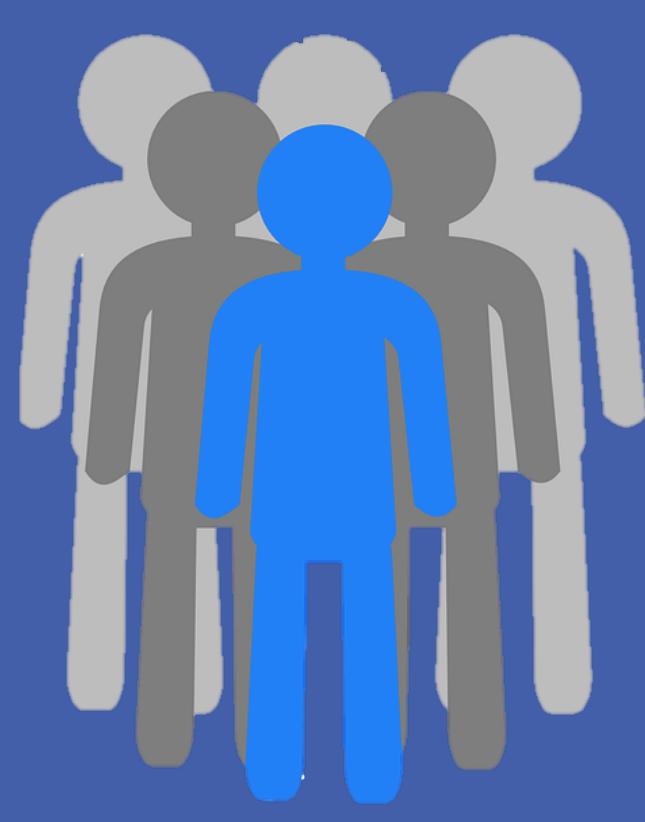


# The Relationship between Depression and Relational Interdependent Self-Construal: A Gender Comparison

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## Abstract

The goal of the current study was to examine the relationship between relational interdependent self-construal and depression across gender. Concerns for self-construal draw consideration to the moderating effect it can exert on an individual's experience of depression. Secondary data analysis from MIDUS II, Biomarker Project, was utilized for the current study. The results of the current study conclude that there are no differences regarding relational interdependent self-construal and depression across gender. The current study validates prior research into the association between relational interdependent self-construal and depression. The findings of the study prompt consideration for increased assessment of psychosocial stressors, such as divorce, in impacting depression.

## Introduction

### Significance of Study

- Worldwide statistics reveal disparity in rate of depression between males and females.
- Prevalence of depression is 5.5% in women and 3.2% in men (Albert, 2015).
- Externalizing factors indicate positive association between an external locus of control and depression (Khumalo & Plattner, 2019).
- Interpersonal relationships are significant because they may act as an externalizing factor for some, thereby affecting their mental health
- Among varying core beliefs, females are more likely to adopt attachment-related core beliefs (Millings & Carnelley, 2015).

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to increase knowledge related to the mental health and interpersonal relationships of women, to treat their depression. The research seeks to assess possible correlations between depression and interdependent self-construal among men and women.

### Research Question

Does gender serve as a protective factor between scores of relational interdependent self-construal and depression?

### Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this study is that men are less vulnerable to experience depression in relation to relational interdependent self-construal, when compared to women.

## Literature Review

It is typically regarded that males and females are socialized differently from birth. Gender specific socialization provides the basis for why women place more significance on interpersonal relationships.

### Depression and Interpersonal Functioning

- Triggers for depression appear to differ among genders, where women present with more internalizing symptoms (Albert, 2015).
- Women report greater sensitivity to interpersonal relationships (Albert, 2015).
- Interpersonal stress is both a cause and factor of depression in women (Hammen, 2001).

### Gendered Socialization on Self-Construal

- The societal expectation of sociability may prompt mental health concerns for women if their reality does not match their expectations.

### Evolutionary Benefits of Interdependence

- Peer sociability between women is thought to be shaped by the high investment of reproduction
- Current friendship dynamics appear to fulfill different roles between genders, arising from evolutionary selection processes (Pearce et al., 2020)
- Women are seen to hold a greater preference for dyadic exchanges (David-Barrett et al., 2015).

### Gaps in Research

- There is a lack of research exploring the effect that culture exerts in modulating interdependent self-construal

## Methods

### Research Design

This study is a secondary data analysis of the Biomarker Project, which is one of five projects composing the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS 2) study. MIDUS 2, which spanned from 2004 to 2009, is a follow-up of a longitudinal study. Ages for participants in the MIDUS 2 Biomarker Project ( $N = 1,255$ ) ranged from 35-85 years old. MIDUS 2 assessed participants using clinical data, experimental data, and survey data.

### Sampling Method

The current study used study participants from the original Biomarker Project. Study participants who failed to fully complete relational interdependent self-construal and depression questions were excluded from the study. This resulted in a final sample size of 1,049 study participants; 476 men and 573 women.

### Measures

The MIDUS II study sought to investigate psychological and social measures of health (Love et al., 2010).

*Relational Interdependent Self-Construal:* A self report survey that consists of a 10-item cumulative scale, assessing participants' relational self construal.

*Depression:* A self report survey that consists of a 20-item cumulative scale from the Center on Epidemiologic Studies that assesses participant's depressive symptomatology.

*Demographics variables:* The study contained demographic variables pertaining to age, gender, education, employment, marital status, number of children and ethnicity.

## Results

- The association between interdependent self-construal and depression was significant for males and females; however, the strength of the correlation was moderate for men and weak for females.
- Regression analysis indicated that gender, age, and participants who were never married were not significant predictors for scores of relational interdependent self-construal.
- Participants who were separated or divorced possessed higher levels of depression and lower scores of relational interdependent self-construal.

Regression Model for Relational Interdependent Self-Construal			
Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$
Constant***	5.107	.151	
Age	.001	.003	.017
Gender	.017	.058	.009
Never married	-.011	.109	-.003
Separated or divorced*	-.184	.084	-.069
Depression (CES-D)***	-.015	.004	-.126

Reference groups: Female and Married or Widowed. \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $p < .05$

## Conclusion

- The results of the study were both expected and unexpected, providing mixed support for the hypothesis of the current study.
- Lower levels of relational interdependent self-construal were related to higher levels of depression for male and female participants.
- The present study finds that gender differences regarding relational interdependent self-construal and its association to depression are negligible.
- Although the study's instruments are empirically validated, there is reasonable doubt that the assessment for depression may not capture males' experiences accurately.
- Accounting for typical male symptoms of depression, such as overworking, decreases the disparity for rates of depression among females (Swetlitz, 2021).

### Implications for Social Work Practice

The current study highlights separation or divorce as a potential predictor variable for low scores of interdependent self-construal. Concerns for relationship draw increased attention for assessment in intimate, micro settings. Screening for separation or divorce can draw attention to client's relational interdependent self-construal, as it pertains to client's initial concerns for depression. Social workers are advocates for vulnerable populations; therefore, drawing attention to relational interdependent self-construal can better support social workers in addressing depression.

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