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The Cultural Lens Approach to Bowen Family Systems Theory: Contributions of Family Change Theory

An accumulation of theoretical and empirical work focuses on expanding Bowen family systems theory (BFST) to be more culturally expansive by including gender, ethnicity, race, social class, and sexual orientation, as well as family history, values, and rituals. In the current article, we contribute to the discussion of culture in BFST and move the question of diversity from how family processes are different to why they are different. Utilizing Hardin and colleagues' cultural lens approach, we discuss the cultural validity of BFST, more specifically the concept of differentiation of self and its premises, in five steps. Further, we propose the integration of Kağıtçıbaşı's family change theory and Carter and McGoldrick's multicultural perspective with BFST and offer cultural examples. Potential contributions and limitations of the cultural lens approach in expanding our understanding BFST are discussed, as are implications for research and clinical practice.

BACKGROUND

From the earliest development of family therapy, Bowen family systems theory (BFST;

Department of Psychology, Koç University, Rumelifeneri Yolu Cad. Sariyer, İstanbul, 34450
 (gizemerdem@ku.edu.tr).

Key Words: Autonomy–relatedness, Bowen family systems theory, cultural lens approach, differentiation of self, family change theory, self-construal.

Bowen, 1972, 1978) has been a prominent systemic perspective guiding research and practice in the field. BFST has evolved in its premises, concepts, and clinical applications over the past 3 decades thanks to the critical contributions of family scholars who brought in discussion of culture through ethnicity and race (Boyd-Franklin, 1989), gender (Hare-Mustin, 1987), and social class as contexts of systemic family processes (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980, 1988; Falicov, 1995). Later, the definition of culture in family science was expanded to include sexual orientation and disability (Sherif Trask & Hamon, 2007). Contextualizing systemic transactions, particularly BFST premises, with a cultural lens called for a paradigm shift in family therapy research and practice, especially in the ways we conceptualize and study human development and family relationships (Carter & McGoldrick, 1980, 1988).

While BFST research and practice became more culturally inclusive and diverse, definitions of culture and trends in the study of culturally diverse families expanded greatly over the years (Sherif Trask & Hamon, 2007). For instance, Sue and Sue (2013) defined culture as shared experiences and social influences of religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and social class, whereas Gardiner and Kosmitzki (2005) defined culture as a “cluster of learned and shared beliefs, practices, behaviors, symbols, and attitudes that are characteristics of a particular group of people” (p. 4). The differences between definitions are subtle but crucial.

The latter defines culture more broadly as the shared way of life of a group of people (shared attitudes, beliefs, norms, roles, interpretations, self-definitions, and values) that is organized around a theme (Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis, & Sam, 2011; Triandis, 2001). Such a broad definition of culture emphasizes psychological processes that can affect individuals' behavior rather than contextualizing culture through solely externalized factors through shared symbols, objects, and language. Other definitions of culture also have included intergenerational and historical processes that preclude culture as a group's shared meaning that is transmitted across generations (e.g., Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006; McGoldrick, 2011).

Given variations in definitions of culture, we use Hardin, Robitschek, Flores, Navarro, and Ashton's (2014) cultural lens approach (CLA) to enhance our understanding of BFST. CLA is a stepwise approach to systematically analyze cultural validity of psychological theories, that is, "the extent to which premises and concepts of a theory are generalizable across, equally relevant to, or equally useful to diverse groups" (Hardin et al., 2014, p. 656). In the current article, we apply Hardin et al.'s (2014) guidelines to discuss cultural validity of the BFST (1978) and more specifically the concept of differentiation of self (DoS). To that end, we followed five steps, from operational definitions of theory to more sophisticated analysis of culture-specific and universal aspects of its premises. Table 1 presents goals of each step as adapted from Hardin et al. (2014), paired with specific questions we generated regarding cultural validity of the BFST.

Step 1: Definitions of BFST's Central Constructs in Theory and Research

Bowen (1978) defined family both as a relationship system and an emotional system whereby family members influence and are influenced by one another at individual, dyadic, systemic, and intergenerational levels. Borrowing concepts from general systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1969), Bowen proposed that the family, as a unit of analysis, is governed by similar rules of other "natural systems," and thus is quite similar to groups of nonhuman animals and other species. He further argued that there are two principal factors that are uniquely human and are attributable to the family functioning (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

One factor is chronic anxiety, which stems from the dilemma of maintaining self while making meaningful connections with significant others. The second key factor is differentiation of self, defined as adaptive strategies to regulate chronic anxiety. Once individuals are able to manage and tolerate the dilemma of conflicting and recurring forces to favor togetherness and separateness in the family system, they have healthy levels of DoS. Only then can they engage in healthy intimate relationships, initially in their families of origin and later in their families of procreation. Achieving this balance of separateness and connectedness is a lifelong and dynamic process that is universal to all human beings as a fundamental dilemma; it cuts across all families.

DoS is a central concept in BFST because it determines how roles, rules, and boundaries are constructed in the family; how alliances and triangulations occur and are transmitted to families of procreation; and more important, how we define functional versus dysfunctional family systems. In addition, DoS manifests itself in both intra- and interpersonal levels. It simultaneously refers to how one makes a distinction between thought and emotional processes and how one relates to significant others while maintaining coherent sense of self (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

An accumulation of empirical evidence on the validity and utility of Bowen's (1978) concept of DoS and its association with individual and family functioning exists. Indeed, empirical support has been found for BFST's major concepts and premises (i.e., differentiation of self, multigenerational transmission; see Miller, Anderson, & Keala, 2004, for a review). Further, several well-validated measures of DoS have been used to provide evidence for BFST premises and constructs, such as the Adult Behavioral and Emotional Reactivity Index (Adult BERI) by Bartle-Haring and Sabatelli (1995) and the Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised (DSI-R) by Skowron and Schmitt (2003).

