shows only small cross-cultural variations among Pakistanis, Chinese, and Westerners (Halford et al., 2018; Hiew et al., 2015a; Iqbal et al., 2019), suggesting that Couple Bond standards are cross-culturally seen as important. However, Chinese and Pakistanis much more strongly endorse Family Responsibility relationship standards than do Westerners (Halford et al., 2018; Hiew et al., 2015a, 2015b; Iqbal et al., 2019). There also are large cultural differences in the religion relationship standard (Skellern et al., 2021); those without a religious faith living in Western countries (the United States and Australia) rate it as much less important than did Christians living in Western countries, Buddhists living in Thailand, and Muslims living in Pakistan.

Culture is a series of ideas, behaviors, and technologies that can be taught, and which serve as adaptations to the environment (Creanza et al., 2017). Relationship standards that vary between cultures relate to dimensions of cultural variation (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020), and we elaborate on this point to provide a theoretical framework for our predictions. One widely used typology of cultural values (Inglehart & Baker, 2000) suggests two major dimensions: (1) Survival—selfexpression and (2) Traditional—secular/rational. Survival values prioritize collective behaviors that promote economic and physical security and are endorsed most strongly in low-income countries (Dobewell & Strack, 2014; Kashima et al., 2019), notably in African, and Islamic countries (World Values Survey, 2020). Selfexpression values prioritize personal freedom and quality of life and are most strongly endorsed in high-income countries (Kashima et al., 2019), notably majority English-speaking countries, and the protestant areas of Europe (World Values Survey, 2020).

People living in countries with high survival values, (e.g., Pakistan and China) strongly endorse family responsibility standards (Hiew et al., 2015a; Iqbal et al., 2019). For example, maintaining couple relationship harmony is valued in high survival value contexts, which might reflect the survival consequences if a couple separate in that context. People living in countries with high selfexpressive values, (e.g., Australia and the United States) rate Family Responsibility standards as relatively unimportant (Hiew et al., 2015a), possibly values like maintaining harmony are seen as less important when selfexpression is a core cultural value.

Traditional values emphasize the importance of God and religion, and that tight conformity to culturally defined normative behavior is important; whereas secular-rational values prioritize the importance of science and rational thought, selfdetermination in life, and freedom to deviate from culturally normative behavior (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). The Religion standard is strongly endorsed in Pakistan (Iqbal et al., 2019) and Thailand (Skellern et al., 2021), which also has strong endorsement of traditional values (World Values Survey, 2020), and much less strongly in Australia and the United States (Skellern et al., 2021), which endorse Secular-Rational values (World Values Survey, 2020).

Association of couple relationship standards and satisfaction

Researchers have suggested three ways in which relationship standards can influence relationship satisfaction. First, satisfaction might be a function of the extent to which the

relationship meets the partners' relationship standards, and there does seem to be an association between these constructs (e.g., Baucom et al., 1996). However, predicting satisfaction from whether your relationship meets your relationship standards seems circular, in that satisfaction seems just another way of saying the relationship meets your standards.

Second, relationship standards might influence relationship satisfaction by some standards being adaptive for couple relationships. For example, in the United States couples' endorsement of standards of shared decision-making and frequent demonstration of caring correlate with relationship satisfaction (Baucom et al., 1996). However, even in comparing countries within Europe, culture affects the association between these standards and satisfaction (Goodwin & Gaines, 2004), suggesting different standards may be adaptive in diverse cultures. Third, relationship standards might influence relationship satisfaction when similarity between partners' standards is high (Hiew et al., 2015b). If both partners value similar behaviors, then it seems likely the relationship can meet each partner's standards.

Couple bond endorsement is associated with relationship satisfaction in Western and Chinese couples (Halford et al., 2018; Hiew et al., 2015b). Evidence-based couple therapy, (e.g., behavioral and emotion focused couple therapies) is based on researched correlates of relationship satisfaction in Western couples, and these therapies emphasize strengthening the couple bond (Halford & Pepping, 2019). For example, positive communication correlates with high satisfaction, and communication skills training is included in behavioral couple therapy (Halford & Pepping, 2019). A couple bond focus seems appropriate, given the importance attached to couple bond across diverse cultures. However, if additional standards in non-Western cultures correlate with relationship satisfaction, couple therapy might need to incorporate additional foci (e.g., family responsibilities).

Pakistani culture and couple relationship standards

We conducted research on Pakistani couples for three main reasons. First, Pakistan is a low-income, non-Western country of approximately 196 million people (Pakistani Ministry of Finance, 2017), and Pakistan has core cultural values that prioritize survival, and tradition-religiosity (World Values Survey, 2020). That makes Pakistan distinctive from the Western cultures in which relationship standards mainly have been studied. In Pakistan, 96% of the total population of Pakistan identifies as Muslim, and more than 95% of Pakistanis agree that religion is "very important" in their lives, compared with 40% of Americans, and less than 10% of the Australian and Hong Kong Chinese population (World Values Survey, 2020). The Islamic tradition places significance on the sanctity of marriage (Alghafli et al., 2014); and the religiousness of Pakistani culture seems likely to be reflected in relationship standards.

