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Couple Relationship Standards in Thailand

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Relationship standards are beliefs about what makes for a satisfying couple relationship. Standards vary substantially cross-culturally. The present study was the first assessment of relationship standards in Thailand, which is a unique synthesis of Chinese, Indian, and Buddhist influences. We assessed the standards of 300 Thai residents, and compared them with 354 Pakistani residents, 190 Westerners resident in the United States or Australia, and 285 residents of China. Thais endorsed almost all standards as of high importance. We found mainly cross-culturally consistency in Couple Bond standards (e.g., expression of love and intimacy); but large cultural differences in Family Responsibility standards (e.g., relations with extended family) and Religion standards (e.g., following religious practices as a couple), with Thais (and Pakistanis) endorsing these latter two standards more strongly than Westerners or Chinese. Couple therapy with Thai couples, and with culturally diverse couples in Western countries, likely needs to address culturally influenced relationship standards around Family Responsibility and Religion.

Public Significance Statement
Relationship standards are beliefs about what makes for a good couple relationship, which vary by culture. The present study found Thai relationship standards emphasize the importance of family responsibilities and religion more than Western or Chinese standards. Theories of couple relationship distress, and couple therapy to address distress, were developed for Western couples and might need to be adapted to address Thai couples' distinctive standards.

Keywords: marriage, relationship standards, culture, Thailand, couple relationships

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Epstein and Baucom (2002, p. 72) defined couple relationship standards as "… personal beliefs about the characteristics an intimate relationship … should have." Such beliefs usually reflect the cultural values of the society in which individuals are raised (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020). For example, relative to Westerners (i.e., people of European ancestry), Chinese and Pakistani people place more importance on responsibilities to extended family, such as respect for elders (Hiew et al., 2015; Iqbal et al., 2019). The endorsement of particular standards by spouses is associated with relationship satisfaction in Chinese, Western, Pakistani (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020), and Malay couples (Nordin, 2021). These cultural differences suggest that the influences on couple satisfaction might vary between cultures, which has implications for couple therapy and education. The present study extended the assessment of relationship standards to the distinctive culture of Thailand.

Cross-Cultural Relationship Standards

The original research on couple relationship standards was done with Westerners, and the generalizability of those findings to diverse cultures was unclear (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020). In the last decade, some research has assessed relationship standards outside Western countries. For example, studies have assessed standards in Chinese (Halford et al., 2018a, 2018b; Hiew et al., 2015, 2016), Pakistani (Iqbal et al., 2019), and Malay people (Nordin, 2021). The focus on these countries was partly for pragmatic reasons, the researchers had collaborators who could provide access to samples, help with translations of measures, and be cultural informants. At the same time, the research has examined standards across cultures hat are different in important ways from Western cultures, examining standards in cultures that are more collectivistic (e.g., Chinese, Malay, and Pakistani), or more religious and traditional (e.g., Malay and Pakistani) than Western cultures (World Values Survey, 2016).

The Cross-Cultural Couple Relationship Standards Scale (CCCRSS; Halford & van de Vijver, 2020) was developed to assess relationship standards salient across a diverse range of cultures. In developing the measure, the authors conducted semistructured interviews of diverse samples in numerous countries (including Australia, China, Thailand) about what behaviors were believed important to have a quality couple relationship. Initially, the scale was developed to assess standards believed to differ between Western and Chinese cultures (Hiew et al., 2015) and contained eight standards. Based on the interviews conducted in Thailand, three standards relating to religion were added (Skellern et al., 2022). Building upon previous research on the importance of Relationship Effort (Wilson et al., 2005), a standard relating to this construct was added (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020). Table 1 summarizes the relationship standards assessed in the current version of the CCCRSS.

Table 1
Cross-Cultural Couple Relationship Standards Scale

Summary scales	Individual scales	Items	Example items
Couple Bond	Demonstration of Love	7	Express their love for each other in words every day
	Demonstration of Care	8	Regularly do work for each other
	Intimacy Expression	11	Tell each other when they are feeling positive emotions
	Intimacy Response	6	Ask each other about their thoughts
	Relationship Effort[a]	10	Persist in trying to make things better when the relationship has problems
Family Responsibility	Extended Family	12	Do not disagree with family elders
	Face	5	Avoid doing things that might lower others' opinions of partner or the couple
	Harmony	7	Do not speak about things that may lead to conflict
	Gender Roles	12	The man financially supports his partner and children
Religion	Religious Sanctification[a]	4	Sense God's presence in their relationship
	Religious Communication[a]	4	Be open and honest with each other about their religious convictions
	Religious Practice[a]	5	Follow religious teaching in how they lead their life together

[a] These four standards were added to the measure after data collection in the Chinese sample.

The CCCRSS assesses 12 standards, which can be combined to form three summary standards. The individual or summary standards can be used to test different hypotheses about cultural and relationship standards. The first five scales assess relationship standards that reflect Western relationship ideals (Baucom et al., 1996). Across diverse cultures, four of these five scales form a summary scale Couple Bond (Halford et al., 2018a; Iqbal et al., 2019), and the fifth scale (Relationship Effort) is a closely related construct that can be included in the Couple Bond summary scale (Iqbal et al., 2019).

The next four CCCRSS standards reflect values seen as important in many collectivistic cultures (e.g., in much of Asia and Africa), but which have not been included in Western assessment of relationship standards (e.g., Baucom et al., 1996). Across Chinese, Western, and Pakistani cultures, these four scales form a summary scale Family Responsibility (Halford et al., 2018a; Iqbal et al., 2019). The final three standards relate to the role of religion in the couple relationship. Across diverse cultural and religious groups, these three religion relationship standards form a summary Religion standard (Skellern et al., 2022).

Cultural Dimensions and Relationship Standards

A widely used typology of culture is that of Inglehart and Baker (2000), and we use that framework to discuss the association of culture with relationship standards. Inglehart and Baker (2000) suggest cultures vary along two major dimensions of values: (a) survival versus self-expression and (b) traditional versus secular. Survival values prioritize economic and physical security and respect for authority and are endorsed most strongly in countries with historically low-income and high-survival challenges (Dobewall & Strack, 2014; Kashima et al., 2019), notably in African, Islamic countries, and countries strongly influenced by the orthodox Russian religion (World Values Survey, 2016). Self-expression values prioritize personal freedom and quality of life and are most strongly endorsed in the historically high-income countries (Kashima et al., 2019), notably the majority English-speaking countries, and predominantly protestant areas of Europe (World Values Survey, 2016).