Additionally, research has shown that in healthy families, individual family members tend to develop differentiation and skills for affect regulation that are associated with psychological adjustment, well-being, and self-control (Sandage & Jankowski, 2010; Skowron, Wester, & Azen, 2004). Furthermore, high levels of DoS predict better interpersonal functioning and higher marital satisfaction and quality (Gubbins, Perosa, & Bartle-Haring, 2010; Lampis,

Table 1. *The Cultural Lens Approach to Evaluating Cultural Validity of Psychological Theory*

| Step Goal (Hardin et al., 2014) | Relevant Questions for BFST and DoS |
|--|--|
| 1 Articulate how central constructs have been defined (implicitly or explicitly) and thus operationalized in past research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is DoS defined conceptually in BFST? • What is the operational definition of DoS in empirical research? |
| 2 Identify the groups (a) from which these definitions have been derived and (b) to which the constructs have either not been applied or with which surprising results have been found | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the research participants in studies testing BFST premises and DoS? • Which BFST constructs have been tested and applied, and which have not been tested? • Are there any mixed findings in BFST research? |
| 3 Identify relevant dimensions underlying cultural variability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we know about the cultural contexts of different social groups? |
| 4 Evaluate the definitions/operationalizations of the central constructs (from Step 1) in the context of broader cultural knowledge about those groups (from Step 3) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we redefine DoS given our knowledge of cultural context of different groups? • How can we expand the concept of DoS in particular and BFST in general to expand its cultural validity? |
| 5 Derive research questions and specific hypotheses based on the questions and answers from Step 4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are potential contributions of integrating a cultural lens into BFST research and practice? • What new BFST related research questions and hypotheses can we generate using this cultural lens? |

Busonera, Cataudella, Tommasi, & Skowron, 2016; Peleg, 2008; Timm & Keiley, 2011).

Consistent with BFST, low levels of DoS are closely linked to dysfunctional relational and personal processes. Individuals with low levels of DoS experience higher psychological distress (Krycak, Murdock, & Marszalek, 2012), daily stress (Murdock & Gore, 2004), and mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, somatization, and obsessive-compulsive symptoms (Jankowski & Hooper, 2012; Knauth, Skowron, & Esobar, 2006). Moreover, individuals with higher emotional reactivity and emotional cutoff (i.e., low DoS) report having greater interpersonal problems (Wei, Vogel, Ku, & Zakalik, 2005). Taken together, there is empirical support for the basic premises of BFST and DoS at individual, relational, and family levels.

Step 2. Identification of the Groups for Which BFST Constructs Have Been Applied or Not

Most of the aforementioned research testing BFST premises and its constructs was conducted in the United States. The central BFST constructs examined in those studies were emotional reactivity, fusion with others, I-position, and emotional cutoff as indicators of DoS. Other constructs of interest included family system processes such as triangulation and multigenerational transmission of DoS. Overall, the studies

supported the basic premise that high levels of DoS were associated with better mental health, well-being, and relationship satisfaction and quality. Participants included couples from university training clinics (e.g., Knerr & Bartle-Haring, 2010) and community (e.g., Gubbins, Perosa, & Bartle-Haring, 2010; Timm & Keiley, 2011), as well as high school (e.g., Knauth et al., 2006), college (e.g., Krycak, Murdock, & Marszalek, 2012; Skowron, Stanley, & Shapiro, 2009), and/or graduate students (e.g., Murdock & Gore, 2004; Sandage & Jankowski, 2010). Samples were predominantly White, non-Hispanic, middle to upper middle class, and highly educated. One exception is Gushue and Constantine's (2003) study, which questioned whether BFST constructs are "simply reflections of White cultural values" (p. 2) and examined levels of DoS among African American female college students.

Nevertheless, few studies tested BFST premises in non-U.S. contexts. Those international studies usually indicated either mixed findings or findings in the unexpected direction despite thoroughly replicating the measures and sampling procedures in the original BFST studies. For instance, a study in South Korea (Kim et al., 2014) investigated the association between the BFST constructs (DoS, I-position, fusion, emotional reactivity, and emotional

cutoff) and family functioning (family adaptability and cohesion). Consistent with BFST, high DoS was associated with high levels of family functioning, greater family satisfaction, and more positive family communication. Yet fusion with others (measured by the FO subscale of the DSI-R Korean version) predicted balanced levels of family cohesion (assessed by FACES IV). These findings indicated that high fusion and high DoS could coexist in the same cultural context and could promote better family functioning. In another study with Filipino couples and their adult children (Tuason & Friedlander, 2000), low DoS (total score) predicted both psychological distress and trait anxiety among family members, but fusion with others was not related to either aspects of functioning.

There were also findings that were contrary to BFST premises. For example, Korean adolescents with more intergenerational fusion tended to have higher self-esteem (Chun & MacDermid, 1997), and Italian adolescents who reported greater fusion with others did not experience more depressive symptoms or anxiety (Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, & Scabini, 2006). Studies from Japan (Bell, Bell, & Nakata, 2001), South Korea (Chung & Gale, 2006), Taiwan, and Thailand (Neff, Pisitsungkagarn, & Hsieh, 2008) also reported findings that were contrary to BFST premises. A study in Italy with community samples of adults found that fusion with others was associated with high dyadic adjustment (Lampis, 2016).

