



# A Cross-Cultural Look at Co-rumination, Self-Disclosure, Friendship, Relational Concerns and Emotional Adjustment



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## Introduction & Aims

### Introduction

Co-rumination (CR), or excessive problem-focused talk, includes rehashing details and dwelling on negative feelings (Rose, 2002). This construct is similar to rumination, a solitary, cognitive process that is associated with anxiety/depression. However, CR is social in nature, and like self-disclosure, may be related to friendship quality.

While CR is associated with positive friendship quality, it is also related to depression and anxiety (Rose et al., 2007), primarily due to its overlap with rumination.

Girls report higher levels of CR than boys, and CR has been found to partially explain gender differences in depression/anxiety (Hankins et al., 2010).

Extant research on CR is limited by an exclusive focus on Western samples of mostly children/adolescents. The current study investigates CR within a culturally diverse sample of emerging adults which promises to enhance our understanding of cross-cultural variation in interpersonal processes and adjustment.

**Question 1:** Are there cross-cultural differences in CR?

Consistent with past research (Taylor et al. 2004), we predict that Asians will report lower levels of CR, a form of explicit support-seeking.

**Question 2:** Do similar patterns among CR, self-disclosure, friendship quality, rumination, and depression/anxiety emerge in an Asian sample? We expect gender differences in CR to replicate cross-culturally.

**Question 3:** Asians have reported greater relational concerns (i.e., group harmony) and past research has found that these concerns partially explain differences in support seeking (Taylor et al., 2004). Do relational concerns also partially mediate cross-cultural differences in CR and self-disclosure?

## Method

### Participants

- 224 Asian college students      118 U.S. students  
Women = 153, Men = 69      Women = 75, Men = 43  
Mean age = 20.37 years      Mean age = 19.05 years

### Procedures

Participants were recruited from large universities in Hong Kong and East China and a small, liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest. Data were primarily collected in a group setting with a trained research assistant.

## Method

### Measures

- Co-Rumination Questionnaire (CR; Rose, 2002)**
  - 27 items (1 = not at all true to 5 = really true);  $\alpha = .95$ 
    - e.g., "we'll talk about every part of the problem over and over"
- Self-Disclosure Inventory (SDI; Miller et al., 1983)**
  - 10 items (0 = discuss not at all to 3 = discuss fully and completely);  $\alpha = .90$ 
    - e.g., "willingness to discuss my deepest feelings"
- Revised Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale -Negative (ESDS-Negative; Snell et al., 1988)**
  - 15 items (0 = never to 4 = always);  $\alpha = .96$ 
    - e.g., "times when you feel pessimistic"
- Network of Relationships Inventory-Short Form (NRI; Furman & Burhmester, 1985)**
  - 13 items (1 = little or none to 5 = the most);  $\alpha = .84$ 
    - e.g. "how much does this person really care about you?"
- Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck et al., 1996; CBSC, 2000)**
  - 21 items (0 = no depressive symptoms to 3 = prominent symptoms);  $\alpha = .90$
- Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck et al., 1988; Cheng et al. 2002)**
  - 21 items (1 = not at all to 3 = severely);  $\alpha = .91$
- Responses Style Questionnaire-Ruminative Responses Scale (RRS; Nolen-Hoeksema, & Morrow, 1991)**
  - 22 items (1 = almost never to 4 = almost always);  $\alpha = .78$ 
    - e.g. "think 'why can't I handle things better'?"
- Social Coping Explanations-Interpersonal Version (SCE; Taylor et al., 2004)**
  - Relational Concerns (SCE-RC): 29 items (1 = not at all to 5 = very much);  $\alpha = .94$ 
    - e.g. "I can save face by solving my problems myself"

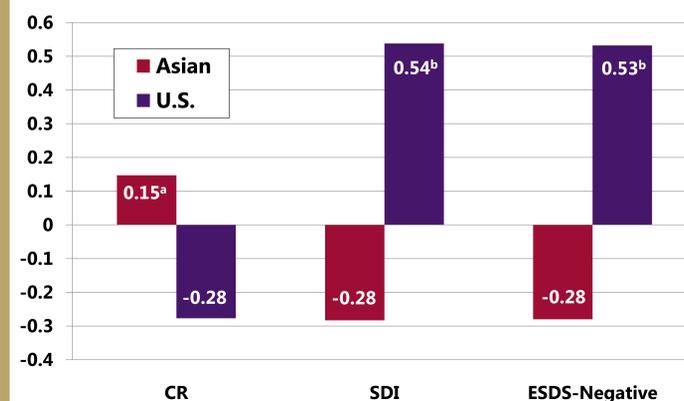
## Results

Unexpectedly, Asian students reported significantly higher levels of CR relative to U.S. students. Interestingly, cross-cultural differences in self-disclosure were found in expected directions where Asians disclosed significantly less than U. S. students (see Figure 1).