Cultural values and relationship standards are related but different constructs. The World Values Survey (2016) assesses cultural values by asking how important an individual believes diverse aspects of life are (e.g., family, religion, money, physical security) on a 4-point scale (1 = *extremely important*, 4 = *not at all important*). Ten separate values are summarized into two summary scores of *traditional–secular-rational* values and *survival–self-expression* values. Countries can be compared on these key dimensions of cultural values. The CCCRSS assesses couple relationship standards, which are an individual's beliefs about behaviors that are important to have a successful couple relationship. CCCRSS example items include rating the importance of telling your partner you love them every day, working hard to gain the approval of family elders, and following religious teaching in how the couple live their life.

Some relationship standards (Family Responsibility and Religion) show large effect size cultural differences, while some standards (Couple Bond) show null or small effect size cultural differences (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020). (Throughout the article, we use the effect size conventions suggested by Cohen, 1988, of small $d = 0.2$, medium $d = 0.5$, and large $d = 0.8$.) People living in countries with high-survival values (and low self-expressive values), such as China (Halford et al., 2018a) and Pakistan (Iqbal et al., 2019), endorse Family Responsibility standards more strongly than Westerners, who live in countries with high self-expressive values (e.g., Australia, the United States). Presumably, Family Responsibility standards (e.g., maintaining harmony in the couple relationship) reflect the consequences for survival if a couple separate in that context. For example, maintaining harmony is rated as less important when self-expression is a core value of the culture.

Traditional values emphasize the importance of religion, parent–child ties, deference to authority, and traditional family values, whereas secular values prioritize the importance of science and rational thought and developing independence in life (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). A related concept to tradition is cultural tightness, which refers to a culture having strong social norms and low tolerance of deviance (Gelfand et al., 2011). Tight cultures and high religiosity covary (Gelfand et al., 2011), and some researchers suggest that religion is a cultural adaptation that promotes adherence

to tight social norms (Norenzayan et al., 2014). These social norms often relate to couple relationships. For example, many religions have strong disincentives to divorce, which serve to sustain marriage. Relative to Western countries like Australia and the United States, who endorse secular-rational values (World Values Survey, 2016), Religion relationship standards are more highly endorsed by Pakistanis (Iqbal et al., 2019) and Malay Muslims (Nordin, 2021), who both have strong endorsement of traditional values (World Values Survey, 2016).

Couple Bond standards are endorsed strongly across Western, Chinese, Pakistani and Malay cultures (Halford et al., 2018a; Hiew et al., 2015; Iqbal et al., 2019; Nordin, 2021). There are some small cultural differences. For example, Westerners endorse Couple Bond more than Chinese living in Hong Kong (Halford et al., 2018a), but when Chinese people are living in Australia Chinese women endorse Couple Bond similarly to Westerners, whereas Chinese men still rate Couple Bond as a little less important than do Westerners (Hiew et al., 2015). Despite these nuances, there is a reasonably consistent high endorsement of Couple Bond cross-culturally, which might reflect that romantic attachment evolved in humans to promote shared caregiving of offspring (Fletcher et al., 2015). In contrast, there are large cultural differences between Westerners from Chinese or Pakistanis on Family Responsibility (Hiew et al., 2015, 2016; Iqbal et al., 2019) and between Westerners and Pakistanis on Religion standards (Skellern et al., 2022).

Assessments of relationship standards need to consider the large cultural and socioeconomic changes occurring in many countries. For example, from the 1970s to the 2020s, there has been extraordinary economic development in Thailand and China, which has lifted both those countries from low- to middle-income countries and been associated with increasing exposure to Western culture (World Bank, 2021a, 2021b). Social changes have accompanied these economic changes, for example, the traditionality of gender roles has declined in China, at least in the large cities (Tang et al., 2012), and in Thailand declined somewhat (Mahiwan & Ayuwat, 2019), although both China and Thailand remain more traditional than Western countries. At the same time, culture has some stability across generations and reflects historic as well as current circumstances (Creanza et al., 2017; Gelfand et al., 2011). Migrants to very different cultures retain important elements of their culture-of-origin values (Kaya et al., 2019) and some of their couple relationship standards (Halford et al., 2018a), which can persist for generations (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020).

Thai Culture and Relationship Standards

In the current research, we extended the assessment of couple relationship standards to another non-Western culture: Thailand. Thailand is a South East Asian country of 70 million people and is a distinctive synthesis of diverse cultural influences. Many Thais have Chinese ancestry, and there is a strong Chinese influence on culture, but there is also a strong influence of Indian culture, and of Buddhism—which is the Thai national religion (Taylor, 2008). Unlike all other South East Asian countries, Thailand was never colonized by a European power, which likely has attenuated Western influence on its culture. In common with China and Malaysia, Thailand has stronger survival values than Western countries, although it is more self-expressive, and less survival focused, than Pakistan (World Values Survey, 2016). Thailand is more traditional than Western countries or China, but less traditional than Pakistan (World Values Survey, 2016). Thailand also has a tight culture (Gelfand et al., 2011). In contrast, most Western cultures are loose, China is in the midrange of tightness, while many other Asian cultures (e.g., Pakistan, Malaysia) are tight (Gelfand et al., 2011).

Religion plays a central part in Thai culture. More than 95% of Thais state Buddhism is their religion, and Thais report higher importance of religion in their lives compared with most Western countries (Huber & Huber, 2012). In comparison to Thailand, Pakistan is even more religious, but the United States is somewhat lower in religiosity, Australia lower again, and China is even lower again (World Values Survey, 2016). Economically, Thailand is a middle-income economy, with substantially lower mean income than Western countries (World Bank, 2021a). Rates of poverty in Thailand declined greatly from the 1970s through to the second decade of the 21st century (World Bank, 2021a). However, there remains a high valuing of meeting basic survival needs, such as the need to provide for family, and lesser valuing of individual needs for freedom (World Values Survey, 2016). These high-survival

values likely reflect that poverty was common until relatively recently.

In summary, Thai culture can be characterized as traditional, more survival focused than Western countries, religious, and culturally tight. Relative to Chinese culture, Thai culture is more religious and culturally tight but shares with China a collectivistic and hierarchical social structure with strong survival values. Thai couple relationships develop within this distinctive cultural context, which seems likely to lead to high endorsement of Family Responsibility standards. Consistent with this proposition, extended family approval is important for marriage to occur, and couples are expected to care for their extended families (Richter & Podhisita, 1992). Romantic love has been suggested to be of lesser importance for Thais than Westerners (Sinsawat & Pumchan, 2014). However, Chinese also have been suggested not to value romantic love as much as Westerners (Boucher et al., 2009), yet Chinese have only small differences from Westerners in Couple Bond relationship standards (Halford et al., 2018a; Hiew et al., 2015). Hence, speculations about Couple Bond relationship standards in Thais need to be tested rather than accepted.

