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# A Model of Family Change in Cultural Context

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## Abstract

This reading is about the psychological study of the family with a cross-cultural comparative orientation. It attempts to provide answers to some basic questions regarding the family in context – whether there are systematic global changes in the family, what might be some of the important factors that characterize family and family change, and how they function. A model of family change is proposed to address these questions and to shed light on the variations in family patterns in different socio-cultural-economic contexts. These patterns also help understand the development of the self in family and society. It is proposed that the modernization hypothesis of 'converging on the Western pattern' with socio-economic development around the globe is not being supported by the research results from various countries. Instead, a synthetic family pattern of emotional/psychological interdependence is emerging across different contexts, as it best satisfies the two basic human needs for autonomy and relatedness.

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## Introduction

In this reading, I will deal with the family from a global perspective. Psychological study of the family with a cross-cultural comparative orientation is not very common. Usually the Western nuclear family and its problems are studied, or descriptions are made of families in anthropological studies in rather exotic societies. In what context can we best study and understand the family? Is the family changing, and if it is, what kind of change is it? We need to understand **what** are the important factors and processes that characterize family and family change; **how** they function; and finally **why** certain types of family patterns are seen in certain types of societies and contexts. Such basic questions require comparative, contextual, and functional perspectives.



What I will present here is basically a theoretical analysis, supported by empirical research, that aims to address these questions from a cross-cultural, contextual, functional perspective. Therefore, I will not address some particularly Western concerns, such as increased divorce rates, nor will I describe the family in any one particular society. The changes in the family patterns particularly in the so-called "Majority World" are not well known; it is these patterns that I study as a cross-cultural psychologist. However, the insights derived from this cross-cultural perspective can be relevant for understanding the family in any society. Note that the term "Majority world" refers to the non-Western societies which make up the majority of the world's population. The family/human patterns are typically not individualistic, but are much more inter-connected than in the western (particularly American) middle class society.

To help make the paper more readable and the issues more clear, I will share with you my personal research experience and thinking. Given the space limitations, I will not go into detailed descriptions or analyses but will present the main points. Those of you who are interested in reading more on the subject can refer to my publications in the reference list, particularly Kagitcibasi, 1990, 1996a, and 1996b.

## Modernization Theory and the Convergence Hypothesis

A general assumption regarding family and human relations in the world is that the diverse human/family patterns are bound to change with urbanization and industrialization to eventually converge on the Western pattern. This type of prediction was also made by the Modernization theory, which was popular particularly in 1960s and 1970s, but is generally taken for granted even today.

The modernization perspective claims that inter-generational dependencies (family interdependence) should decrease and separation/ nucleation within the family should increase with socio-economic development, pointing to a convergence toward the Western nucleated independent family, a core of the individualistic society.

In most societies in the Majority World the family is a system of interdependent relations, where family integrity requires cooperative interconnectedness. In contrast, the ideal of independence characterizes the Western middle class (particularly American) family, where individual interests and needs have priority. Here the autonomy, privacy, self sufficiency and self actualization of the individual members are considered important starting particularly in adolescence. This is also reinforced by psychological teaching. For example, the "individuation-separation" hypothesis, with a psychoanalytic orientation, stresses the importance of early human separation and individuation for healthy psychological development of the self. These outlooks reflect the Western individualistic world view.

Modernization theory's prediction of convergence toward the Western pattern is based on a social evolutionist thinking claiming that whatever is different from the (most evolved) Western pattern is deficient and is therefore bound to evolve and change toward it with societal development. It is commonly assumed, for example, that the interconnected interdependent family/human orientations are not compatible with economic development.

This type of claim is seriously challenged today by the examples of great economic advancement in some non-Western collectivistic societies, such as Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Again research from various societies has been showing that despite socio-economic development, urbanization, etc., the expected individuation/separation in human/family relations is not taking place in non-Western collectivistic cultural contexts (Lin & Fu, 1990; Phalet & Schonpflug, 2001; for a review see Kagitcibasi, 1996a).