CR was significantly associated with self-disclosure (SDI:  $r=.31$ ; ESDS:  $r=.24$ ), friendship quality ( $r=.40$ ), and rumination ( $r=.28$ ). The pattern of relationships among SDI scores and emotional adjustment suggests that while general self-disclosure was not associated with either anxiety or depression for Asians it was negatively associated with depressive symptoms for Americans (see Table 1).

## Results

Figure 1. Cross-cultural differences in self-disclosure and co-rumination.



Note. Means are standardized z-scores.  
<sup>a</sup>Asians reported significantly higher levels of CR relative to Americans,  $t(260) = -3.60, p < .001, d = -0.42$ . <sup>b</sup>Asians reported significantly lower levels of general self-disclosure,  $t(340) = 7.83, p < .001, d = 0.90$  and emotional self-disclosure about negative feelings,  $t(340) = 7.73, p < .001, d = 0.87$ , relative to Americans.

Table 1  
Relationships Between Co-rumination, Disclosure, Friendship Quality, Rumination, Depression and Anxiety

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. CR	--	.43***	.27***	.45***	.34***	.06	.02
2. SDI	.45***	--	.43***	.45***	.29***	-.00	.01
3. ESDS	.47***	.42***	--	.29***	.37***	.32***	.29***
4. NRI	.52***	.46***	.38***	--	.19**	-.07	-.09
5. RRS	.16	-.11	.07	-.03	--	.28***	.20**
6. BDI	-.04	-.22*	.08	-.16	.43***	--	.56***
7. BAI	.11	-.04	.14	-.10	.43***	.46***	--

Note. Correlations for Asians are presented above the diagonal. Correlations for U.S. students are presented below the diagonal.  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

In contrast, ESDS scores were positively associated with anxiety/depression for Asians but unrelated to adjustment for Americans. CR was more weakly related to ESDS for Asians than Americans. Surprisingly, CR was not associated with either anxiety or depression in either sample, nor did it predict unique variance in adjustment beyond the effects of rumination. Mirroring past findings, CR was a unique predictor of friendship quality above and beyond the effects of self-disclosure across the two samples.

Consistent with our hypotheses and past research, women reported significantly higher levels of CR ( $M=2.93, SD=.75$ ) relative to men ( $M=2.68, SD=.67$ ),  $t(336) = -2.98, p < .01, d = -.35$ .

## Results

Replicating past work, Asian students ( $M=2.95, SD=.66$ ) reported significantly higher levels of relational concerns than U.S. students ( $M=2.49, SD=.77$ ),  $t(209) = -5.58, p < .001, d = .64$ . As expected, relational concerns partially mediated cultural differences in self-disclosure but not in CR (see Figure 2).

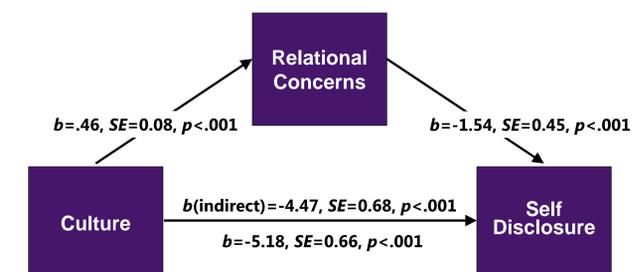


Figure 2. Numbers in this figure are unstandardized regression coefficients. Americans were coded as 0 and Asians were coded as 1. Using Preacher and Hayes's bootstrapping method, the indirect effect of culture on self-disclosure, through relational concerns, was statistically significant.

## Conclusion

It appears that for Asians, CR is a dyadic interpersonal process that fulfills relationship building vs. support-seeking functions.

- First, CR was not associated with adjustment despite the fact that self-disclosure was associated with anxiety/depression in cross-culturally expected ways. Relatedly, CR was most weakly associated with negative emotional disclosure in the Asian sample.
- Second, although we conceptualized CR as an explicit support-seeking behavior, Asians unexpectedly reported co-ruminating more but disclosing less. Past studies suggest that social assurance (Morling et al., 2003), an interdependent form of support, may be used more readily by Asians than explicit forms of support-seeking. Given its' dyadic focus, CR appears to be more similar to implicit forms of support for Asians.
- Finally, while relational concerns partially explained cultural differences in self-disclosure they did not explain cultural differences in CR. Findings related to self-disclosure are consistent with past research (Taylor et al., 2004) and suggest that CR seems to be different from support-seeking.

With limited research on CR in emerging adults (Calmes & Roberts, 2008), it is unknown whether unique sampling issues or a meaningful developmental shift accounts for the lack of associations between CR and adjustment among U.S. students.

Regardless, future longitudinal research should incorporate strategies (e.g. observational data, time sampling) that extend beyond self-report. These designs promise to sharpen our understanding as they more fully capture the dynamic forces at play in CR that may vary across time and culture.