Interestingly, there were also psychometric studies on adaptation of the DSI-R scale and other DoS measures in other languages and cultures, which all concluded that the “factor structure of DoS is well-established” but never investigated what DoS-related constructs (fusion, emotional cutoff, I position, emotional reactivity) *mean* in that particular culture or whether the constructs are relevant or useful to that social group (see Işık & Bulduk, 2015; Lam & Chan-So, 2015; Lampis et al., 2017, for examples of Turkish, Chinese, and Italian versions, respectively). Hence, construct validity of the measure does not necessarily translate to the cultural validity of the theory to which the measure aligns. In other words, studies testing BFST constructs and premises in non-U.S. contexts simply replicated original studies in the United States, failing to contextualize BFST in a truly

culturally valid manner. Therefore, interpretation of mixed and/or contrary findings becomes extremely difficult.

According to Matsumoto and Yoo (2006), this type of cross-cultural research is “Phase I research” which examines how social groups are different by their geographic location, language, ethnicity, race, or gender with no sophisticated explanation of why such differences exist. Almost always, the contrary findings in the aforementioned BFST studies were discussed in relation to culture post hoc as “surprising” or “new findings.” There appears to be only limited discussion of BFST constructs, and then it primarily focused on fusion. For instance, Kim et al. (2014) wrote: “Indeed, for cultures in which tight-knit families are revered, perhaps the Western mislabel of fusion may be needed to be replaced by something more akin to concepts that denotes collaborative health, such as solidarity” (p. 263).

In sum, it appears that there are mixed findings regarding DoS constructs, particularly fusion with others, in non-U.S. contexts. It is apparent that differences in study findings are not simply attributable to measurement issues (i.e., construct validity of the DoS measures) or compatibility of study designs with the original U.S. studies. Furthermore, there appears to be a pattern in mixed and inconsistent findings; fusion with others (as an indicator of DoS) may not always relate to overall differentiation, psychological, and family functioning in the direction originally proposed in BFST, especially in Asian societies (e.g., South Korea, China, Philippines), but there is some limited support for the theory in studies conducted in Italy, Israel, and Turkey. On the basis of that empirical evidence, we hypothesize that there are underlying cultural dimensions through which cultures can be regrouped in clusters in a universal manner (i.e., a cultural dimension that explains why Asian countries have more similar findings than cultures in the Mediterranean). Additionally, we hypothesize that there are culture-specific ways to define DoS, particularly fusion with others, and how it relates to self. In doing so, we also hypothesize that studies conducted in the West fit in certain cultural dimensions of this cross-cultural and cultural psychology framework.

*Step 3: Identify Other Relevant Dimensions
Underlying Cultural Variability and Self*

Individualism–collectivism. As already mentioned, one aspect of DoS lies in its relevance to the self and how one balances basic needs of separateness and connectedness. In the 1970s, Bowen was writing about DoS and introducing systemic thinking on interpersonal and intrapersonal processes. In the same era, a new discipline in psychology was emerging: cross-cultural psychology. Both family systems and cross-cultural psychology were challenging the mainstream theories of self, but while the first was contextualizing self in the family, the latter was contextualizing self within the culture.

Early pioneers of cross-cultural psychology (Harry Triandis, John Berry, Ype Poortinga, Çiğdem Kağıtçıbaşı, and Marshall Segall) questioned the utility, validity, generalizability, and replicability of Western psychological research and its premises in the majority world. Such inquiry was more sophisticated and overarching than intellectual curiosity over cultural differences, but it relied heavily on the critique of modernization and its premises (Berry et al., 2011). Modernization theory (Rostow, 1990) suggested that economic development, industrialization, and urbanization transforms societies to adhere to more Western values, such as liberalism, individual agency, and independent thought. From the 1970s, Asian countries in the Pacific Rim (especially South Korea and Japan) achieved significant economic growth, urbanization, and industrialization but experienced a dilemma over adapting Western values while maintaining their own traditions and values. That dilemma was the hallmark of scientific inquiry over rethinking culture in a postindustrial society (Berry et al., 2011). Topics of interest included, but were not limited to, self, identity development parenting, attachment, and acculturation, while researchers shared a common perspective in their critique of the hidden principle of universalism in academic research and its relevance to Western values and modernization.

A key dimension to contextualize cultures is the continuum of individualism–collectivism. One side of this dimension, individualism, can be defined as a preference for a loosely knit social network in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families (Triandis, 2001). Such cultures foster autonomy and independence of the individual and prioritize personal goals and achievement

over the interest of the in-group (Triandis, 2001). Conversely, collectivism represents a preference for a tightly knit framework in society in which individuals expect loyalty from not only their immediate family but also their relatives or members of a particular in-group. Such cultures prioritize in-group harmony and belonging over an individual's personal goals and encourage individuals to shape their behaviors according to group norms and expectations (Triandis, 2001).

Individualism and collectivism are both categorical and continuous dimensions of culture. According to Hofstede's (2017) cross-cultural rankings, the United States, Canada, and Germany are cultures of separateness, but they vary greatly in their levels of individualism, with scores of 91, 80, and 67, respectively. Similarly, cultures of relatedness such as Japan, India, and China are often grouped together, but they vary in their individualism–collectivism scores, with 46, 48, and 20, respectively.

The continuum of individualism–collectivism offers a new approach in contextualizing cultures in a globalized world. The society's position on this dimension also determines whether individual's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we."