Research Aims and Hypotheses

The present study had two aims. The first aim was to assess the endorsement of the different relationship standards by Thais and to contextualize those standards by comparing them with those found in Western, Chinese, and Pakistani cultures. The second aim was to extend previous cross-cultural research on relationship standards, which has focused largely on the superordinate standards of Couple Bond and Family Responsibility, to examine all 12 standards assessed by the current version of the CCCRSS. Based on the consistent high endorsement of summary Couple Bond standards across cultures, we hypothesized Thai people would show high endorsement of the summary Couple Bond standard, and all five Couple Bond standards (Demonstration of Love, Demonstration of Care, Intimacy Expression, Intimacy Response, and Relationship Effort) that was similar (small or null effect size) to Western, Pakistani, and Chinese samples (Hypothesis 1). Based on the tightness of the Thai culture, plus the emphasis on survival values in Thailand, we hypothesized that Thai's endorsement of the summary Family Responsibility standards and all four Family Responsibility standards (Extended Family, Face, Harmony and Gender Roles) would also be high, higher than Western people, and similar to Pakistani and Chinese people (Hypothesis 2). Finally, given the high religiosity of Thailand, we predicted high endorsement of the summary Religion Standard and the three religion standards (Religious Sanctification, Religious Communication, and Religious Practice), which would be higher than Westerners but similar to Pakistanis (Hypothesis 3).

In previous research with Chinese, Pakistanis, Malays, and Westerners, there were few sex differences in the endorsement of relationship standards at the level of summary standards (Couple Bond, Family Responsibility, Religion; Hiew et al., 2015, 2016; Iqbal et al., 2019; Nordin, 2021). However, we retested sex differences at the level of individual relationship standards, which might show sex differences. For example, given the suggestion that Thais have traditional gender roles, we wanted to test whether there were sex differences in the endorsement of Gender Role standards.

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of four samples recruited in Thailand, Pakistan, Western countries (Australia and the United States), and China. All participants aged 18 years and older and were recruited for an online study described as an examination of "beliefs about what makes for a positive couple relationship." Conduct of the research was reviewed and approved by The University of Queensland's human research ethics committee (Approval No. 2015000773). The Thai sample was recruited specifically for the present study. The Pakistani, Western, and Chinese samples were recruited for earlier studies, and some data on the summary relationship standards in those samples were reported for Pakistan in Iqbal et al. (2019), China in Halford et al. (2018a), and Westerners in Skellern et al. (2022), respectively. The current article is the first to report on the Thai relationship standards and to report on the 12 individual relationship standards for all four samples.

The Thai sample was $n = 300$ (167 female, 133 male) residents of Thailand recruited through

social media. Their mean age was $M = 31.47$ years ($SD = 7.95$). The entire sample was born in Thailand; 197 (66%) of the sample resided in Bangkok; 275 (92%) had a university degree; and 120 (40%) were in a couple relationship. The Pakistani sample consisted of 354 (176 male, 178 female) residents of Pakistan, the vast majority of whom lived in the large city of Karachi in the wealthy Sindh province of southern Pakistan. They were recruited through social media. Almost all participants ($N = 237$, 95.1%) were born in Pakistan. The mean age of participants was 33.3 years ($SD = 8.4$), 291 (67%) participants had a university degree, and 175 (49%) were in a couple relationship.

The Western sample were residents of one of two Western countries (Australia or the United States). The Australian sample was recruited from The University of Queensland's first-year psychology undergraduates ($N = 122$, 101 female and 21 male) who participated for course credit. Noting the Australian sample had a modest number of men, we recruited a sample of U.S. residents through MTurk ($N = 68$, 49 male and 19 female) who were paid U.S. $10 to complete the questionnaire. Australian participants were significantly younger ($M = 21.6$ years, $SD = 6.5$) than U.S. participants, ($M = 30.6$ years, $SD = 7.3$), $F(1, 188) = 75.62$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .29$. Moreover, Australian participants were more likely to be single (74/122, 61%) than U.S. participants (28/68, 41%), $\chi^2(1) = 6.663$, $p = .015$. Combining the Australian and U.S. samples gave a more diverse Western sample, and combined participants' mean age was 25.1 years ($SD = 8.4$), and 88/190 (46%) participants were currently in a relationship.

The Chinese sample comprised 286 (99 male, 187 female) residents of Hong Kong, China, who were recruited through calls on social media and who reported being of majority Chinese ancestry. Most participants were born in Hong Kong (234/286, 82%) or Mainland China (37, 13%), with small numbers born in other countries of Eastern Asia (3%) or in Western countries (2%). Their mean age was 23.8 years ($SD = 6.2$), 139 participants (49%) had a university degree, and 111 (39%) reported they were in a couple relationship.

Measures

We translated the measures of relationship standards and couple satisfaction into Thai, Urdu, and Chinese following Brislin's (1970) method. A person who was bilingual in English and the target language translated the original questionnaire from English to the target language, and a second bilingual person independently translated that version back to English. For each translation, the original and back translations were compared, and discrepancies resolved to refine the translation. The Chinese version gave participants the choice to complete the measures in simplified or traditional Chinese characters.

Cross-Cultural Couple Relationship Standard Scale (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020)

The CCCRSS is a 90-item measure of couple relationship standards in which behaviors are rated for their importance for a successful couple relationship on a 6-point scale (0 = *not important*, 5 = *extremely important*). The items constitute the 12 scales described in Table 1. Each scale is scored as the mean score per item, so scale scores are comparable despite varying numbers of items in the scales. The mean of the Expression of Love, Expression of Caring, Intimacy Expression, and Intimacy Response scales forms the summary Couple Bond score. The mean of the Extended Family, Face, Harmony, and Gender Roles scales forms the summary Family Responsibility score. The mean of the Religious Sanctification, Religious Communication, and Religious Practice scores forms the summary Religion score. The Chinese sample was recruited before the Relationship Effort and Religion standards were added to the CCCRSS, and we only report data on eight of the 12 individual standards for the Chinese sample.

Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007)

The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI) is a widely used 32-item measure of relationship satisfaction that has excellent internal consistency and strong convergent and construct validity. Higher total scores indicate higher relationship satisfaction. In the current sample, the CSI had excellent internal consistency, all $\alpha > .95$ for each cultural groups' men and women.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, we did three separate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) for the three summary standards of

Couple Bond, Family Responsibility, and Religion standards. This allowed comparison of current findings with previous findings on cultural differences on these summary standards. We did not include Relationship Effort in the scoring of the Couple Bond standard, as that scale was added later and was not assessed in the Chinese sample. Two ANOVAs (for Couple Bond and Family Responsibility) were four cultures (Thailand, Pakistani, Chinese, Western) by sex. The third ANOVA of Religion was three cultures (Thailand, Pakistani, Western) by sex. Given there were three comparisons of nonindependent standards, we applied the Holmes' sequential Bonferroni correction, which keeps the experiment-wide Type I error rate at $p = .05$ (Abdi, 2010).

We then conducted two-way ANOVAs of four cultures (Thailand, Pakistani, Chinese, or Western) by sex for eight of the 12 individual standards, and for the remaining four standards, we conducted two-way ANOVAs of three cultures (Thailand, Pakistani, or Western) by sex. The Chinese sample was not included in the ANOVAs for Relationship Effort or the three Religion standards as these scales were not assessed in the Chinese sample. Given there were 12 comparisons of nonindependent standards, we again applied the Holmes' sequential Bonferroni correction (Abdi, 2010). Significant ANOVA effects were followed up with post hoc simple comparison of means to identify the source of significant effects.

Results

Each of the 12 scales had acceptable to high internal consistency in the Thai sample: Demonstration of Love, $\alpha = .80$; Demonstration of Caring, $\alpha = .81$; Intimacy Expression, $\alpha = .87$; Intimacy Responsiveness, $\alpha = .78$; Relationship Effort, $\alpha = .90$; Extended Family, $\alpha = .88$; Face, $\alpha = .70$; Harmony, $\alpha = .72$; Gender Roles, $\alpha = .90$; Religious Sanctification, $\alpha = .92$; Religious Communication, $\alpha = .71$; Religious Practice, $\alpha = .91$. The internal consistency of the scales for Pakistani (Iqbal et al., 2019), Chinese (Halford et al., 2018a), and Western samples (Skellern et al., 2022) were reported elsewhere and all were acceptable, all αs $> .70$.

Endorsement of Summary Relationship Standards

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and ANOVA results on the three summary standards of Couple Bond, Family Responsibility, and Religion. On Couple Bond, there was a medium effect of culture, no significant effect of sex, and no significant interaction of culture by sex. As predicted in Hypothesis 1, Thais endorsed Couple Bond similarly to Westerners as 3 = *quite important* to 4 = *very important*. Pakistanis rated Couple Bond as even more important, and Chinese rated it as less important than Thais.[1]

On Family Responsibility, there was a large effect of culture, a small but significant effect of sex, and a small significant interaction of culture by sex. As predicted in Hypothesis 2, Thais endorsed Family Responsibility as 4 = *very important*, which was more important than Westerners, or any of the other cultures. There were no sex differences on Family Responsibility for Thais, but in the other three cultures, men endorsed this standard more strongly than women, which accounts for the significant main effect of sex and the significant sex by culture interaction. On Religion, there was a very large effect of culture, but no sex or sex by culture effects. As predicted in Hypothesis 3, Thais rated Religion as more important than Westerners, although not as important as Religion was rated by the Pakistanis.

[1] An anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of the article queried how comparable the Australian versus U.S. resident Westerners were on their relationship standards. To test for possible differences within the Western sample, we ran a series of two-way ANOVAs of sample (Australia vs. the United States) and gender on the three superordinate relationship standards of Couple Bond, Family Responsibility, and Religion and also on the 14 individual standards. For the sake of brevity, we do not report these analyses in detail, but the full results are available on request to the authors. There were no main effects of sample for the Couple Bond superordinate standards or any of the five individual standards. There was a small effect size sample difference in the superordinate Family Responsibility standards, $\eta^2 = .032$, and two of the four individual standards, Harmony and Gender Roles. There were no significant sample effects on the superordinate Religion standard or on the three individual religion standards. Caution must be exercised in interpreting these findings as the subsample size of Australian male and U.S. female participants was modest, which limited power to detect differences. Nonetheless, in all relationship standards, the means of the United States and Australian subsamples were more similar to each other than to the Thai or Pakistani samples. For example, on the superordinate Family Responsibility standard which was significantly different between Australia and the U.S. sample, the mean of the Australian subsample was 2.57 (SD = 0.69) and for the U.S. subsample was 3.00 (SD = 0.88), which are both notably lower than the Thai and Pakistani means shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Mean, Standard Deviations, and Results of ANOVAs on Superordinate Couple Relationships Standards Across Cultural Groups

		M (*SD*)				ANOVA[b]								
		Culture				Culture			Sex			Culture × Sex		
Standard	Sex[a]	Thailand	Pakistan	Western	China	*F*(*df*)	*p*	η^2	*F*	*p*	η^2	*F*	*p*	η^2
Couple Bond	C	3.68 $(0.58)_2$	3.91 $(0.67)_1$	3.7 0$(0.72)_2$	3.39 $(0.59)_3$	30.19*	<.001	*.07*	0.66	.415	.00	2.04	.106	.01
	F	3.63 (0.58)	3.93 (0.63)	3.74 (0.71)	3.34 (0.62)	(3, 1,114)			(1, 1,114)			(3, 1,114)		
	M	3.74 (0.59)	3.89 (0.70)	3.64 (0.76)	3.49 (0.51)									
Δ Family Responsibility	C	4.07 $(0.49)_1$	3.79 $(0.62)_2$	2.48 $(0.91)_3$	2.42 $(0.65)_3$	430.50*	<.001	**.54**	43.44*	<.001	.04	6.74*	<.001	.02
	F	4.07 (0.46)	3.68 (0.60)	2.29 (0.81)	2.30 (0.66)	(3, 1,114)			(1, 1,114)			(3, 1,114)		
	M	4.06 (0.54)	3.90 (0.61)>	2.79 (0.99)>	3.52 (0.58)>									
Religion	C	3.29 $(0.83)_2$	3.97 $(0.85)_1$	2.63 $(1.45)_3$	—	104.67*	<.001	**.20**	0.16	.899	.00	0.70	.498	.00
	F	3.33 (0.76)	3.96 (0.78)	2.59 (1.47)	—	(2, 1,114)			(1, 1,114)			(2, 1,114)		
	M	3.23 (0.91)	3.97 (0.92)	2.71 (1.42)	—									

Note. ANOVA = analysis of variance. The Chinese samples were not assessed on the Religion standard. Each standard is rated on a 6-point scale (0 = *not at all important*, 5 = *extremely important*). Means across rows for each standard are not significantly different from each other, $p < .05$, if they share a subscript, the subscripts are the rank order of strength of rated importance that contribute to the main effects of culture (i.e., collapsed across sex). The Δ Family Responsibility standard had a significant culture by sex interaction and we did post hoc comparisons of the sexes for each country; > = these male means were significantly higher than the female means in this culture, $p < .05$; no symbol indicates no significant sex difference in this culture for this standard, $p < .05$. Using Cohen's (1988) effect size conventions, medium effect sizes are $\eta^2 > .06$, which are italicized, and large effect sizes are $\eta^2 > .14$, which are bolded.