### **The Value of Children Study**

In mid-1970s I conducted a nation-wide study in Turkey on the Value of Children (VOC), as a part of a 9-country research project investigating motivations for childbearing (Kagitcibasi, 1982). The findings appeared to support the modernization theory, so that was my initial interpretation, also. However, different research results were pointing to continued family inter-dependencies. My own impressions also pointed in that direction. This prompted me to re-examine the VOC study results to discover that our questions had determined our results.

The VOC Study pointed to the importance of economic/utilitarian and psychological values attributed to children by parents. The economic/utilitarian VOC has to do with children providing material benefits to their families while young (working in family business, doing household chores, etc.) and providing old age security to their parents when they grow old. The psychological VOC has to do with the love, pride, joy, etc. that children give to their parents. The economic VOC was found to be particularly strong in less developed countries of the Majority World with low levels of affluence and mostly rural/agrarian life styles. In these contexts children are expected to be dependent on their parents, that is obedient, while young, this dependence to be reversed later on by the dependence of the elderly parents on their grown up offspring for their livelihood.

As the VOC Study had been informed mainly by economic and demographic conceptualizations, questions mostly dealt with basically economic/material interdependencies between generations. We found that with socio-economic development (higher GNP, urbanization, higher socio-economic standing), the economic/utilitarian VOC decreased. However, initially we interpreted these results as decreasing dependencies *in general*, not only in economic/material terms, even though only the economic VOC was found to decrease *not overall VOC* because psychological VOC did not decrease with increasing affluence and socio-economic development.

### A Model of Family Change

The realization that the material and psychological VOCs were in fact differentially affected by socio-economic development led me to modify our initial interpretation, to focus on the different VOCs and to differentiate between material and emotional (psychological) interdependencies in the family. This was a conceptual breakthrough that paved the way toward the development of a model of family change.

The model of family change that I developed (Kagitcibasi, 1990, 1996a) involves decreasing material interdependencies but continuing psychological interdependencies with socio-economic development (particularly urbanization) in societies with collectivistic cultures of interpersonal connectedness. It fits with the above research and others conducted in Asian countries as well as with ethnic minorities in North America and Europe.

The model of family change that I propose analyzes the development of three different types of self within three different family interaction patterns. The model aims to discover the societal and familial antecedents of the separate (individualistic) and the related selves. It also examines the implications of family change, through socio-economic development, for the emergence of a third type of self that integrates both autonomy and relatedness.

Three family interaction patterns are differentiated: the traditional family characterized by overall (material and emotional) interdependence, the individualistic model based on independence, and a dialectical synthesis of the two, involving material independence but emotional/psychological interdependence. These interaction patterns are studied at the intergenerational level.

The *family model of total interdependence* is prevalent in traditional rural agrarian society, though not limited to it, where intergenerational interdependence is a requisite for family livelihood. The child contributes to the family well being both while young (for example working in the field and contributing to family economy) and later on in providing old age security to his/her parents. Thus, in such contexts the child's economic/utilitarian value has salience for parents, and high fertility is implicated, as the economic value of the child (VOC) is cumulative with child numbers (Kagitcibasi 1982, 1990). More children contribute more in material terms. In the family model of total interdependence, the independence of the child is not functional and may even be seen as a threat to the family livelihood because independent offspring may look after his/her own self-interest rather

than that of the family. Thus obedience orientation is seen in childrearing that leaves no room for autonomy.

A contrasting pattern is seen in the **family model of independence**, characteristic of the western middle class nuclear family, at least in professed ideals. Here intergenerational independence is valued, and child rearing is oriented toward engendering self reliance and autonomy in the child. Individuation-separation is considered a requisite for healthy human development in such a context where objective conditions of social welfare and affluence render family interdependence unnecessary, if not dysfunctional. Old people have their own income, insurance benefits, etc.