Self-construal and family change theory. At first sight, the individualism–collectivism dimension seems to fit in with the BFST, particularly Bowen's construct of societal emotional processes. Bowen (1978) argued that society (as a macrosystem) operates by the same principles as all other natural systems and is therefore identical to the family in its processes. As the principle of isomorphism (Bertalanffy, 1969) suggests, the models, principles, and laws apply to all systems irrespective of their particular kind, elements, and forces involved. In that case, it is no wonder that self is a reflection of a societal process and is defined through principles of the larger system (culture). However, cross-cultural psychology deviates from the BFST by adding another dimension within the societal system: self-construal.

It is under this dimension of individualism–collectivism that we can observe differences among people (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Self-construal refers to the beliefs one has about one's own self, the nature of which may differ because of the significance given to the private and inner aspects of the self versus the public and relational aspects (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Independent

self-construal, characterized by autonomy and separation from the social context, is marked by clearly defined boundaries between self and others and is embedded in individualistic and Western cultures. Conversely, interdependent self-construals are characterized by viewing of the self as more connected with others (not separated from the social context), with more permeable boundaries between self and other people, making self–other relationships the focus of the self in regulating behavior (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Such self-construals are engendered by collectivistic and non-Western cultures.

While considering self-construal and its relevance to culture, it is crucial to contextualize self within positional subjectivity; that is, there is no absolute reference point for an “insider” perspective of culture. A common misconception of this framework is to categorize cultures as if they exist in uniformity. Quite the opposite, cross-cultural psychology conceptualizes self-construal in relation to the individualism-collectivism continuum of the immediate context of the individual with attention to subcultures as well as the individual’s socioeconomic status, religion, and gender roles. Such a framework aligns with discussion of intersectionality in family science (Collins, 2015; Falicov, 1995; Purkayastha, 2012). Self-construal within that framework exists in a complex milieu of power and oppression as well as intersecting multiple identities of nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, and social class.

Intersectionality is apparent in Kağıtçıbaşı’s (1996) theory of family change (FCT) as well, but the true contribution of the theory to BFST stems from its sophisticated conceptualization of intersecting contexts of parenting, attitudes, family processes, and culture. Rather than simply stating family processes mirror societal processes, the FCT theorizes the specific ways in which societal processes are transmitted to the parents and then to their children. Self-construal, in that framework, is more than mere reflection of the macrosystem; it relates to complex system of culture, parenting, values, and attitudes as well as socioeconomic status. Such a framework, we believe, expands our notion of DoS and how it relates to other systems that influence or are influenced by the family system.

Kağıtçıbaşı’s empirical work that laid the foundations of her theory dates back to 1975

and her Value of Children (VoC) study, a nationally representative study of parental attitudes regarding fertility in Turkey as part of a cross-cultural research consortium across nine countries.¹ Accumulating empirical evidence from VoC, Kağıtçıbaşı (1982) found that parents have different motives for having children depending on their socioeconomic status and cultural context, which, in turn, promote different family models and self-construals. For instance, in low-income and/or rural contexts, children have economic utility, as they contribute economically to the family while they are young and are perceived as potential caregivers for aging parents in the future.² Hence, in a family where children have an economic and instrumental value, high independence of children is discouraged, while loyalty, belonging, and interdependence are promoted. Such family models would fit in rural areas of developing countries and underdeveloped countries, where family models of interdependence are common.

Conversely, in urbanized, industrialized, and/or high-income societies, the child has a psychological utility (i.e., bringing joy to the family) but also an economic cost for the family. In that socioeconomic and cultural context, the independence of a child is more likely to be accepted and encouraged. Furthermore, in societies or communities undergoing economic and social transition, value of children may also be shifting from economic utility to psychological utility, and therefore, both child-rearing patterns may be visible where autonomy and relatedness are being promoted simultaneously. A 30-year follow-up study to the original VoC study supported that hypothesis: As socioeconomic conditions of societies changed, so did value of children, family models, and self-construals (Kağıtçıbaşı & Ataca, 2005).

Kağıtçıbaşı proposed that three prototypical normative family models (family model of independence, family model of interdependence, and family model of psychological interdependence) emerge as a result of those

¹Other participating countries were Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, United States, and Federal Republic of Germany.

²Kağıtçıbaşı wrote extensively on gender and value of children. We do not go into detail on gender differences in her cross-cultural studies, as the scope of the article is culture and DoS rather than gender.

values attributed to children, and a fourth model emerges from a neglectful family (Figure 1). Each family model is characterized by particular child-rearing patterns, which, in turn, engender the development of different types of self-construal in the child. The four distinctive self-construals, defined by their levels of autonomy and relatedness, are autonomous-separate self, heteronomous-separate self, autonomous-related self, and heteronomous-related self (Figure 2).

The autonomous-separate self is high on autonomy and low on relatedness and is a product of the promotion of self-reliance orientation in child rearing. This sort of self is found within the family model of independence, which is embedded in cultures of separateness (i.e., individualistic cultures) as characterized in affluent, urbanized, and industrialized societies. Conversely, the development of the heteronomous-related self, defined by low agency and high relatedness, is engendered by authoritarian parenting with an obedience orientation in child rearing. Such parenting is characteristic of the family model of interdependence, which is usually found in agrarian and close-knit societies, situated within cultures of relatedness (i.e., collectivistic cultures).

The family model of psychological interdependence synthesizes the previous two models and is characterized by authoritative parenting that allows for the child to develop an autonomous-related self and enables the child to have a sense of both agency and closeness to significant others. This model is found often in developing countries that have been undergoing economic growth. In such countries, adult children have relatively limited economic dependence in relation to their families of origin as compared to adult children of collectivistic countries, yet they strive to retain intimacy with significant others.

The fourth type of self, the heteronomous-separate self is also observed, although it does not correspond to a specific cultural context. This self develops in a hierarchical neglectful family that is indifferent to child rearing. This type of self very little agency and low relatedness with others.