Second, we focused on Pakistan because it is culturally tight (Gelfand et al., 2011). Culturally tight countries have low tolerance for deviation from culturally defined desirable behavior, (e.g., India, Pakistan, Singapore, South Korea); culturally loose countries have more tolerance of deviance from culturally defined behavior (e.g., Australia, Brazil, Greece, and United States) (Gelfand et al., 2011). The cultural tightness in Pakistan may well be reflected in relationship standards. For instance, unmarried cohabitation is strongly discouraged in Pakistani culture, whereas cohabitation is accepted or at least tolerated in most Western countries (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020). Third, the only studies to date of relationship standards in Pakistanis found their standards were quite different to Westerners or Chinese. Most notably, Pakistanis endorsed the importance of Religion more strongly than any other culture studied to date (Iqbal et al., 2019; Skellern et al., 2021).

Aims of the current research

There were two aims in the current study. The primary aim was to evaluate the association of relationship standards with relationship satisfaction in Pakistani couples, which could clarify how well correlates of couple satisfaction in Western countries also correlate in Pakistani couples. A secondary aim was to assess Pakistani relationship standards and to do that we compared Pakistani standards with two other cultures. We had data on couple bond and family responsibility relationship standards of Westerner couples living in Australia (Hiew et al., 2015b), and Chinese couples living in Hong Kong (Halford et al., 2018). As noted earlier, Pakistan is more survival-focused than China which in turn is more survival-focused than Western countries. In addition, culturally Pakistan differs from Western countries and China in being more religious. Therefore, we compared our Western and Chinese samples, who differ culturally in noteworthy ways from our sample of Pakistani couples recruited for the current study. Based on Iqbal et al. (2019), we predicted Pakistanis would endorse the couple bond standards similarly to Westerners and Chinese (Hypothesis 1), and endorse family responsibility standards more strongly than Westerners, and at least as strongly as Chinese (Hypothesis 2). We did not have data on other cultures with which to compare Pakistani couples on the religion or relationship effort standards. Based on the centrality of religion in Pakistani culture, and Iqbal et al.'s (2019) findings, we predicted Pakistanis would endorse the religion and relationship effort standards at least as strongly as family responsibility standards (Hypothesis 3). Most studies found no sex differences in relationship standards in Pakistani, Chinese, or Westerners (Halford et al., 2018; Iqbal et al., 2019). We made no specific predictions but did test for sex differences in the current Pakistani, Chinese and Western couple samples.

As endorsement of couple Bond and agreement on family responsibility standards predicted relationship satisfaction in Western and Chinese cultures (Halford et al., 2018; Hiew et al., 2015b), we predicted that in Pakistan high satisfaction would be associated with high couple bond (Hypothesis 4), and high partner agreement on family responsibility (Hypothesis 5). Given the centrality of religion in Pakistan, we hypothesized that endorsement of religion would predict high satisfaction (Hypothesis 6). Finally, we predicted that relationship effort would predict high satisfaction (Hypothesis 7). Previous findings in Chinese and Westerners found little sex difference in the association of satisfaction with standards (Hiew et al., 2015b). It was unclear whether this would also be true in Pakistanis; so, we made no specific predictions but did test for sex differences.

METHOD

Participants

There were three samples. The first sample was recruited specifically for the current study between July and September 2016, and consisted of 49 married couples living in Pakistan, who were recruited via social media for a study on "what makes a great couple relationship?" All couples were selfdescribed as Muslim. Samples 2 and 3 were recruited between June 2014 and June 2016 for a study comparing Chinese, Western and intercultural couples living in Hong Kong, China and Brisbane, Australia, which is reported in Halford et al. (2018). In the current article, we focus on the 33 Western (i.e., European ancestry) married couples living in Australia, and the 30 Chinese married couples living in Hong Kong, China.

Measures

The **Couples Satisfaction Index** (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007) is a widely used 32-item measure of relationship satisfaction that has strong convergent and construct validity. In the Pakistani sample the CSI had excellent internal consistency, $\alpha = 0.94$, similar to the high consistency in both the Western and Chinese samples, $\alpha = 0.97$.

Cross-Cultural Couple Relationship Standards Scale (CCCRSS) is an 89-item measure of couple relationship standards. Each item describes a behavior that is rated for its importance for a successful long-term couple relationship on a 6-point scale ($0 = Not\ Important$, $5 = Extremely\ Important$). The 89 items reflect 10 scales, which were described in the introduction, and each scale is the mean of the items in the scale. The mean of the four scales that assess demonstration of love, demonstration of caring, intimacy expression, and intimacy responsiveness form a superordinate couple bond scale. The mean of the four scales that assess relations with the extended family, face, relational harmony and traditional gender roles form a superordinate family responsibility scale. The derived scores were the totals for the couple bond, family responsibility, relationship effort, and religion standards. In addition, we calculated the similarity of the partners on each standard as the ICC of the item scores in that standard, with high scores (closer to 1) reflecting high spouse similarity on that standard. As the derived score is the agreement between partners, the score is a couple-level variable (i.e., is the same for each spouse).

