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Relationship between perceived family functioning and positive self constructs in graduate students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between family functioning and positive self constructs in graduate students. A sample of graduate students selected purposively from University of Kashmir ($n = 85$) completed the sample survey packets comprised of 'Family Functioning Style Scale', 'Rosenberg self-esteem scale' and 'Self-congruence subscale'. A question on factors that significantly correlate with self-esteem and self-congruence was formulated. Data were analyzed by stepwise regression. The results showed that there are significant relationships between sub-domains family function, self-esteem, and self-congruence. A sense of commitment in families could predict self-esteem; strength of balance and the quality of communication in families could predict self-congruence among students. These findings show that for the development of positive self constructs in an individual, parents should try to have a family with commitment, balance and effective communication among other sub-domains of family functioning. Limitations and implications for future research have also been discussed.

Keywords: family functioning, self-esteem, and self-congruence

1. Introduction

Self – recognized by the individual as “I” or “me” is a subset of the phenomenal field, which is an organized and consistent pattern of perceptions (Rogers, as cited in Patterson & Joseph, 2007) ^[12]. Psychological literature indicates that self-congruence and self-esteem are the key constructs of self. These constructs have been extensively discussed by psychoanalytic, clinical, social, and developmental psychologists, as they have been seen linked with behavioural and emotional consequences (Impett, Sorsoli, Schooler, Henson, & Tolman, 2008) ^[11].

Self-esteem has been defined as the totality of an individual's thoughts and emotions regarding the self (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989) ^[14]. Bailey (2003) ^[3] states that self-esteem is summary judgment of who one is, what one does, what one has, and to whom one is attached. In other words, everything an individual assesses about himself or herself.

Self-Congruence is defined as the ability of a person to achieve congruency among his/her real or social and inner or ideal self. According to Rogers human beings function to maintain consistency among different aspects of self. To achieve congruence between one's self perception and actions or experiences is crucial for healthy functioning of an individual (Patterson & Joseph, 2007) ^[12]. The notion of congruence between one's self-concept and one's ideal self-concept was central to client-centered theory of personality and personality change. Self-congruence is synonymous with the construct of self-authorship, characterized by striving for identity, individuation and autonomy (Bernieri & Holt; Deci & Ryan as cited in Patterson & Joseph, 2007) ^[12].

Contextual influences on the development of positive aspects of self had been largely neglected in empirical research. Although many factors are thought to contribute, the quality of family relationships is arguably the most important factor. It is fair to say that focus of family research has been mainly concentrating on children and adolescence but the role of family, especially parental relationship does not diminish even in adulthood (Harvey & Byrd, 1998) ^[10]. Families have an important stabilizing influence in the development of positive aspects of self in an individual (Yousefi, 2012) ^[17].

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Family functioning is a process by which the family operates as a whole, including communicating in and manipulating the environment for problem solving and meeting the needs of its members through developmental transition (Yousefi, 2012) [17]. Different aspects of family functioning have been emphasized by researchers. Dunst, Trivette, and Deal (as cited in Trivette, Dunst, Deal, Hamer, & Prospt, 1990) [8] introduced three dimensions of family functioning that reflect family identity, information sharing, and coping/resource mobilization. They include sub dimensions of commitment; appreciation; time sense of purpose; congruence; communication; role expectations; coping; problem solving; positivism; flexibility; and balance, as 12 major qualities or strengths of well functioning families. So family functioning indicates how members in a family work and relate to together (Trivette, 1990) [8].

Self-esteem has a consistent positive relationship with family functioning (Brown, Dutton, & Cook, 2001) [4]. Family characteristics like emotional support, parental availability and control have significant effect on positive aspects of self (Alegre & Benson, 2010) [1]. Gorbett and Kruczek (2008) [9] study on college young adults found family cohesion significantly predicted strong self-esteem. Serewicz, Dickson, and Morrison (2007) [15] found that in university students, the communication with family members was indicative of the qualities of family interactions, satisfaction and relationships. More importantly, this communication pattern learned from family continued to affect ninety percent of the left home adult. Several studies using the measure of self-congruence as well as other related measures have provided initial evidence for links between self-congruence and self-esteem (Impett, *et al.*, 2008) [11]. Aronson and Mettee (1968) [2] in a study found participants with high self-esteem acted in ways that were congruent with the self.