Empirical support for Kağıtçıbaşı's FCT. The family patterns suggested by FCT have been studied in several different countries, and empirical evidence has shown that such family models and respective self-construals

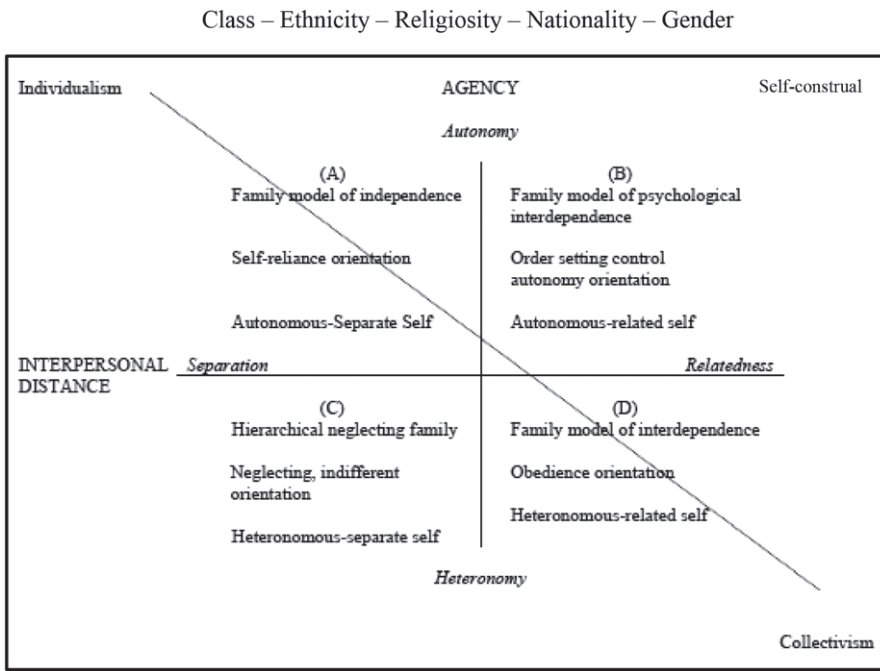
exist in their hypothesized cultures. Specifically, Mayer, Trommsdorff, Kağıtçıbaşı, and Mishra (2012) found family models of independence in Germany (a culture characterized by high individualism), family models of interdependence in India (a culture characterized by high collectivism), and a family model of psychological interdependence in Turkey (a culture that gives importance to aspects of both individualism and collectivism).

Kağıtçıbaşı (1996) introduced the terms *autonomy* and *relatedness* as two basic needs that can coexist within an individual. *Autonomy* refers to "the state of being a self-governing agent," and *relatedness* refers to "the degree of connection with others." These two dimensions of agency and interpersonal distance underlie the self, the relation of self with others, and social behavior (see Figure 1). Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) argued that the autonomous-related self is the most psychologically sound type of self, as it meets two basic needs: separateness and connectedness in congruence with the cultural and family context. Research has shown that having these basic needs met is associated with better mental health (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000; Willemen, Schuengel, & Koot, 2011) and functioning in social settings (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Evidence suggests that fulfillment of both autonomy and relatedness is linked to higher levels of marital of romantic relationship satisfaction among couples (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007; Zimmer-Gembeck, Arnhold, & Connolly, 2014). Çelenk, van de Vijver, and Goodwin (2011) also found that autonomy-relatedness was associated with high levels of relationship satisfaction among British and Turkish couples, indicating that this phenomenon was seen in two distinct types of cultures (independent and psychologically interdependent).

Step 4: Redefining BFST's Central Constructs in the Context of Individualism–Collectivism, Self-Construal, and FCT

Drawing on 4 decades of theoretical and empirical work in cross-cultural and cultural psychology, we propose that individualism–collectivism, self-construal, and autonomy–relatedness can be integrated in BFST as cultural dimensions of DoS. As discussed in Step 1, Kerr and Bowen (1988) argued that separateness and connectedness are two independent but related

FIGURE 1. AGENCY, INTERPERSONAL DISTANCE, AND TYPES OF SELVES IN CULTURAL CONTEXT.



Source. Adapted from Kağıtçıbaşı (2005).

Note. Individualism–collectivism (I–C) dimension and squares (representing context) are added by the authors. I–C does not cross the origin because there are cultures that have indicators of both cultural dimensions and promote autonomous-related self.

constructs, and achieving a balance of the two dimensions is optimum for individual and family functioning. This two-dimensional perspective of the self is evident in Kağıtçıbaşı’s constructs and FCT as well (Figure 1). Additionally, such premises are supported by growing research evidence (see, e.g., Bell, Bell, & Nakata, 2001; Bell et al., 2007; İmamoğlu, 2003).