The items of the CCCRSS show structural invariance across culturally diverse samples in the United States, Australia, China, Pakistan, and Thailand (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020). Internal consistency in the current Pakistani sample was high on all scales, couple bond $\alpha = 0.91$, family responsibility $\alpha = 0.90$, relationship effort $\alpha = 0.90$, and religion $\alpha = 0.89$. The couple bond and family responsibility scales administered to the Westerners and Chinese had similar high internal consistency, ranging from $\alpha = 0.90$ to 0.95.

Procedure

The Pakistani couples were recruited through social media and measures were administered online. The couples recruited in Brisbane, Australia were recruited through online and traditional media outreach, and participated in two face-to-face sessions with a research team member. We administered the selfreport measures as an online questionnaire administered during the first session. Following completion of these assessments, partners participated in four video-recorded discussions. The current article focuses on relationship standards. We also recruited the couples in Hong Kong, China online and they completed the same questionnaires online as the Australian sample, but we did not conduct the face-to-face assessments with the Hong Kong couples. The Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Queensland reviewed and approved all procedures in the conduct of the research (approvals 2010000418 and 2015000773).

Data analysis

There was less than 0.5% missing data in the three data sets, and we used maximum likelihood estimation to impute missing data. To test Hypotheses 1 and 2 comparing Pakistani standards

with these other countries we did two 3×2 analysis of variances (ANOVAs) of Country (Pakistan, Australia, and China) by sex, with the latter being a within-subject factor, on couple bond and family responsibility standards. As there were significant differences between countries on relationship satisfaction, we also ran ANCOVAs using relationship satisfaction as a covariate. The pattern of findings was identical, so we report the original ANOVAs. To test Hypothesis 3 comparing the mean rated importance of the four relationship standards by Pakistani men and women, we did a 4×2 ANOVA of standards (couple bond, family responsibility, religion and relationship effort) by sex, with both factors being within subject factors. In presenting these ANOVAs we describe the effect sizes using the conventions proposed by Cohen (1998) for partial η^2 of small > 0.01, medium > 0.06, and large effect sizes > 0.14, and we follow these conventions for main and interaction terms. While there are not widely used effect size conventions for interactions terms, when reporting partial η^2 this indicates the proportion of variance accounted for and therefore seems equally applicable to main and interaction terms.

To test our primary hypotheses about the association of standards to relationship satisfaction in Pakistani couples, we conducted four sex-specific multilevel models (MLMs) in which partners were clustered within the couple using MLwiN (Rasbash et al., 2005). The models separately examined the actor, partner, and similarity effects of endorsement of each of the four relationship standards on relationship satisfaction in an Actor Partner Similarity Interdependence Model.

Relationship satisfaction$_{ij}$ = [β male$_{0i}$ + β female$_{0i}$] + [male. male_couple_bond$_i$ + female. female_couple_bond$_i$] + [male. female_couple_bond$_i$ + female. male_couple_bond$_i$] + [male. similarity_couple_bond$_i$ + female. similarity_couple_bond$_i$]

In the above MLM equation, male and female are dummy variables that create the sex-specific estimates. In the first set of square brackets β male$_{0i}$ + β female$_{0i}$ are the intercepts of satisfaction for men and women. Male_couple_bond and Female_couple_bond are the endorsement of couple bond standards by the male and female partners. The first square bracket models actor effects of endorsement of couple bond standards on satisfaction. The second square bracket model partner effects. The third square bracket models the association of partner standards similarity with satisfaction. Similarity_couple_bond designates the ICC between the male and female partners' endorsement of standards. The same model assessed the association of relationship satisfaction with family responsibility, religious, and relationship effort standards, by inserting the relevant standard in the equation.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics for the three samples. To assess the comparability of the three samples, we conducted separate one-way ANOVAs of countries (Pakistan, Australia, and China) on women's and men's age and relationship satisfaction. We also conducted 3 by 2 Chi-squares on categorical data of presence of children, and male and female spouse completion of university education. There were no significant differences in mean age by country. There were significant, large effect size differences between countries in the mean relationship satisfaction for men and women. In both sexes Pakistanis reported lower satisfaction than Westerners. Pakistani and Chinese men had similar levels of satisfaction, whereas Pakistani women reported higher satisfaction than Chinese women. There was no difference between countries in the mean duration of the relationship.