[a] C = sexes combined; F = female; M = male. [b] Statistical significance was adjusted using the Holmes' sequential Bonferroni correction (Abdi, 2010) to maintain the experiment-wide Type I error rate at $p = .05$.

* $p < .05$ after Holmes correction.

Endorsement of Individual Relationship Standards

Table 3 presents the mean endorsement of all 12 standards by country and sex and the results of the ANOVAs. Across the five Couple Bond standards (Demonstration of Love, Demonstration of Caring, Intimacy Expression, Intimacy Responsiveness, and Relationship Effort), there were very similar patterns of significant effects. All five standards had medium to large effects of culture and no significant effects of sex. Relative to the other cultures, Thais rated Demonstration of Love and Intimacy Expression as more important, but rated Demonstration of Caring and Intimacy Response as less important. The sex by culture interactions were not significant for four of the five standards, but there was a small interaction of culture by sex on Intimacy Responsiveness. As shown in Table 3, the culture by sex interaction on Intimacy Response is attributable to Thai men rating this standard as more important than Thai women, but there were no sex differences in the other cultures.

Three of the four standards related to Family Responsibility (Face, Harmony and Gender Roles) had identical patterns of effects. There were significant large effects of culture, significant but small effects of sex, and significant but small interactions of culture by sex. For Extended Family, there was a significant large effect of Culture, but the sex effect and the sex by culture interaction were not significant. While the main effects of culture are moderated somewhat by the sex effects for three standards, overall Thai and Pakistani respondents have similarly high ratings of Family Responsibility standards, and the Western and Chinese respondents have similar low to moderate ratings on these standards. The culture by sex interaction on Face was attributable to men endorsing this standard more than women in Western and Chinese cultures, but there were no sex differences in the two other cultures (Thai and Pakistani). The culture by sex interaction on Harmony and Gender Roles had the same pattern, men endorsed both these standards more than women in Pakistani, Western, and Chinese cultures; but there were no sex differences in the Thai culture. In brief, the culture effects were much larger than sex differences. The sex differences varied across culture, but where they existed it always was for men to endorse Family Responsibility standards more strongly than women. Thais were the only culture that had no sex differences on any of the Family Responsibility standards.

Across all three standards related to Religion (Religious Sanctification, Religious Communication, and Religious Practice), there was the same pattern of significant findings. There were significant effects of culture, no significant effects of sex, and no significant interactions of sex by culture. The culture effects were large for Religious Sanctification and Religious Practice, but small for Religious Communication. The Thais rated Religious Sanctification and Religious practice as more important than Westerners, but the Westerners and Thais had similar ratings of the importance of Religious Communication. Across all three Religion standards, the Pakistanis had higher mean ratings of importance than the other cultures.

Figure 1 shows the mean endorsement of standards separately by sex in the Thai sample and the comparison samples of Westerners, Pakistanis, and Chinese. Consistent with the ANOVA results, Figure 1 shows that the endorsements of all standards have notably larger differences between countries than the sex differences within countries. Also, consistent with the ANOVA results, the sex differences that exist are predominantly in the domain of Family Responsibility standards, but there are no sex differences evident in this domain for Thais. Most Couple Bond standards were endorsed by all cultural groups as being 3 = *quite important* to 4 = *very important*, except for a rating of 2.5 on Demonstrations of Love by the Chinese men. The endorsement of Family Responsibility standards seems to separate the four countries into two groups: the Thais and Pakistanis who rated those standards around 4 = *very important*, and the Westerners and Chinese who rated standards lower, between 2 = *moderately important* and 3 = *quite important*. On the Religion standards, the Pakistanis were outliers in rating all three of these standards as around 4 = *very important*, whereas the Thais and Westerners rated these standards around 2 = *moderately important* to 3 = *quite important*. As was evident in Table 2, Thais rated Religious Practice as much more important than Westerners, but Thais and Westerners were very similar in rating Religious Communication.

Table 3

Mean, Standard Deviations, and ANOVAs of 12 Couple Relationships Standards Across Cultures and Sex