As mentioned before, there is a general modernization assumption of a shift from the former model of family interdependence to the latter model of family independence with socio-economic development. However, recent evidence is questioning this assumption in showing continuities in closely-knit interaction patterns despite increased urbanization and industrialization in collectivistic cultures (see Kagitcibasi, 1990, 1996a for reviews). What appears to happen is that **material** interdependencies weaken with increased affluence and urban life styles, but **emotional** (psychological) interdependencies continue, since they are not incompatible with changing life styles.

Therefore the emerging pattern is the **family model of emotional/psychological interdependence** that is different from the two commonly recognized prototypical models of Independence and Interdependence. In the family model of independence there is independence in both material and psychological dimensions; in the family model of interdependence there is interdependence in both dimensions. In the synthetic model of emotional interdependence, however, there is independence in the material realm together with interdependence in the psychological realm.

There are important implications of the modifications in family interdependencies for childrearing. When material interdependencies decrease, there is room for autonomy in childrearing. This is because when the material contribution of the offspring is no longer required for family livelihood, his/her autonomy is not seen as a threat. Nevertheless, since emotional interdependency continues to be valued, the **closeness** (connectedness/relatedness) of the growing child is aspired for. Thus though autonomy is valued and complete obedience and loyalty of the child is no longer needed, there is still firm control (not permissive childrearing) because separation is not the goal.

Thus in the proposed family model of emotional/psychological interdependence autonomy can enter childrearing because of decreasing material interdependencies. Why it **should** enter, however, has to do with its adaptability in urban living conditions. With changing life styles, autonomous, agentic orientations become more functional in coping with more specialized tasks requiring individual responsibility and decision making rather than following age-old traditions. Obedience does not get very far in ensuring success in school or in work that goes beyond menial labor in non-agricultural contexts (Nunes, 1993; Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993).

In the family model of total interdependence, childrearing is oriented toward obedience, since an obedient child is more likely to grow up to be a loyal offspring. In the family model of independence, autonomy and separateness of the growing child are

encouraged, since these characteristics contribute to greater self reliance and self sufficiency. In the family model of emotional (psychological) interdependence, a dialectic synthesis of the other two models is seen in a childrearing orientation that integrates autonomy with relatedness. The self that develops in the family model of interdependence is the related self; it is characterized by relatedness and dependency. The self that emerges in the family model of independence is the separate self; it involves autonomy and separateness. The self that develops in the family model of emotional interdependence is the autonomous-related self, manifesting autonomy and relatedness.

In the family model of interdependence, authoritarian and obedience oriented parenting contributes to the development of the related self that lacks autonomy. In the family model of independence relatively permissive and self-reliance oriented parenting engenders the separate and autonomous self. In the family model of emotional/psychological interdependence there is a combined autonomy and control orientation in parenting, which may be akin to "authoritative parenting" (Baumrind, 1980). It leads to the development of the ***autonomous-related self***.

### **Implications of the Model of Family Change**

In societies with collectivistic "cultures of relatedness" the model of emotional interdependence explains better than the model of independence the emerging family/human patterns resulting from shifts in lifestyles from rural/ traditional to urban. This model also helps explain the ethnic variations in family/human patterns currently experienced among immigrant groups in Western countries.

New conceptualizations such as "Socially oriented achievement motivation" (Agarwal & Misra, 1986; Bond, 1986; Misra & Agarwal, 1985; Phalet & Claeys, 1993; Sinha, 1993, K-S Yang, 1986; Yu & K-S Yang, 1994) pointed to new syntheses of individualistic and collectivistic orientations rather than a shift with socio-economic development to the Western individualistic model. What this concept refers to is a sense of achievement that is not individualistic but rather extends from the self to close others, such as the family or the group. The key here is the related self. For example, Phalet and Claeys (1993) found that while for Belgian youth future achievement had an only an individual meaning, for Turkish youth it had the additional meaning of the family sharing the pride.