TABLE 1 Demographic characteristics of Pakistani, Australian, and Chinese Couples

Demographic	Pakistani couples $n=49$	Australian couples $n=33$	Chinese couples $n=30$	Test for difference between countries
Means (and standard deviations) and analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparisons across countries for continuous variables				
Female age	35.8 (11.1)^a	34.2 (11.8)^a	34.5 (9.6)^a	$F(1, 109) = 0.241, p = 0.786\ \eta^2 = 0.004$
Male age	36.2 (9.8)^a	35.8 (12.9)^a	33.9 (9.0)^a	$F(1, 109) = 0.447, p = 0.641\ \eta^2 = 0.008$
Female satisfaction	131.5 (17.3)^a	138.6 (19.1)^b	118.2 (25.7)^c	$F(1, 109) = 8.091, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.129$
Male satisfaction	116.9 (26.5)^a	138.0 (15.9)^b	114.5 (25.7)^a	$F(1, 109) = 10.158, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.157$
Relationship duration	10.9 (10.9)^a	11.5 (11.7)^a	8.8 (8.1)^a	$F(2, 108) = 0.547, p = 0.758, \eta^2 = 0.010$
Numbers and percentages and Chi-square comparisons between countries for categorical variables				
Have children	34 (52%)	14 (42%)	10 (33%)	$\chi^2(2) = 11.330, p = 0.003$
Female university	40 (81%)	24 (73%)	18 (60%)	$\chi^2(2) = 4.228, p = 0.121$
Male university	40 (82%)	17 (52%)	19 (63%)	$\chi^2(2) = 8.585, p = 0.014$

Note: Means across rows that share a superscript are not significantly different $p < 0.05$.

Table 1 shows the countries differed in the proportion of couples having children. A higher proportion of Pakistani couples had children than Australian couples, $\chi^2(1) = 5.907$, $p = 0.022$, or Hong Kong couples, $\chi^2(1) = 9.803$, $p = 0.002$. The proportion of couples having children was not significantly different between Australian and Chinese couples, $\chi^2(1) = 0.551$, $p = 0.604$. There were high, similar rates of female university education across countries. A higher proportion of Pakistani men had university education than Australian men, $\chi^2(1) = 8.440$, $p = 0.004$, there was no significant difference in the proportion of Pakistani men to have university education than Chinese men, $\chi^2(1) = 3.296$, $p = 0.069$, and Australian and Chinese men did not differ in rates of university education, $\chi^2(1) = 0.896$, $p = 0.344$.

In summary, the three samples of couples were similar in age and relationship duration. There were differences in mean relationship satisfaction across countries, with Westerners more satisfied than Pakistani or Hong Kong Chinese. Pakistani couples were more likely to have children than the other couples. Finally, Pakistani men, but not women, were more likely to have completed university than their Australian counterparts.

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations of relationship satisfaction and relationship standards in Pakistani couples. Mean relationship satisfaction was higher for women, and similar for men as that reported for a large community sample of US adults ($M = 121$, $SD = 32$) (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Mean endorsement of each of the four relationship standards was around 4 on the 5-point scale, reflecting a rating of "very important." Mean similarity scores (ICCs between partners' scores) were low and reflect a small to medium association between spouses' standards, which might reflect the high mean and truncated range of scores on each standard. Correlation between the partners on relationship satisfaction and endorsement of each standard was significant (medium associations). Male satisfaction was correlated with high couple bond (medium association), but not with his other three standards. Female satisfaction was correlated with three of her four standards but not with relationship effort. In men, three standards (couple bond, family responsibility, and religion) showed large significant correlations with each other, but relationship effort was unrelated to the other standards. In women, all four standards showed significant medium to large correlations. Partner similarity on standards show low to null association with endorsement of those standards by male or female partners. Partner similarity on all four standards showed no association with satisfaction for either sex.
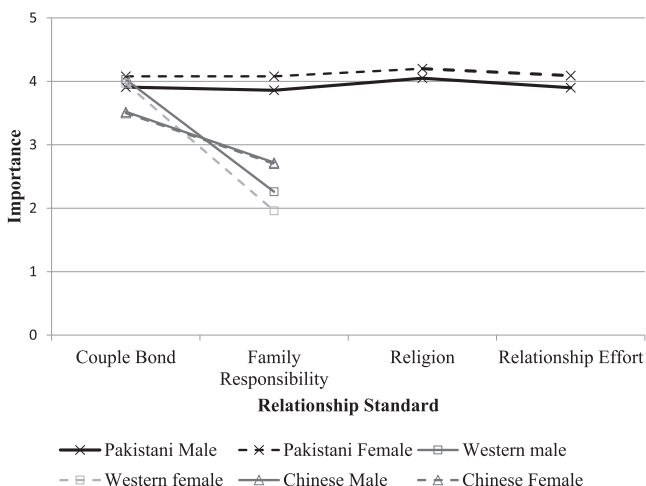
Rated importance of relationship standards