		M (*SD*)				ANOVA results[a]								
		Culture				Culture			Sex			Culture × Sex		
Standard	Sex	Thailand	Pakistan	Western	China	*F*(*df*)	*p*	η^2	*F*	*p*	η^2	*F*	*p*	η^2
DemoLove	F	3.96 $(0.54)_1$	3.63 $(0.89)_2$	3.22 $(0.89)_3$	2.61 $(0.97)_4$	99.84*	<.001	**.21**	3.19	.074	.00	2.04	.107	.01
	M	4.00 (0.59)	3.58 (0.98)	3.36 (0.99)	2.89 (0.92)	(3, 1,114)			(1, 1,114)			(3, 1,114)		
DemoCare	F	2.90 $(0.99)_4$	4.05 $(0.65)_1$	3.64 $(0.78)_2$	3.27 $(0.69)_3$	95.35*	<.001	**.20**	1.86	.173	.00	2.43	.064	.01
	M	3.10 (1.00)	4.03 (0.70)	3.53 (0.83)	3.47 (0.64)	(3, 1,114)			(1, 1,114)			(3, 1,114)		
IntExp	F	4.25 $(0.52)_1$	3.98 $(0.67)_2$	3.94 $(0.79)_3$	3.58 $(0.74)_4$	40.36*	<.001	*.10*	0.51	.474	.00	1.46	.224	.00
	M	4.21 (0.51)	4.01 (0.71)	3.76 (0.77)	3.66 (0.58)	(3, 1,114)			(1, 1,114)			(3, 1,114)		
IntResp Δ	F	3.41 $(0.70)_3$	4.06 $(0.64)_1$	4.14 $(0.79)_1$	3.90 $(0.66)_2$	31.54*	<.001	*.08*	0.01	.931	.00	5.32*	.001	.01
	M	3.66 (0.74)>	3.94 (0.68)	3.94 (0.73)	3.94 (0.52)	(3, 1,114)			(1, 1,114)			(3, 1,114)		
Effort	F	3.96 $(0.52)_1$	3.93 $(0.81)_2$	3.40 $(0.78)_3$	—	44.23*	<.001	*.10*	2.88	.090	.00	1.54	.216	.00
	M	4.16 (0.55)	3.93 (0.81)	3.46 (0.80)	—	(2, 830)			(1, 830)			(1, 830)		
ExtFamily	F	4.20 $(0.49)_1$	3.59 $(0.69)_2$	2.58 $(1.06)_3$	2.59 $(0.79)_3$	252.37*	<.001	**.41**	5.85	.016	.01	2.76	.041	.01
	M	4.12 (0.59)	3.85 (0.66)	2.77 (1.20)	2.69 (0.76)	(3, 1,114)			(1, 1,114)			(3, 1,114)		
Face Δ	F	4.03 $(0.55)_1$	4.11 $(0.66)_1$	2.78 $(0.93)_2$	2.80 $(0.78)_2$	188.86*	<.001	**.34**	13.65*	<.001	.01	5.00*	.002	.01
	M	4.05 (0.66)	4.08 (0.72)	3.13 (1.00)>	3.15 (0.81)>	(3, 1,114)			(1, 1,114)			(3, 1,114)		
Harmony Δ	F	4.46 $(0.50)_1$	3.75 $(0.73)_2$	2.36 $(0.84)_3$	2.07 $(0.83)_4$	493.10*	<.001	**.57**	34.12*	<.001	.03	10.13*	<.001	.03
	M	4.37 (0.51)	3.90 (0.68)>	2.87 (0.97)>	2.56 (0.74)>	(3, 1,114)			(1, 1,114)			(3, 1,114)		
GenRoles Δ	F	3.62 $(0.57)_1$	3.28 $(0.83)_2$	1.46 $(1.06)_3$	1.71 $(0.90)_3$	320.47*	<.001	**.46**	89.15*	<.001	*.07*	8.60*	<.001	.02
	M	3.72 (0.73)	3.80 (0.78)>	2.38 (1.31)>	2.22 (0.83)>	(3, 1,114)			(1, 1,114)			(3, 1,114)		
ReligSanc	F	2.84 $(1.09)_2$	3.77 $(1.05)_1$	1.93 $(1.85)_3$	—	113.14*	<.001	**.21**	0.60	.437	.00	2.05	.129	.01
	M	2.65 (1.23)	3.87 (1.15)	2.25 (1.88)	—	(2, 830)			(1, 830)			(2, 830)		
ReligComm	F	3.64 $(0.75)_2$	3.96 $(0.90)_1$	3.65 $(1.28)_2$	—	16.64*	<.001	.04	1.04	.308	.00	0.87	.420	.00
	M	3.53 (0.95)	4.01 (0.95)	3.50 (1.27)	—	(2, 830)			(1, 830)			(2, 830)		
ReligPrac	F	3.52 $(0.99)_2$	4.15 $(0.75)_1$	2.18 $(1.71)_3$	—	140.83*	<.001	**.25**	0.10	.755	.00	1.27	.282	.00
	M	3.51 (1.10)	4.03 (1.02)	2.40 (1.63)	—	(2, 830)			(1, 830)			(2, 830)		

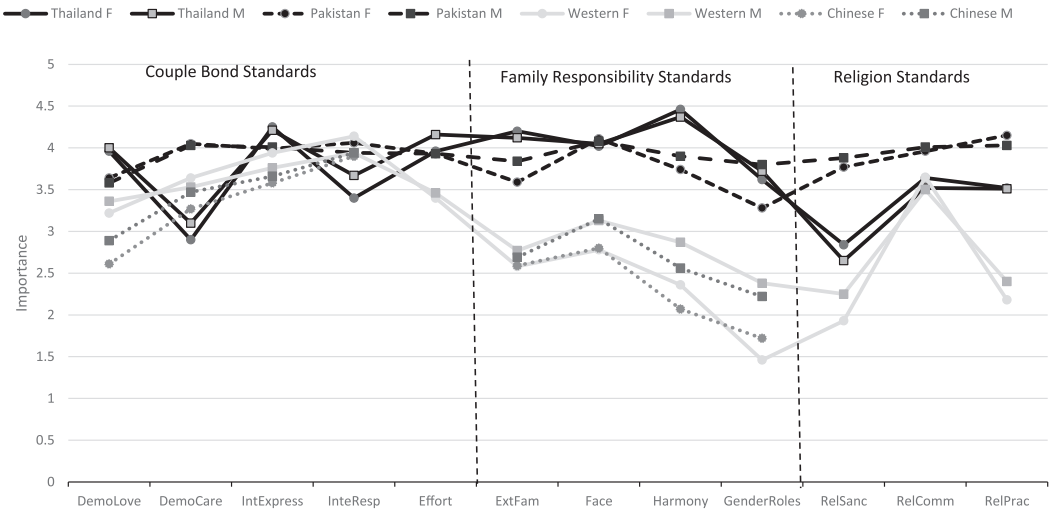
Note. ANOVA = analysis of variance. The Chinese samples were not assessed on four of the standards, as measures of these constructs were developed after data collection in that sample. DemoLove = Demonstration of Love; DemoCare = Demonstration of Care; IntExpress = Intimacy Expressiveness; IntResp- = Intimacy Responsiveness; Effort = Relationship Effort; ExtFam = Extended Family; GenRoles = Gender Roles; RelSanc = Religious Sanctification; RelComm = Religious Communication; RelPrac = Religious Practice; 0 = *not at all important*, 5 = *extremely important.* Means across pairs of rows for each standard are not significantly different from each other, $p < .05$, if they share a subscript, the different subscripts are the rank order of strength of rated importance with 1 = culture with highest rated importance, testing the culture differences that contribute to the main effects of culture (i.e., collapsed across sex). Δ These standards had significant culture by sex interactions and we did post hoc comparisons of the sexes for each country; > = these male means were significantly higher than the female means in this culture, $p < .05$, no symbol indicates no significant sex difference in this culture for this standard. Using Cohen's (1988) effect size conventions, medium effect sizes are $\eta^2 > .06$, which are italicized, and large effect sizes are $\eta^2 > .14$, which are bolded.