Yet the distinction between BFST and FCT stems from the differences in the definition of the separateness aspect of DoS in BFST research and definition of autonomy in cross-cultural psychology research.³ For instance, Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) argued that “*autonomy* has long been

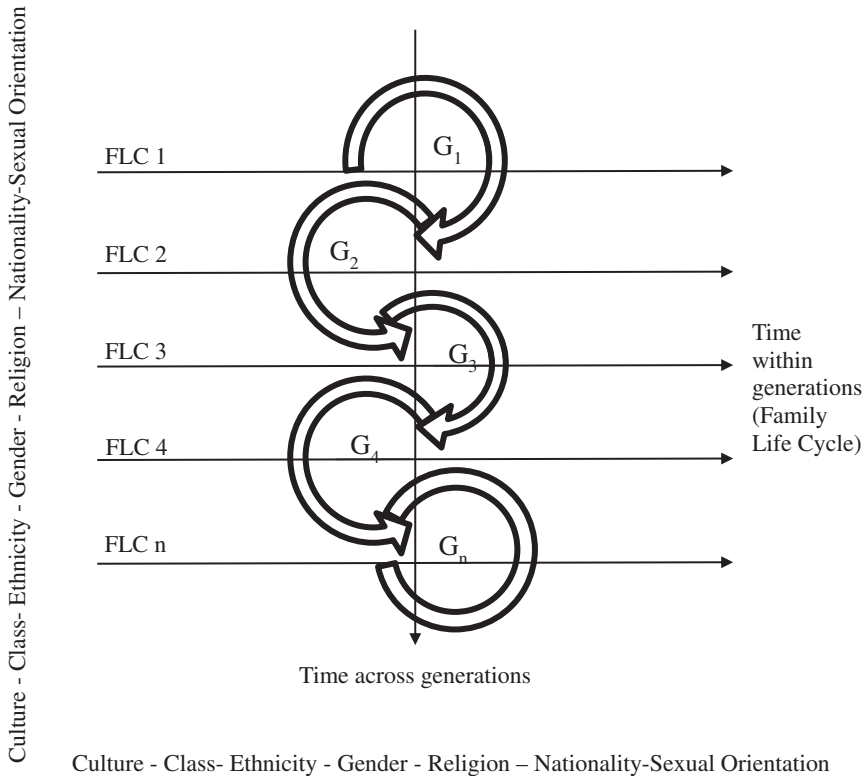
inappropriately equated with independence and assumed to be in opposition to relatedness, but in fact autonomy overlaps with *agency*” (p. 404). She defined agency more in line with Bandura’s (1989) social cognitive perspective, which conceptualizes agency as a motivated action towards a desired outcome. Therefore, one’s degree of autonomy refers to the extent to which one has agency to act willingly and without coercion.

Consistent with BFST, Kağıtçıbaşı (2005) suggested that autonomy is a fundamental and

³It is important to remember the crucial difference between cultural validity of BFST and construct validity of DoS measures. We argue that the mixed research findings are not simply about measurement errors or problems with cultural adaptation of scale items. Rather, such findings stem from basic, culturally bound premises and constructs of BFST. To illustrate, Kerr and Bowen (1988) discussed universality of DoS in their book *Family Evaluation* and gave examples of development of self in American and

Japanese cultures: They argued that Japanese culture emphasizes togetherness as well as compliance, and the development of “self” in that culture requires giving up on one’s sense of individuality. Kağıtçıbaşı argued that one does not simply need to “give up” on individuality for sake of togetherness; it is a more complex process with variations among cultures in terms of self-construal. Development of self is a by-product of cultural context, family environment, parenting styles, socioeconomic status, and value of children. Depending on context variables, togetherness and separateness may even coexist, as in cultures with family models of psychological interdependence.

FIGURE 2. TIME PERSPECTIVE IN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY BY SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT.



Note. Figure is a visual representation of Carter and McGoldrick's (1988) family life cycle perspective and multicultural framework. G = generation, FLC = family life cycle, and arrows indicate time and process.

universal human need. Yet cultural dimensions determine the desired outcome of that agency. In cultures of separateness (cultures with high individualism), the desired outcome of agency is achieving individuation and meeting individual goals. In cultures of relatedness (cultures with high collectivism), agency seeks relatedness and the achievement of interpersonal goals (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). That phenomenon explains why BFST premises and constructs were empirically well validated and replicated in middle-class, White, non-Hispanic samples in the urban United States. The participants were sampled in a culture with high individualism, they exhibit characteristics of a family model of independence, and they have autonomous-separate self-construal. In that cultural context, having a balanced separateness and connectedness (high DoS) aligns with an autonomous-separate self. In other words, the

cultural definition of high agency aligns with the idea of separateness and connectedness.

It is no surprise that studies examining DoS showed mixed findings mainly in cultures where individualism and collectivism coexist (see Gushue & Constantine, 2003, for a study with African American women). Those cultures are characterized by a family model of psychological interdependence with autonomous-related self-construals such that loyalty to one's family-of-origin refers to high relatedness only. In other words, those individuals have high agency and high relatedness, but that agency refers to autonomy rather than separateness.

Similarly, contrary findings come from studies conducted in Asian countries: These are cultures of relatedness oriented toward obedience, loyalty, and belonging. In a cultural context where self is defined as high in relatedness and low in agency, defining a healthy level of

DoS becomes especially difficult. Indeed, Kim et al. (2014) wrote that their Korean participants perceived “fusion with others” as simply being loyal to or in harmony with one’s social group, which indicates a desired outcome in Korea. This issue also explains why most cross-cultural differences in BFST research come from the “fusion with others” aspect of DoS.

*Step 5: Derive New Research Questions
and Hypotheses for BFST Constructs
and Premises*

Given those cultural dimensions of self-construal, family models, and individualism–collectivism, it seems likely that one can recontextualize DoS by asking new research questions. It appears that although needs for separateness and for autonomy are universal, the motive for the desired outcome of a healthy balance seems culture bound (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005, 2007). This raises several questions about DoS and BFST: Given those cultural dimensions, how can we define family dysfunction and chronic anxiety in different cultural contexts? Do norms over what is considered healthy vary culturally, or do we also have different mechanisms to trigger chronic anxiety over the balance between separateness and connectedness in different cultures? Can we hypothesize that chronic anxiety is transmitted across generations in family models of interdependence in a more consistent manner than in family models of independence? If an individual lives in a society that is contrary to his or her family model or self-construal (e.g., Latino populations in urban industrialized United States, Turkish immigrants in Germany), how does that relate to chronic anxiety, their level of DoS, their development of self in the family context, and their adaptation to the host culture?