Figure 1 presents the mean on the couple bond and family responsibility standards for the three samples (Pakistani, Western, and Chinese couples). In this article, we use in the ANOVA testing country differences in couple bond standards (Hypothesis 1), there was a significant large effect of country, $F(2, 109) = 9.847$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.153$, but no significant effect of sex, $F(1, 109) = 0.234$, $p = 0.629$, $\eta^2 = 0.002$, or interaction by country, $F(2, 109) = 1.306$, $p = 0.275$, $\eta^2 = 0.023$. Pakistanis and Westerners did not differ significantly on couple bond, $F(1, 80) = 0.000$, $p = 0.984$, $\eta^2 = 0.000$, but Pakistanis rated couple bond as more important than Chinese, $F(1, 77) = 14.787$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.161$. Figure 1 shows comparable means on couple bond in Pakistan and Australia, a lower mean for China, and the similarity of the sexes within each country.

In testing country differences in family responsibility (Hypothesis 2) there was a large effect of country, $F(2, 109) = 106.921$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.662$, no significant effect of sex,

TABLE 2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations between relationship satisfaction and relationship standards

Variable	Female		Male		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
	M	SD	M	SD									
Individual variables													
1. CSI satisfaction	123.51	23.35	124.93	23.68	0.34*	0.30*	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.15	−0.01	0.09	0.14
2. Couple bond	4.09	0.56	3.94	0.56	0.47*	0.34*	0.87*	0.51*	0.51*	0.04	−0.02	−0.12	−0.03
3. Family responsibility	4.02	0.58	3.92	0.71	0.36*	0.71*	0.31*	0.45*	0.42*	0.16	0.00	−0.23	0.06
4. Religion	4.04	0.75	4.22	0.60	0.29*	0.39*	0.62*	0.40*	0.69*	0.05	0.00	−0.31*	0.13
5. Relationship effort	3.92	0.75	4.06	0.71	0.24	0.59*	0.43*	0.36*	0.31*	−0.08	0.04	−0.15	−0.04
Couple variables													
6. Couple bond similarity	0.20		0.41		0.10	0.05	−0.02	0.28	0.22	—	0.45*	0.13	0.48*
7. Family responsibility similarity	0.25		0.35		−0.05	−0.16	−0.25	−0.07	0.23	0.45*	—	0.18	0.37*
8. Religion similarity	0.11		0.38		0.16	−0.12	−0.36	−0.38	−0.11	0.13	0.18	—	−0.01
9. Relationship effort similarity	0.10		0.51		0.06	0.01	0.02	0.17	0.02	0.48*	0.37*	−0.01	—

Note: Correlations above diagonal for females; underlined on the diagonal are the correlations between male and female partners on the specified variable. Similarity indices are couple-level variables as they quantify the agreement between partners. *$p < 0.05$.

FIGURE 1 Mean relationship standards importance by country and by sex. Only Pakistani couples were assessed on religion and relationship effort.

$F(1, 109) = 1.321$, $p = 0.253$, $\eta^2 = 0.012$, and a medium interaction of sex by country, $F(2, 109) = 3.674$, $p = 0.026$, $\eta^2 = 0.065$. Pakistanis rated family responsibility ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.60$) as more important than did Australians ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.60$), $F(1, 80) = 193.141$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.706$, and as more important than Chinese ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.54$), $F(1, 77) = 101.421$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.568$. The interaction of country by sex was attributable to there being no sex difference in Family Responsibility in Pakistani couples, $F(1, 48) = 0.868$, $p = 0.356$, $\eta^2 = 0.018$, or in Chinese couples, $F(1, 48) = 0.034$, $p = 0.956$, $\eta^2 = 0.001$; but Australian men rated family responsibility ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 0.68$) as more important than did Australian women ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 0.81$), $F(1, 48) = 101.421$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.568$. Even with the sex difference in Australians, Figure 1 shows that sex differences within cultures are smaller than the cultural differences between countries on family responsibility.

In testing Hypothesis 3 about the relative endorsement of the different standards by Pakistani couples, there was a large effect of standard, $F(3, 46) = 4.694$, $p = 0.006$, $\eta^2 = 0.234$, but no significant effect of sex, $F(1, 48) = 1.774$, $p = 0.189$, $\eta^2 = 0.036$, or interaction of standard by sex, $F(3, 46) = 0.366$, $p = 0.778$, $\eta^2 = 0.023$. Religion had the highest mean ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.56$) and was rated as more important than family responsibility, which had the lowest mean endorsement of the four standards, ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.52$), $F(1, 48) = 5.348$, $p = 0.025$, $\eta^2 = 0.100$. Religion was not rated as significantly more important than couple bond ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.68$), $F(1, 48) = 4.026$, $p = 0.050$, $\eta^2 = 0.077$. None of the other pairwise comparisons of rated importance of the standards were significant. Figure 1 shows the mean of each of the four standards are similar across sexes.