[a] Statistical significance was adjusted using the Holmes' sequential Bonferroni correction (Abdi, 2010) to maintain the experiment-wide Type I error rate at $p = .05$.

* $p < .05$ after Holmes correction.

Figure 1

Couple Relationship Standards in Thailand, China, Pakistan, and Western Countries (the United States and Australia)



Note. The Chinese sample was not assessed on some standards, as measures of these constructs were developed after data collection in that sample. DemoLove = Demonstration of Love; DemoCare = Demonstration of Care; IntExpress = Intimacy Expressiveness; IntResp = Intimacy Responsiveness; Effort = Relationship Effort; ExtFam = Extended Family; RelSanc = Religious Sanctification; RelComm = Religious Communication; RelPrac = Religious Practice; 0 = *not at all important*, 5 = *extremely important*.

Discussion

We conducted the first assessment of couple relationship standards in Thai people and compared their standards with those of Pakistani, Western, and Chinese people. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, Thais gave high endorsement to the importance of the superordinate Couple Bond standards, which was like Westerners, higher than Chinese, but not as high as Pakistanis. Testing cultural differences in the five component standards of Couple Bond showed nuances in cultural differences. Relative to the other cultures, Thais gave the strongest endorsement to Demonstration of Love, Intimacy Expression, and Relationship Effort but gave the lowest rating to Demonstrations of Caring and Intimacy Response.

Hypothesis 2 received strong support, Thais endorsed the importance of the superordinate Family Responsibility standards strongly and each of the four components standards more strongly than the other cultures. (The one minor exception was for Face, which was rated similarly by Pakistanis and Thais, who each rated it as more important than did the Westerners or Chinese). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, Thais rated the Religion superordinate standard as highly important, and more important than did Westerners, but not as important as did Pakistanis. Testing the three component standards of Religion showed nuances in cultural differences, with Thais rating Religious Sanctification and Religious Practice as more important than Westerners but having similar ratings of importance as Westerners on Religious Communication. Pakistanis gave higher rated importance to all three Religion standards than did Thais or Westerners.

Sex differences predominantly were small. At the level of superordinate Couple Bond and Religion standards, sex differences were not significant, and the sex effect for Family Responsibility was small. At the level of the 12 component standards, there were a few small but significant sex differences and one medium-sized sex effect (on Gender Roles). The only significant sex effect on Couple Bond standards was that Thai males rated Intimacy Response as more important than Thai women. There were no sex differences for Thais on any of the Family Responsibility standards. However, in the other three cultures, men more strongly endorsed the importance of Face, Harmony, and Gender Roles than women.

The current findings that Westerners endorsed Couple Bond more strongly than Chinese on relationship standards, replicated the small differences on Couple Bond in previous findings (e.g., Hiew et al., 2015, 2016). However, the present study found no significant differences between Chinese and Westerners on Family Responsibility standards, which fails to replicate the large effect size differences found between Westerners and Chinese living in Australia (Hiew et al., 2015, 2016), but is similar to different samples of Westerners and Chinese living in both Australia and Hong Kong (Halford et al., 2018b). In the present study, Westerners mean endorsement of Family Responsibility was about 2.5, which is similar to that reported by Halford et al. (2018b), whereas in other studies, mean endorsement by Westerners ranged from 1.5 to 2.0 (Hiew et al., 2015, 2016). The Family Responsibility standards of Chinese have been more consistent across studies of between 2.3 and 2.5 (e.g., Halford et al., 2018a, 2018b) and the present study. Future research needs to test the consistency of Westerners' ratings of Family Responsibility standards.

Thai Relationship Standards in Context

The current research extends prior research in two important ways. First, it assesses standards in the distinctive Thai culture and extends knowledge on how standards are similar and different across diverse cultures. Second, it extends prior research by reporting a more fine-grained analysis of cultural differences for each of 12 standards, extending prior research that has focused on cultural differences at a more global level of the superordinate standards (e.g., Halford et al., 2018a, 2018b; Hiew et al., 2015, 2016; Iqbal et al., 2019).

The high mean endorsement by Thais of the Couple Bond standard (closer to 4 = *very important* than 3 = *moderately important*) contradicts the commonly expressed opinion in the cross-cultural literature (e.g., Shi & Wang, 2009), and portrayal of romance in popular culture in different countries (Wu et al., 2019), that romantic love as the basis of marriage is a predominantly Western idea that does not fit with Asian traditions. More specifically, the current findings contradict suggestions that romantic love is less important to Thais than Westerners (e.g., Sinsawat & Pumchan, 2014). The average endorsement of the summary Couple Bond was above three for all four cultural groups across both sexes, and cultural differences were only of medium effect size. There is considerable evidence that romantic attachment evolved in humans because it promotes shared caregiving of offspring (Fletcher et al., 2015), hence Couple Bond standards are likely to be important across diverse cultures including Thailand. At the same time, the distinctive patterns of endorsement by the Thais on the five individual Couple Bond standards underscore that the precise behaviors that are viewed as important in Couple Bond do vary somewhat cross-culturally.

In contrast to the modest cross-cultural variation in endorsement of Couple Bond, Family Responsibility and Religion showed large effect size differences across cultural groups. Thais rated Family Responsibility as more important than the other cultural groups and rated Religion as more important than Westerners although not as important as Pakistanis. The strong endorsement of Family Responsibility standards by Thais and Pakistanis likely reflects the collectivistic, hierarchical social structures in Thai and Pakistani cultures (Hofstede, 2001; World Values Survey, 2016) and the tightness of both cultures in enforcing these standards of behavior (Gelfand et al., 2011).

The strong Thai and Pakistani endorsement of Religion standards likely reflects both the relatively homogeneity of strong religious identification (Buddhism in Thailand, Islam in Pakistan), and the tightness of both cultures in enforcing normative behaviors (Gelfand et al., 2011). Most measures of relationship standards were developed in Western countries (Halford & van de Vijver, 2020) and do not include Family Responsibility or Religion standards. This perhaps is understandable given that these standards are rated as of modest importance to Westerners, but the strong Thai and Pakistani endorsement of these standards shows that their assessment can be important. Moreover, the endorsement of Family Responsibility and Religion standards showed more variability within the Westerners than within the Thai or Pakistani samples. The Western heterogeneity in Family Responsibility and Religion standards suggests differences between spouses might be important in some Western couples' relationship.