1.1 Gaps in the previous research and the purpose of the present study

There is a vast literature on self-esteem in relation to the behavioural and emotional outcomes but little research has been conducted determining the factors predicting this important construct. The researcher could not find the relevant empirical literature studying theoretically emphasized the self-congruence and its correlates. There is a strong theoretical support for the relation between self-esteem and self-congruence but very little empirical studies were found. In light of this need to fill the gap in the literature, the objectives of the present study are to examine the associations between family function, self-esteem and self-congruence among graduate students. As the aforementioned literature suggests the links between these variables, the present study examines these variables in a different socio-cultural context with a different population contributing to the literature both theoretically and empirically.

The purpose of the research is to answer the following question:

Which factor(s) of family functioning has/have significant correlation with self-esteem and self-congruence among graduate students?

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Procedure

Participants were graduate students of University of Kashmir. One hundred students were purposively selected

and invited to participate in the anonymous study, examining their perception of family function and two constructs of self (self-esteem and self-congruence). They were asked to complete a survey packet consisting of:

- a) A Brief Biographical Information Blank
- b) The Family Functioning Style Scale (FFS; Deal, Trivette, Dunst, 1998) [6]
- c) The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965)
- d) The Self-Congruence subscale of the Index of Autonomous Functioning scale (IAF; Weinstein, Przblyski, & Ryan, 2012) [16].

2.2. Sample Size, Statistical Power and Data Analysis

To achieve the desired statistical power level, sample size of 100 was determined which exceeds the minimal sample size of 97 by calculating the alpha level (.05), the effect size (.15), and power (.8) (Cohen, 1992) [5].

The collected data was screened and the data of only 85 participants were included, rests were excluded list wise for discrepancies, during analysis using SPSS 16. Participants of the final sample study were predominantly female ($n = 67$, 79 %), with $M_{age} = 22.73$ years and $SD = 2.04$.

Then the data was analyzed for descriptive and inferential statistics. The study variables were first examined using Pearson product-moment correlations. To achieve the purpose of the study, a series of regression analyses were applied. The first analysis examined the outcome of self-esteem predicted by the family functioning variables. Next, self-congruence was used as the outcome variable; with family function variables serving as the predictor variables.

3. Results

Table 1 presents the results of the initial correlation analysis. These results supported the theorized associations comprising the present study. Self-esteem and self-congruence were found to be significantly correlated with family functioning ($r = .25$, $p = .02$ & $r = .28$, $p = .01$ respectively). The results also revealed that self-esteem and self-congruence are significantly and positively correlated ($r = .41$, $p < .001$).

Table 2, Table 3, and Table 4 present the correlation coefficients for self-esteem and self-congruence in relation to the sub-domains of family functioning. Of the all possible correlations, self esteem was found significantly correlated with commitment ($r = .25$, $p = .02$), flexibility ($r = .21$, $p = .04$), and resource mobilization ($r = .25$, $p = .02$). There were no significant correlations between self-esteem and other subscales of family functioning.

Similarly of the all possible correlations self-congruence was found significantly correlated with appreciation ($r = .22$, $p = .03$), communication ($r = .27$, $p = .01$), information sharing ($r = .25$, $p = .01$), coping ($r = .22$, $p = .04$), balance ($r = .33$, $p = .002$), and resource mobilization ($r = .25$, $p = .02$). Other domains of family functioning were found insignificantly related to self-congruence.

Predicting the positive aspects of self, regression analysis was used. Stepwise regression analysis was applied to investigate the degree to which self-esteem and self-congruence could be explained by the family functioning factors. Summary data for this analysis are reported in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that for self-esteem in step 1 commitment ($\beta = .245$, $p = .024$) could predict 6 % of the variance ($R^2 = .060$; $F(1, 83) = 5.289$, $p = .024$). Other variables, although

contributing to the overall variance were not found significant predictors of self-esteem in the model. For self-congruence in step 1, balance ($\beta = .333, p = .002$) could predict 11 % of the variance in the model ($R^2 = .111; F(1, 83) = 10.319, p = .002$) and in step 2, balance ($\beta = .303, p = .004$) and communication ($\beta = .232, p = .025$) could predict 16 % of the variance ($\Delta R^2 = .164; F(2, 82) = 8.020, p = .001$) in the model for self-congruence. Other variables, although contributing to the overall variance were not significant predictors of self-congruence. The semi-partial regression coefficient, which is the contribution of a predictor variable to the outcome variable after other

variables have been statistically controlled, was also calculated. Summary data for this analysis are reported in Table 5.