Relationship standards and satisfaction in Pakistani couples

Figure 2 shows the MLM coefficients for the relationship standards' prediction of relationship satisfaction. As shown, own couple bond predicted high satisfaction for both men and women, but there were no partner or similarity effects for couple bond. Women's family responsibility predicted their own satisfaction, but there were no other associations with satisfaction for
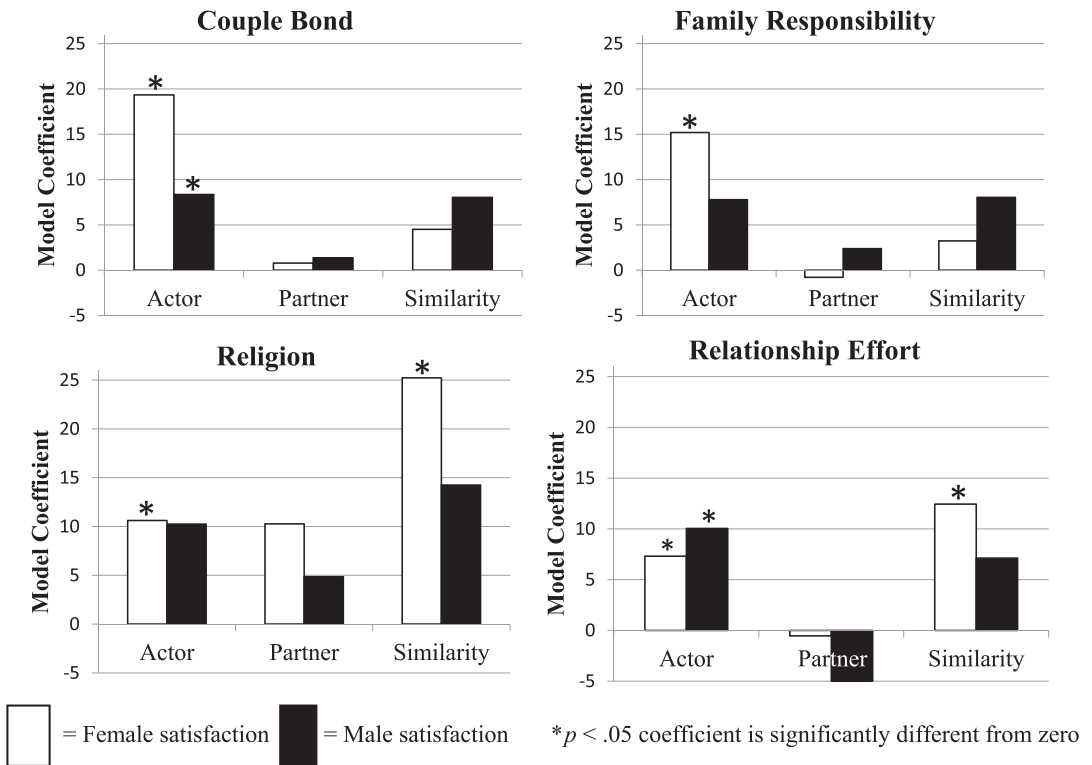
FIGURE 2 Relationship standards predicting relationship satisfaction in Pakistani couples using an actor partner similarity interdependence model. Female satisfaction = male satisfaction.

women or men. Women's religion, and spousal agreement on religion, predicted women's satisfaction. Religion did not predict men's satisfaction, $\beta = 10.235$ ($SE = 5.369$), $z = 1.741$ $p = 0.082$. Relationship effort predicted own satisfaction of women and men, and spousal similarity predicted women's satisfaction. Across all standards, there were no partner effects, and there were more associations between standards and women's satisfaction than men's satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

We assessed relationship standards in Pakistani couples, compared endorsement with that of Westerners and Chinese, and assessed the association of standards with satisfaction among Pakistani couples. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, Pakistani couples rated Couple Bond as similarly important as did Westerners, and as more important than did Chinese. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, Pakistani couples rated Family Responsibility standards as more important than Western couples, and even rated it as more important than Chinese couples. Hypothesis 3 was supported, Pakistanis rated Religion as at least as important as Family Responsibility, in fact they rated it as even more important. There was no evidence of sex differences in mean endorsement of standards by Pakistani couples,

On the association of standards with relationship satisfaction, Hypothesis 4 was supported, participants' own rated importance of couple bond predicted high satisfaction of Pakistani women and men. The association between family responsibility and satisfaction was not as predicted in Hypothesis 5, instead of partner agreement it was women's endorsement of family responsibility that predicted their own satisfaction, and contrary to prediction there was no association at all between family responsibility and men's satisfaction. There was partial support for Hypothesis 6, own endorsement of Religion, and agreement between partners on religion, predicted women's satisfaction, but not men's satisfaction. As predicted in Hypothesis 7, own relationship effort predicted satisfaction for women and men; and similarity of relationship effort predicted women's satisfaction.