There is also some evidence, however, that the model has validity even in Western, especially European contexts with rising 'soft' postmodern values (Inglehart, 1991), replacing the competitive capitalistic individualism/ materialism (e.g., Fu, Hinkle, & Hanna, 1986; Moge, 1991 in the United States; Saal, 1987 and Jansen, 1987 in the Netherlands; and Ekstrand & Ekstrand, 1987 in Sweden). Relatedness is valued more and competitive achievement is not valued as highly as before.

Indeed a family/human model that integrates both autonomy and relatedness appears to be more optimal for human development. This is because autonomy and relatedness (intimacy) are considered to be two basic human needs (for a review, see Kagiticbasi, 1996b). Therefore, the family model of emotional/psychological

interdependence recognizes and satisfies both of these two basic human needs. In contrast, the family model of independence recognizes and satisfies only the need for autonomy, while ignoring the need for relatedness, and the family model of total interdependence satisfies the need for relatedness, at the cost of the need for autonomy. Other thinkers have pointed to the same type of synthesis of autonomy (agency) and merging with others (relatedness), for example, S. R. Sinha (1985) in India; C. F. Yang (1988) and K-S Yang (1986) in China; and Westen (1985) from a global perspective.

Current research conducted in a number of Western and non-Western countries and with ethnic minorities in the United States and Europe provides evidence supporting some aspects of the model of emotional/psychological interdependence and the autonomous-related self. For example, Kim, Butzel and Ryan (1998, June) showed a more positive relation between autonomy and relatedness than between autonomy and separateness in both Korean and American samples. Ryan and Lynch (1989) and Ryan, Stiller, and Lynch (1994) in the U.S. found positive rather than negative links between relatedness to parents and autonomy in adolescents. Lin and Fu (1990) found a combined autonomy and control orientation in Chinese parents. Cha (1994) found both control and encouragement of autonomy in Korean parents. Imamoglu (1987) found low SES Turkish parents to stress material interdependence, but modernized middle/upper SES Turkish parents to value autonomy and closeness to their children. Phalet and Schonpflug (2001) found that among Turkish immigrants in Germany parental autonomy goals do not imply separateness, and achievement values are associated with parental collectivism, not individualism. Chou (2000) in Hong Kong found individuation to be associated with depression in adolescents. Stewart, Bond, Deeds and Chung (1999) in Hong Kong found persistence of family interdependencies together with some individualistic values; family relatedness and parental control were seen even in 'modern' families. Jose, Huntsinger, Huntsinger and Liaw (2000) found Chinese and Chinese American parents to endorse both relatedness and autonomy, together with high control and closeness with their children.

### **Conclusion**

It appears that societies upholding individualistic values and reflecting these in their family/childrearing patterns have typically recognized and reinforced the basic human need for autonomy, while ignoring to some extent the basic human need for intimacy/ connection (especially American individualism). Societies stressing collectivistic values have done the reverse. Recognizing both of these human needs promises to better contribute to human well being.

The model of emotional/psychological interdependence involves such a synthesis. Given its benefits, it may be the future of the family, not only in the Majority World with cultures of relatedness, but also in the West. The recent research evidence seems to point in this direction. Nevertheless, the established individualistic worldview of the West may still prevail, in line with the modernization paradigm, because it is exported by the West to the Majority World as the more advanced model. It takes a great deal of conscious effort to modify this trend toward individualism by showing that this would not be the optimal human



condition, given the fact that it does justice to only one of the two basic human needs. An integrative synthesis of both the needs for autonomy and for relatedness would be a more optimal human condition globally.

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### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What are the main differences among the three family/human model prototypes described by Kagitcibasi?
2. What is meant by psychological value of children?
3. According to Kagitcibasi, what is the nature of the change in family relationships that occurs in the context of urbanization and industrialization?
4. Why is an obedience/dependence orientation in childrearing associated with economic/utilitarian value of children?
4. In the 'model of independence' why is the relatively permissive parenting associated with greater psychological value of children and value placed on independence?