Examining cultural differences on the 12 individual standards reveals additional nuances in cross-cultural differences. For example, within Family Responsibility standards, Gender Roles

were the least strongly endorsed by Westerners and Chinese, but Thais and Pakistanis endorsed these standards strongly. Traditional gender roles are gradually being displaced by more egalitarian roles in China and Western countries, but change is less evident in Thailand and Pakistan (Chiappori & Molina, 2021). Despite the large cultural differences in the summary Religion Standard, all three assessed cultures (Thai, Pakistani, Western) endorsed the importance of Religious Communication quite strongly, with only a small cultural difference. It was specifically Religious Practice that was much less strongly endorsed by Westerners than Thais, and Pakistani endorsed these standards most strongly.

Limitations of the Study

A noteworthy limitation of the present study is that we recruited convenience samples, who were predominantly young, highly educated, and lived in large cities. The generalizability to older, less educated, or rural dwelling members of the Thai and other national populations needs to be assessed. While all cultures show internal variability, regional variability might be particularly marked in some countries. For example, Pakistan has great diversity in education and income, ranging from educated often Westernized progressives living in large cities of the Sindh province through to seminomadic predominantly illiterate tribal people of the North-West Frontier Province (Zaman et al., 2006). Similarly, China (Textor, 2021) and Thailand (Parks, 2019) show great regional variability in income and education. Traditional values like Family Responsibility and Religion standards seem likely to be more strongly endorsed by older, less educated rural dwellers than by young educated urban dwellers; and hence, the differences found in the present study between Western culture and the three Asian cultures might underestimate the true size of cultural differences.

Some readers might question whether Hong Kong is representative of mainland China, given Hong Kong was under British rule for 199 years. However, Hong Kong Chinese sustained many aspects of traditional Chinese culture during British rule (Chan et al., 2005). The World Values Survey (2016) shows substantial similarity in cultural values between Hong Kong and mainland China, and both Hong Kong and the mainland show clear differences from cultural values in Western countries like the United States and Australia. Nonetheless, more research is needed assessing standards across the diversity of China. Moreover, the Western sample combined samples drawn from Australian university undergraduates and U.S. residents recruited through MTurk. That provided greater diversity in age and sex than using the Australian sample alone, but some differences in United States and Australian relationship standards might be detectable with larger samples.

While the Thai data in the present study are published for the first time, the other three comparison samples used data previously published. As in any research, replication of the findings in these cultures is important. Replication in separate samples of the findings on couple relationship standards for Western (Hiew et al., 2015, 2016), Chinese (Halford et al., 2018a, 2018b; Hiew et al., 2015, 2016) and Pakistani samples (Ayub et al., 2022). Future research needs to replicate research on Thai relationship standards.

In comparing the cultures, some caution must be exercised as the samples differed on some sociodemographic characteristics. For example, our Pakistani sample was about 7 years older than the other samples. Among Chinese and Westerners differences in relationship status, education, and age are largely unrelated to endorsement of relationship standards (Halford et al., 2018a). Nonetheless, numerous sociodemographic differences between the countries covary with culture, and it is likely that some of those difference help shape the culture. For example, the much lower mean income that has existed for generations in Thailand relative to Western countries likely shapes greater attention to survival values and high cultural tightness in Thailand. The current cross-sectional study can identify cultural differences but cannot establish what of the historic and current circumstances might account for these cultural differences.

Finally, the present study provides a snapshot of relationship standards at a particular time, and there are likely to be changes in cultural values and relationship standards across time. For example, in Western countries and the large cities of China, participation by married women in the paid workforce has increased substantially across the last two to three generations, gender roles have become less traditional, and these trends have occurred to varying extents in other Asian countries (Chiappori & Molina, 2021).

Implications and Applications

The current research replicates earlier research showing that the CCCRSS identifies standards that show large and potentially important variations across cultures (Halford et al., 2018a; Hiew et al., 2015). It extends that prior work by identifying what behaviors in Thai culture are most valued, and how those standards are similar and different to standards in Western countries. Moreover, it highlights the considerable cultural diversity in relationship standards across Asian countries. Notably, while Thai culture has strong historic Chinese influence, Thai culture is considerably more religious, culturally tight, and endorses Family Responsibility standards more than Chinese culture.

The current findings have implications for couple therapy. Evidence-based couple therapies (e.g., cognitive behavioral couple therapy, emotion-focused couple therapy) were developed in Western countries and prioritize enhancing the Couple Bond (Halford & Pepping, 2019). Given our finding that Thais place high importance on the Couple Bond, these approaches might be useful to assist distressed Thai couples, although this possibility needs to be evaluated in systematic trials. At the same time, the high importance attached to Family Responsibility and Religion standards suggests that evidence-based couple therapies might need to be adapted for Thai couples.

Standardized assessments used in Western couple therapies pay little attention to the extended family. For example, the Frequency and Acceptability of Partner Behavior Inventory used to assess relationship behaviors in couple therapy (Doss & Christensen, 2006) has 19 items none of which relate to extended family or religion. The CCCRSS can be used to broaden assessment of areas of importance to couples and thus could be used to guide therapists to give more culturally appropriate couple therapy. For example, if both partners choose to spend a lot of time and resources supporting extended family that might be positive for the couple relationship. On the other hand, disagreement between partners on this issue might be problematic.

Evidence-based approaches to couple therapy pay little explicit attention to religious beliefs (Halford & Pepping, 2019). Some Western couple therapists have added Christian concepts to couple interventions for religious couples. For example, Fincham and Beach (2013) relate suggested relationship behavior changes to religious principles and incorporated religious activities (e.g., joint prayer) into their couple therapy. Analogous adaptations could include Buddhist teachings as the rationale for couple therapy procedures and involve joint religious activities when appropriate. Buddhist influenced individual therapy already is influential in Thailand (Srichannnil & Prioir, 2014), and Buddhist influenced couple therapy should be evaluated in future research with Buddhist couples.

The cultural differences in relationship standard suggest that, when working in Western countries with high cultural diversity (e.g., Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States), couple therapy needs to assess and accommodate Family Responsibility and Religion relationship standards as well as Couple Bond. When working with intercultural couples, particular attention needs to be paid to the potential association of differences in standards with cultures of origin; and helping couples develop shared standards that draw upon the strengths of each cultural tradition. As one example, a review of each partner's relationship standards is part of the Couple CARE program (Halford, 2017), which has demonstrated efficacy enhancing couples' relationship satisfaction (Halford et al., 2015).

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