MOVING TOWARD AN INTEGRATIVE
FRAMEWORK: SYSTEMIC, INTERGENERATIONAL,
AND CULTURAL PROCESSES

From a CLA perspective, cultural dimensions of individualism–collectivism, self-construal, and family models offer new horizons for defining DoS and BFST. Nevertheless, cultural and cross-cultural psychology do not necessarily address the issue of chronic anxiety in intimate relationships, which is the crux of BFST. We propose that Kağıtçıbaşı’s FCT and

Carter and McGoldrick’s (1988) multicultural framework and family life-cycle perspective can be integrated to contextualize chronic anxiety as it relates to DoS and how it is transmitted and/or transformed across generations through self-construal.

Carter and McGoldrick’s (1980, 1988) framework expanded on BFST concepts by including cultural and historical processes of families. The framework redefined DoS as a by-product of one’s family history and relational patterns transmitted across generations, while one’s family history is embedded in multiple suprasystems of culture, race, ethnicity, and social class.

That being said, we argue that Carter and McGoldrick’s (1980, 1988) true contribution to BFST is the addition of a time perspective. As Figure 2 shows, DoS can be conceptualized as a process that moves in two-dimensional time. The horizontal time dimension represents the family life cycle, or the phases and stages families go through, spanning from mating and courtship to marriage and birth of children, then their adulthood. This dimension can also include divorce, remarriage, and other family life events that trigger change in family structure or dynamics. The vertical time dimension represents the family history, values, traditions, roles, rules, and relational patterns across generations. The vertical time dimension encompasses both intergenerational transmission of family processes and generational changes. The vertical and horizontal time intersect where families experience traumatic incidents, major changes, and political and social incidents (e.g., war, oppression, discrimination). Those incidents have an impact on the family’s life cycle within the generation, but the memories and stories are transmitted across generations through rules, roles, and rituals, thus creating a cultural context for the family. Carter and McGoldrick’s (1988) perspective enables us to take into account the “adaptability” aspect of DoS while examining the extent to which it is functional in regulating chronic anxiety in a given cultural context.

We propose that Carter and McGoldrick’s (1980, 1988) perspective can be integrated into FCT to examine chronic anxiety and DoS through cultural dimensions. We argue that DoS evolves differently in family models of independence, interdependence, and psychological interdependence as a function of different self-construals. All those potential family models are situated within

individualism–collectivism dimensions of culture (Figure 3). Therefore, a healthy balance of separateness and connectedness varies depending on culture at both societal and family levels. The sociocultural characteristics that affect DoS include the cultural value of children, child-rearing practices, urban versus rural settlement, nuclear versus extended families, and socioeconomic status. In that model, DoS is a fluid and an adaptive process in constant interaction with cultural demands and norms.

While Kağıtçıbaşı's (1996) FCT adds depth to the integrative model by situating self-construal in models of families (independence vs. psychological interdependence vs. interdependence) and cultures (individualism and collectivism); Carter and McGoldrick's (1980, 1988) perspective adds interactions of chronic anxiety, culture, and time dimensions to the model. Self-construal is a reflection of DoS, a fluid and dynamic concept that evolves over time through family life cycles (e.g., marriage, birth of a first child), environmental stressors (e.g., natural disasters), and/or family history and legacy (e.g., family secrets, immigration). Chronic anxiety over resolving the need for autonomy and need for connectedness is situated within the norms of the host culture as well as the culture of one's family of origin. In that case, the greater the mismatch between host culture and family culture, the more chronic anxiety family members experience. In that case, DoS refers to the balance of belonging to and connecting with the host culture and maintaining one's self-construal and family culture in that context. The family's level of adaptability to develop strategies for a healthy level of DoS determines the normative family processes (vs. dysfunction in the family).

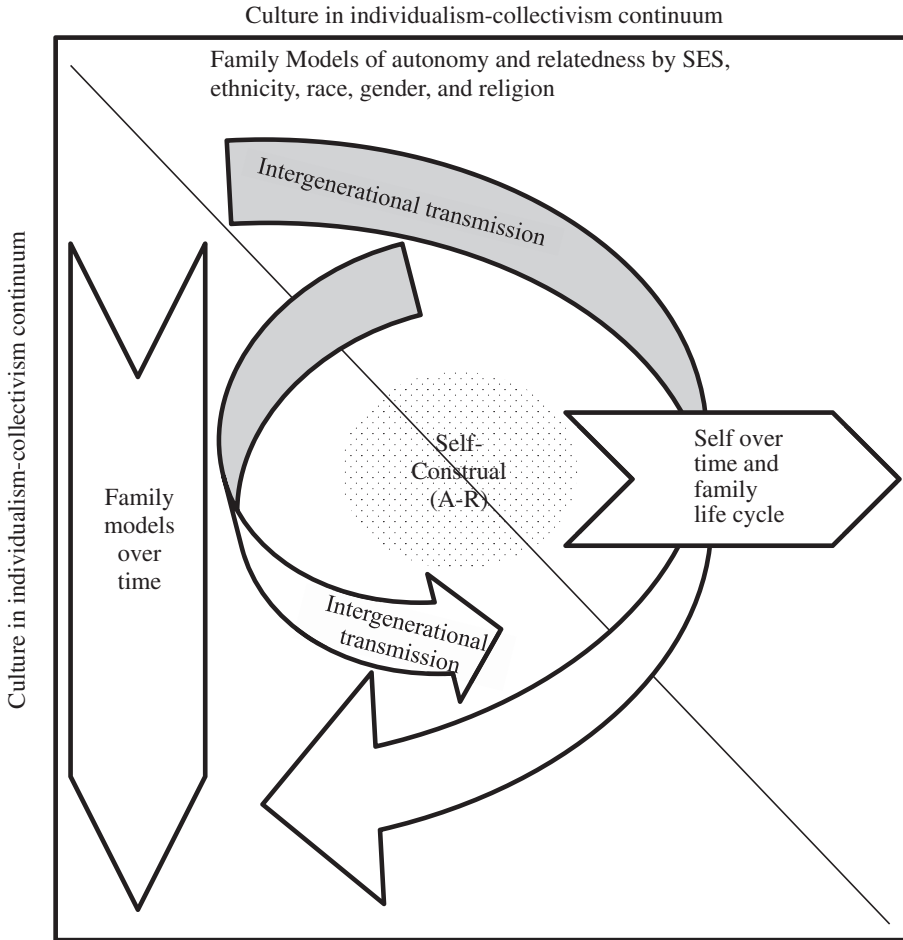
Acculturation is a good example to apply our integrative and systemic model. Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) argued that acculturation does not necessarily refer to the adoption of host culture at the expense of culture of emigrant country (assimilation into the host culture); rather, acculturation indicates the achievement of biculturalism or multiculturalism, where immigrants adopt the culture of the host country while maintaining their heritage culture and identity. Current research and theory on acculturation also suggests that members of the host culture are also influenced by the culture of the immigrants (Sherif Trask & Hamon, 2007); that is,

