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# COUPLES SCHEMAS, COGNITIVE FUSION, AND INTERACTIONS IN THE RELATIONSHIP

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## Background

Several studies show that early maladaptive schemas are related to couple satisfaction (Dumitrescu & Rusu, 2012) and may predict divorce (Yousefi et al., 2010). Maladaptive schemas are activated in adult romantic relationships, and they may lead to avoidance of schema pain through schema coping behaviors (McKay, Lev & Skeen, 2012). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy may prove its potential effectiveness in helping partners to become aware of the existing interpersonal schemas and defuse from them in order to engage in more workable couple interactions (Lev & McKay, 2017).

## Method

The ongoing project aims to analyze relations between relationship schemas, cognitive fusion, and interactions in romantic relationships. The survey is conducted online among people over 18 and in a romantic relationship.

Couples participating in the study complete:

- The Couples Schema Questionnaire (Lev & McKay, 2017).
- The Cognitive Fusion Questionnaire (Gillanders et al., 2014).
- The Interactions in Relationship Scale based on The Functional Idiographic Assessment Template-Questionnaire (Darrow et al., 2014).

Sample: 133 heterosexual couples (266 participants);  $M_{age} = 29.63$  ( $SD = 10.41$ ); mean relationship length 6.56 years ( $SD = 7.70$ ); 73.7% in the informal relationships, 13.5% have kids.

## Discussion

1. Emotional deprivation was the strongest predictor of interpersonal relating among partners indicating that people with emotional deprivation schema assess their interpersonal relating with partner negatively.
2. The pattern of results changes once we predict one partner's interpersonal functioning based on the other partner's schemas. For example, if men score high on social isolation and alienation schema, women assess their emotional experience and expression in a relationship as worse; if women score high on emotional deprivation schema, men report lower scores in the area of bidirectional communication.
3. Significant correlations between partners' schemas were only positive, suggesting that people with particular schemas might be attracted to each other.
4. Moderation analyses revealed that cognitive fusion moderates the relationship between schemas and interpersonal relating. For participants whose fusion was low, the relationship between schemas and behaviors in their close relationship was negative and stronger than for those with a higher level of fusion. One of the possible explanations is that people fused with their schemas may perceive their own and partner's behaviors via the lens of rigid rules and therefore may not assess interpersonal interactions accurately.

**Table 1**

Predicting interactions in the relationship from couples schemas.

	A	B	C	D	E
AI	.09	.13	.04	.19 <sup>T</sup>	.04
MA	-.14	-.20*	-.19 <sup>T</sup>	-.20*	-.06
ED	-.49**	-.38**	-.04	-.38**	-.28**
DS	.08	.14	.02	.01	-.06
SIA	-.07	-.004	-.04	-.25*	-.15
D	.17**	-.07	.00	.11	.17**
F	-.11	-.13	-.15	-.03	-.12
EG	.06	.01	.02	.21**	.13*
SSSU	-.13	-.06	-.21*	.09	-.11
US	.004	.01	.06	.06	-.03
F	15.49**	7.90**	6.33**	8.10**	11.39**
R <sup>2</sup>	.38	.24	.20	.24	.31

Note. Coefficient represent standardized betas from multiple regression. AI - Abandonment/instability; MA - Mistrust/abuse; ED - Emotional deprivation; DS - Defectiveness/shame; SIA - Social isolation/alienation; D - Dependence; FA - Failure; EG - Entitlement/grandiosity; SSSU - Self-Sacrifice/subjugation; US - Unrelenting standards; A - Assertion od needs; B - Bidirectional communication; C - Conflict; D - Disclosure and interpersonal closeness; E - Emotional experience and expression  
<sup>T</sup>  $p < .07$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 3**

Predicting interactions in the relationship from partners' schemas.

Schemas	A		B		C		D		E	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
AI	-.13	.06	-.10	.002	.04	-.29	.06	-.05	-.25	-.12
MA	-.16	-.12	-.10	-.19	-.20	-.06	-.30*	-.13	.07	-.09
ED	-.06	-.31*	-.33*	-.36*	-.04	-.07	-.43**	-.30*	-.04	-.25
DS	.04	.12	.23	.25	.02	.10	-.03	.10	.14	-.01
SIA	-.44**	-.04	-.30	.11	-.41*	-.08	-.04	-.22	-.61**	-.12
D	.10	.07	.08	-.06	.02	-.16	-.13	-.14	.04	-.13
F	.03	-.05	-.12	.002	-.01	.16	.06	.05	.07	.17
EG	.10	.07	.15	.20*	.14	.17	.07	.21*	.26**	.17
SSSU	-.04	.04	.08	-.15	.05	.06	.21	.18	.12	.06
US	.19	.08	.15	.07	.14	-.08	.13	.25*	.17	.02
F	5.19**	1.10	3.75**	1.93*	3.04**	1.50	6.10**	2.79**	4.23**	2.19*
R <sup>2</sup>	.30	.08	.24	.14	.20	.11	.33	.19	.26	.15

Note. Coefficient represent standardized betas from multiple regression. M - male; F - female; AI - Abandonment/instability; MA - Mistrust/abuse; ED - Emotional deprivation; DS - Defectiveness/shame; SIA - Social isolation/alienation; D - Dependence; FA - Failure; EG - Entitlement/grandiosity; SSSU - Self-Sacrifice/subjugation; US - Unrelenting standards; A - Assertion od needs; B - Bidirectional communication; C - Conflict; D - Disclosure and interpersonal closeness; E - Emotional experience and expression  
\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

**Table 4**

Correlations (Pearson's  $r$ ) between females and males schemas.

Schemas	AI F	MA F	ED F	DS F	SIA F	D F	FA F	EG F	SSSU F	US F
AI_M	.440**	.471**	.393**	.390**	.324**	.023	.318**	.097	.265**	.227**
MA_M	.300**	.394**	.305**	.295**	.265**	.065	.222*	.023	.256**	.143
ED_M	.304**	.371**	.368**	.269**	.268**	.063	.259**	.054	.203*	.142
DS_M	.317**	.331**	.278**	.263**	.298**	-.029	.224**	.148	.229**	.206*
SIA_M	.384**	.420**	.325**	.359**	.398**	.098	.321**	.167	.301**	.255**
D_M	.151	.247**	.138	.138	.242**	.072	.129	.106	.160	.170
FA_M	.373**	.296**	.309**	.312**	.303**	.162	.288**	.087	.280**	.285**
EG_M	.150	.098	.187*	.051	.063	.017	.117	.130	.102	.164
SSSU_M	.200*	.243**	.189*	.224**	.213*	.088	.264**	.100	.221*	.275**
US_M	.322**	.287**	.235**	.253**	.248**	.197*	.263**	.065	.222*	.235**

M - male; F - female; AI - Abandonment/instability; MA - Mistrust/abuse; ED - Emotional deprivation; DS - Defectiveness/shame; SIA - Social isolation/alienation; D - Dependence; FA - Failure; EG - Entitlement/grandiosity; SSSU - Self-Sacrifice/subjugation; US - Unrelenting standards  
\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

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