Culture and couple relationship standards

The current findings that couple bond, family responsibility, religion, and relationship effort each were highly endorsed by Pakistani men and women, replicates an earlier study (Iqbal et al., 2019). Similarly, the finding that Couple Bond is rated comparably by Pakistanis, Chinese, and Westerners; while family responsibility and religion are endorsed significantly more by Pakistanis than Chinese or Westerners, also replicates earlier studies (Iqbal et al., 2019; Skellern et al., 2021).

The current research is the first to assess the association of standards with satisfaction in Pakistani couples. The current finding that couple bond is associated with relationship satisfaction in the distinctive Pakistani culture extends previous findings that couple bond predicts satisfaction in Western (Hiew et al., 2015b) and Chinese couples (Halford et al., 2018). Moreover, relationship effort also predicted satisfaction in Pakistani couples. Couple bond and relationship effort had high correlation in the current sample. In a previous study with Pakistanis, relationship effort fitted a confirmatory factor analytic model in which it was one of five subscales of couple bond (Iqbal et al., 2019). While this factor structure needs cross-cultural replication, relationship effort might be best thought of as a component of the couple bond. Together the current and previous findings suggest cross-cultural consistency in the association of couple bond with high satisfaction. There is considerable evidence that romantic attachment evolved in humans to promote shared offspring caregiving (Fletcher, Simpson, Campbell, et al., 2015), suggesting that a cross-culturally pervasive desire for a strong couple bond might reflect evolutionary imperatives.

The strength of endorsement of family responsibility shows considerable cultural variability, and the current findings are consistent with previous observation that endorsement tends to be stronger in survival focused, collectivistic cultures like Pakistan and China than more selfexpressive, individualistic cultures like Australia and the United States (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020). Endorsement of family responsibility standards by Pakistani women was associated with their own high relationship satisfaction, but Pakistani men's endorsement was unrelated to their satisfaction. These findings failed to replicate previous findings that partner agreement rather than endorsement of family responsibility predicts satisfaction in Western (Hiew et al., 2015b) and Chinese couples (Halford et al., 2018). Collectively these findings suggest cross-cultural variations, not just in the rated importance of family responsibility standards, but also in how those standards are associated with relationship satisfaction. In a low-income country like Pakistan, survival values and the associated emphasis on family responsibilities seem likely to be of particular importance.

The current finding that Religion standards were highly endorsed with a mean rated importance of around 4 reflecting "very important" is in stark contrast to nonreligious Westerners who rate religion standards around 1 "of minor importance" (Skellern et al., 2021). The high rating by Pakistanis is consistent with the high importance attached to religion in Pakistan (World Values Survey, 2020). In Pakistanis wives' religion standards were associated with wives' relationship satisfaction, but husbands' religion standards were not. While studies of Muslims living in Pakistan and Iran found a small to medium association of individual religiosity with satisfaction for both husbands and wives (Aman et al., 2019; Yeganeh & Shaikhmahmoodi, 2013), a study of Muslims living in the United States found no significant association between individual religiosity and satisfaction (Abdullah, 2017). Perhaps religiosity within the majority religion of a country is associated with satisfaction, but not religiosity in a minority religion within a country. There is evidence that migrants feel pressure to adopt aspects of the majority culture in which they live van de Vijver et al. (2016), and that discrimination against minority groups can undermine relationship satisfaction (Trail et al., 2012). Perhaps adherence to a religion is most beneficial for couple relationships when that religion is a majority religion.

The current study was the first to test the association of religion relationship standards with satisfaction, as distinct from individual religiosity. The former is conceptually more proximal to the couple relationship than individual religiosity. In Caucasian Christian couples, dyadic spiritual activities (e.g., praying together) is associated with marital satisfaction more strongly than global religiosity (Mahoney et al., 2008), which might be attributable to joint religious activities increasing couples' intimacy, shared values, and accessing support from religious communities (Mahoney et al., 2008).

While not the key focus of the current study, there were differences between countries in relationship satisfaction, with Pakistani couples being less satisfied than Australian Westerners. This might reflect broader life satisfaction related to the culture or income of each country. The World Values Survey (2020) data show Australians rate their life satisfaction significantly higher than do Pakistanis. Alternatively, relationship satisfaction has been criticized as too individualistic (Galovan et al., 2021), inappropriately unidimensional, insensitive to variation in the upper range of relationship quality, and its relevance in non-Western cultures has been queried (Sanri et al., 2021). Future research would benefit from extending the range of measures of relationship quality used with particular attention to the cultural appropriateness of measures for diverse populations.