acculturation is a shared experience for all members of the society.

Using our model, we can argue that there are two different cultural contexts in which anxiety may be experienced. The first dimension is between family members with needs for connectedness and autonomy in a cultural context that offers different norms for those dimensions. Consider an urban, middle-class Mexican family that has immigrated to an urban city in the United States. Cross-cultural psychology suggests that the family will exhibit characteristics of family models of psychological interdependence and autonomous-related self-construal. The family needs to adjust to an individualistic culture in which agency is highly reinforced. The family also needs to balance any need for belonging to a cultural group and maintaining their own cultural identity—these dimensions parallel anxiety over the need to belong and need to separate. There may be differences between family members in the extent to which they adjust to the host culture, which may be determined by their level of DoS.

The same tension holds for members of the host society and other immigrant communities: Families need to regulate anxiety over adapting new cultural norms gained through new immigrant groups and maintaining their belonging to their own cultural group. Consider that the same Mexican family sends their children to a school where they interact with children of other cultures. They may have friends who are Chinese American; those children have parents whose heritage is high in collectivism, their family models are interdependent, and their self-construals are heteronomous-related. In contrast, having grown up in United States, the Chinese American children are likely to exhibit some levels of individualism (given their acculturation experiences), so we could expect their self-construal to move toward becoming a more autonomous-related self. We suggest that self-construal is a dynamic construct that changes over the life cycle and across generations. Therefore, the extent to which the groups of children get along is determined not by their degree of acculturation but by their level of DoS. Highly differentiated children will flexibly adapt to different cultural norms and will balance their need to belong and need to separate from the host culture while still interacting with it (either through other immigrants or members of the host culture).

FIGURE 3. A CULTURAL-SYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE OF SELF OVER TIME ACROSS CULTURES.



Although the first dimension is situated in the family life cycle (immigration), the second is situated in the intergenerational transmission of experiences of acculturation and immigration. The experiences of the first generation of immigrants are transmitted across generations through stories, rituals, and values, yet their self-construals and levels of DoS may shift as they adapt different strategies for acculturation. The future generations may adapt to integrate or assimilate or even marginalize, which characterizes generational gaps. This is not to suggest that one acculturation strategy is functional and healthy over the other. Rather, it means acculturation is a process in which we can observe cultural dimensions of FCT and BFST in an intergenerational framework.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The current article has had two main objectives. The first was to discuss the cultural validity of BFST using step-by-step guide of the cultural lens approach. CLA offers new insights for potential cultural dimensions that may be missing from BFST. The second goal was to generate research questions and hypotheses to spark discussion on integrating Kağıtçıbaşı's (1996) FCT and Carter and McGoldrick's (1988) multicultural perspective into BFST. An integrative BFST framework has significant implications for family science research and family therapy practice. It appears that in a globalized world, it is time to "move the margin to the center," or use cultural groups as their own points of reference

when defining family processes (McGoldrick, 2011).

We strongly believe that such an integrative framework also requires a shift in the study of culture in family science and therapy. It is apparent that it is time to move toward research that identifies meaningful dimensions of cultural variability in BFST (e.g., individualism–collectivism) so that we can focus more on testing empirically these individual-level cultural dimensions to group-level observed differences in DoS. Thus, we need to move away from reified ethnic, racial, and gender differences to approaches to test the cultural validity of BFST. Such a shift would require changing our research questions and studies examining for whom theoretical constructs are more or less culturally valid to understanding why theoretical constructs are more or less valid. Emerging areas of research in family science (e.g., undocumented immigrant families, refugees, fatherhood, intermarriage, fertility) would benefit immensely from a more inclusive cultural framework by borrowing concepts from the rich literature of cross-cultural psychology. This article has focused primarily on BFST and its constructs, yet FCT offers many other opportunities for family scientists to integrate in their theory and research. We hope this article has stimulated fellow family scientists to pursue their research interests in a more cross-cultural and critical perspective and to compare family processes across independent, interdependent, and psychologically interdependent models.

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