The tests of multicollinearity were conducted. Typically, a variance inflation factor (VIF) of 10 or higher indicates multicollinearity and tolerance levels of .10 or lower typically indicate multicollinearity (Field, 2009). None of the predictor variable reached to these levels. The variables do not indicate multicollinearity; thus commitment can be used to predict self-esteem and balance and communication can be used to predict self-congruence among graduate students. The results are in Table 6.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for self-esteem and self-congruence in relation to family functioning.

Variables		M	SD	Range	SE	r (p)
Family Functioning Style	Self-Esteem	17.75	3.63	8 – 27	.39	.25*(.02)
	Self-Congruence	18.51	3.15	10 – 25	.34	.28*(.01)

*p<0.05

Table 2: Summary of Pearson Correlations for self-esteem, self-congruence and sub-domains of family functioning.

Variables	Self-Esteem (p)	Self-Congruence (p)	Commitment (p)	Appreciation (p)	Time (p)	Sense of purpose (p)	Congruence (p)	Family Identity (p)
Self-Esteem	1.00	.41* (<.001)	.25* (.02)	.14 (.19)	.04 (.74)	.14 (.21)	.02 (.88)	.18 (.10)
Self-Congruence		1.00	.14 (.20)	.22* (.04)	.09 (.43)	.06 (.59)	.16 (.15)	.21 (.05)
Commitment			1.00	.37* (.001)	.21 (.05)	.23* (.04)	.29* (.007)	.63* (<.001)
Appreciation				1.00	.29 (.05)	.50* (.04)	.33* (.007)	.79* (<.001)
Time					1.00	.18 (.10)	.19 (.07)	.60* (<.001)
Sense of purpose						1.00	.14 (.19)	.63* (<.001)
Congruence							1.00	.58* (<.001)
Family Identity								1.00

* P < .05

Table 3: Summary of Pearson Correlations for self-esteem, self-congruence and sub-domains of family functioning.

	Self-Esteem (p)	Self- Congruence (p)	Communication (p)	Role Expectations (p)	Information Sharing (p)
Self-Esteem	1.00	.41* (<.001)	.21 (.05)	.11 (.31)	.20 (.06)
Self-Congruence		1.00	.27* (.01)	.13 (.25)	.25* (.02)
Communication			1.00	.33* (.002)	.86* (<.001)
Role Expectations				1.00	.76* (<.001)
Information Sharing					1.00

* p < 0.05

Table 4: Summary of Pearson Correlations for self-esteem, self-congruence and sub-domains of family functioning.

	Self-Esteem (p)	Self-Congruence (p)	Coping I (p)	Coping II (p)	Problem Solving (p)	Positivism (p)	Flexibility (p)	Balance (p)	Resource Mobilization (p)
Self-Esteem	1.00	.41* (<.001)	.18 (.11)	.17 (.11)	.19 (.09)	.04 (.73)	.21* (.04)	.13 (.23)	.25* (.02)
Self-Congruence		1.00	.22* (.04)	.02 (.88)	.21 (.06)	-.09 (.41)	.21 (.06)	.33* (.002)	.25* (.02)
Coping I			1.00	.20 (.06)	.23* (.04)	.35* (.001)	.16 (.13)	.47* (<.001)	.71* (<.001)
Coping II				1.00	.37* (.001)	.18 (.10)	.14 (.20)	.05 (.66)	.48* (<.001)

Problem Solving					1.00	.14 (.21)	.36* (.001)	.26* (.02)	.62* ($<.001$)
Positivism						1.00	.24* (.03)	-.001 (.99)	.59* ($<.001$)
Flexibility							1.00	.20 (.06)	.57* ($<.001$)
Balance								1.00	.57* ($<.001$)
Resource Mobilization									1.00

* $p < 0.05$

Table 6: Stepwise multiple regressions of the family functioning factors on the positive self constructs among participants.

Outcome	Step	Predictors	M	SD	SEM	B	SE B	β	t	Sig	Semi-partial
Self-Esteem	Step 1	Constant				14.64	1.41		10.42	.000	.245
		Commitment	5.71	1.63	.18	.545	.237	.245*	2.30	.024	
Self-Congruence	Step 1	Constant				15.26	1.06		14.37	.000	.333
		Balance	.16	1.67	.18	.629	.196	.333*	3.21	.002	
	Step 2	Constant				13.55	1.28		10.60	.000	.301
		Balance	5.21	1.91	.21	.573	.192	.303*	2.98	.004	
		Communication				.383	.168	.232*	2.28	.025	

Note: Self-esteem $R^2 = .060$ in Step 1 ($p = .024$); Self-congruence $R^2 = .111$ in Step 1 ($p = .002$); $\Delta R^2 = .164$ in Step 2 ($p < .001$). * $p < .05$.