Limitations of the study

The sample sizes of couples were modest. In the ANOVAs comparing standards cross-culturally the small Chinese sample of 30 dyads is sufficient only to detect medium size main effects, power = 0.80, and $\alpha = 0.05$, but does not provide adequate power to reliably detect small main effects or medium interaction effects (Faul et al., 2007). For the MLM analyses done with the Pakistani couples, the 49 couples is adequate to detect a medium effect actor effect, power = 0.80 and $\alpha = 0.05$, but the power to detect medium partner or similarity effects in this study was low (Ackerman et al., 2015). Thus, some null results—most notably the lack of partner and similarity effects in the MLM—might be attributable to the study being underpowered to detect these effects, and replication with a larger sample is needed.

All three samples (Pakistanis, Westerners, and Chinese) were convenience samples, and while they were similar in age and years in the relationship, they differed in some ways. Analyses controlling for relationship satisfaction suggest country differences in satisfaction are unlikely to account for country differences in relationship standards. The Pakistani couple also were more likely to have children than the Western or Chinese couples, which reflects the higher birth rate in Pakistan relative to other countries.

All three samples had higher than average levels of formal education than the populations of the countries from which they were drawn. The generalizability of the results to less educated couples is unclear. Moreover, within each country there are likely to be substantial cultural variations. For example, in Australia there is a very large and culturally diverse migrant population who retain much of the elements of the cultures and couple relationship standards of their countries of origin (Halford et al., 2018). The current Australian sample was deliberately focused on Australians of European ancestry, labeled as Westerners. Generalizability to Westerners living outside Australia, or non-Westerners living in Australia needs to be assessed. Pakistan also has great diversity. Those who live in the large cities of the Sindh province often are university educated and have considerable exposure to Western cultural influences, whereas the tribal people of the mountainous regions of the North-West Frontier Province have little or no formal education, and little exposure to culture outside their region (Zaman et al., 2006). Therefore, the convenience-drawn Pakistani sample is over-representative of the educated elite living in cities. In this sample the strength of endorsement of religion relationships standards was striking, and identification to more traditional religious values is likely to be even more marked among tribal groups with less exposure to Western culture.

IMPLICATIONS

The lack of association of family responsibility and religion standards with male relationship satisfaction does not mean those standards are unimportant in Pakistani marriage. There was high mean endorsement of these standards by both Pakistani men and women. The almost universal strong endorsement of all four relationship standards likely reflects the strong influence of Islam on marriage beliefs, and the tightness of the Pakistani culture. However, the truncated range limits the variability of standards across Pakistani couples to test the association of those standards with satisfaction.

The strong endorsement of couple bond and relationship effort standards in Pakistan is like that observed across many diverse cultures (e.g., Halford et al., 2018), and demonstrates some cross-cultural consistencies in what is valued in couple relationships. Evidence-based couple therapies prioritize enhancing the couple bond (Halford & Pepping, 2019), which is likely to be useful to assist distressed Pakistani couples, at least within the educated elites sampled in the current study. At the same time, as religion standards were rated as so important by Pakistani couples the largely secular evidence-based approaches to couple therapy, which pay little attention to religion (Halford & Pepping, 2019), might need some adaptation to be acceptable to Pakistani couples. Some Western couple therapists have added religious concepts to couple therapy, such as relating desired relationship behavior changes to religious principles and incorporating praying for the spouse into suggested couple activities (Fincham & Beach, 2014; Stanley et al., 2014). Similar adaptations for Muslim couples might enhance the acceptability of couple therapy for Muslim couples.

Family responsibility standards were rated as very important by Pakistani couples, which suggests attention might be needed to this standard in couple therapy for Pakistanis. Standardized assessment used in Western couple therapies pay little attention to extended family. For example, the areas of change questionnaire used to assess areas of dissatisfaction has only 1 of 31 items that relate to extended family (Margolin et al., 1983). The CCCRSS can broaden assessments to assess areas of importance to couples, which could guide therapists to give more culturally appropriate couple therapy.

It is noteworthy that the endorsement of family responsibility standards was stronger in the survival-focused culture of Pakistan than in the more selfexpression focused cultures of Australians of Western ancestry. Similarly, endorsement of religion standards was stronger in a traditional culture like Pakistan than in the more Secular Rational cultures of China and Australia. Future research needs to test whether such associations between standards and culture are evident across a broader range of cultures. Relationship standards in any given culture seem likely to reflect the effects of the environment of adaptation on that country's culture.

CONCLUSION

The current research adds to the growing body of research on what tends to be cross-culturally valued in couple relationships (Couple Bond and Relationship Effort), and what is more culturally variable (Family Responsibilities and Religion) (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020). The cross-cultural consistency in the importance of the couple bond suggests there are some commonalities in what might be cross-culturally effective in couple therapy. At the same time, the cross-cultural variations suggest the need to test couple therapy adaptations to address issues more specific to particular cultures, notably the role of religion and family responsibilities. In culturally diverse Western countries like the United States and Australia, it would be useful to test the extent to which relationship standards vary across diverse couples, and whether adaptations to address particular standards enhance the acceptability and effects of couple therapy for minority couples.

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