Table 7: Multicollinearity Results

Predictor Variables	Tolerance	VIF
Commitment	.85	1.17
Balance	.98	1.01
Communication	.92	1.09

4. Discussion

The present study was conducted to examine the relationship between family functioning and positive self constructs in a sample of university graduate students. The study examined the significant relationships between sub domains of family functioning, self-esteem, and self- congruence. It was investigated that which family functioning variables could predict the self-esteem and self-congruence. The results revealed significant correlation between the family functioning and the self aspects. These findings are consistent with the previous studies showing consistent relationship of family functioning with the positive development of self (Brown *et al.* 2001; Harvey & Byrd, 1998; Yousefi, 2012) [4, 10, 17].

A series of correlational analyses were performed to find the factors of family functioning that significantly correlate with self-esteem and self-congruence. Self-esteem was found to be significantly correlated with commitment, flexibility, and resource mobilization factors of family functioning. Self-congruence was found to be significantly correlated with balance, communication, appreciation, coping, information sharing, and resource mobilization.

Finally, the data was examined with a series of stepwise regression analysis to determine the family functioning factors or variables that served to predict self-esteem and self-congruence in the participants. Self-esteem was found to be significantly and positively predicted by a commitment. A belief or a sense of commitment towards promoting the well-being of the individual family members as well as that of the family unit influence the self esteem of the individual family members (Trivette, *et al.*, 1990) [8]. Self-congruence was significantly and positively predicted by balance and communication among all other factors or domains of the family functioning. The ability to communicate with one

another, in a way that emphasizes positive interactions among family members, influences the self constructs of its family members. Strength of balance between the use of external and internal family resources for coping and adapting to life events and planning for the future also has a positive impact on its individual members (Trivette, *et al.*, 1990) [8].

These findings are consistent with the previous studies emphasizing emotional bonding among family members and the balance between separateness and togetherness that every family system must negotiate (Alegre & Benson, 2010; Gorbett & Kruczek, 2008) [1, 9].

Family researchers view cohesion and commitment as a resource for the family when handling stressors, renegotiating the structure and routine of family life. In fact, it has been suggested that those families who function with balanced levels of cohesion and adaptability will adapt more successfully to these stressors (Yousefi, 2012) [17]. Balancing the freedom with responsibility has been shown to be positive. Serewicz, *et al.* (2007) [15] suggested that communication with family members was indicative of the qualities of family interactions, satisfaction and relationships among young adults.

Further analysis revealed a noteworthy finding that self-esteem and self-congruence are significantly and positively correlated, which is consistent as was found by Impett, *et al.*, (2008) [11] study. It has been found that participants with high self-esteem act in ways congruent with their self (Aronson & Mettee, 1968) [2].

In spite of these findings, the role of significant variables to determine variances of self constructs is not strong. It seems other variables have a strong role in the development of self. These results must be considered tentative until tested further.

4.1 Limitations of the study

The primary limitations to this study were identified. First, the sample was predominately female (69.79 %). It would be difficult to generalize the results to male students without additional data. Second, given that the study relied on self-report data, so social desirability must be considered.

Participants may have reported family functioning levels in a way that they thought would improve the way they themselves or others viewed it. Finally, the sample size did not permit a valid regression analysis. In order to improve the quality of the results, it would be beneficial to perform further validation studies, particularly with the study's method of measuring family functioning.

4.2 Practical applications and implications for future research

This study provides support for the emphasis on neglected family environment for helping professionals in order to improve positive aspects of self among students.

Future research could strengthen and deepen the argument, made in this study. Suggestions for future studies include testing the model with a larger sample. Regarding the total variance, other researchers should include other important person and situation variables. It would be beneficial to explore the impact of other family functioning factors in student development of self. This would provide a means of determining whether family factors or other influences affect development of these characteristics. Future researchers could also include parent or sibling ratings of students' family functioning to augment the results of the self-report methods. These ideas seem especially promising given the findings of the present study and their applicability to the professionals in counseling and intervention.

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