

Feelings of being understood enhance physical and psychological well-being

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ABSTRACT

A two-week online diary study (N = 135) examined how feelings of being understood and misunderstood are related to well-being and health symptoms. Results showed that **people who reported feeling more understood and less misunderstood in their social interaction also reported greater life satisfaction and fewer physical health symptoms on the same day and the following day. In addition, people who consider social connectedness and relations more central to their self-concept** (people who are high in interdependent self-construal) **show a stronger relationship between felt understanding and their physical and psychological well-being than people who consider those social aspects as less central to their self-concept** (people low in interdependent self-construal). These results indicate that there may be cultural differences in how felt understanding in daily interaction relates to well-being, mediated by self-construals.

BACKGROUND

- Extant research suggests that the people seek and enjoy social relationships in which they feel understood by the partner (Swann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2003; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004).
- Moreover, a plethora of research has demonstrated that healthy social relationships are closely tied to well-being (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). Integrating these perspectives, the present research sought to examine whether feelings of being understood or misunderstood in daily social interactions is linked to physical and psychological well-being.
- Furthermore, the relationship between felt understanding and well-being or health may be moderated by individual differences in interdependent and independent self-construal. For example, those who consider social relationships as more central to who they are may be more impacted by daily felt understanding experienced in their social interaction.

THE STUDY

Participants:

- 135 University of Virginia undergrads (100 f, 35 m)

Design:

- Completed an online diary every night for 14 days.

Measures:

- Daily satisfaction (DS):**
 - How was today?
 - How satisfied are you with your life today?
- Feeling of being understood (U)**
 - During your interaction with others today, to what extent did you feel understood by others?
- Feeling of being misunderstood (MU)**
 - And, to what extent did you feel misunderstood by others?
- Daily Health Symptoms (HS)**
 - Number of health related symptoms (e.g., headaches, stomach pain, dizziness)
- Self Construal (Singelis, 1994)**
 - Interdependent self-construal (**INTERD**)
 - Independent self-construal (**INDEP**)
 - Measured prior to daily diary

RESULTS (cont'd)

Felt understanding predicting health symptoms in the next 2 days

Parameter	Next day HS		2 nd Day HS	
	Coefficient	p	Coefficient	p
Intercept (γ_{00})	1.36	<.01	1.32	<.01
INTERD effect (γ_{01})	0.28	0.05	0.28	0.06
INDEP effect (γ_{02})	-0.01	0.97	-0.05	0.72
U main effect (γ_{10})	-0.07	0.04	0.02	0.65
INTERD mod (γ_{11})	-0.08	0.07	-0.10	0.04
INDEP mod (γ_{12})	-0.02	0.62	-0.01	0.88
MU main effect (γ_{20})	0.02	0.65	0.02	0.55
INTERD mod (γ_{21})	-0.11	0.04	-0.05	0.27
INDEP mod (γ_{22})	-0.01	0.87	-0.06	0.14

df = 134

DISCUSSION

- Self-reported felt understanding in daily social interactions is related to greater daily satisfaction and fewer health symptoms.
- The association between feeling of being understood and fewer health symptoms also extends to the following day.
- Moreover, individuals who consider social connectedness and relations with others as more central to the self showed a consistently stronger relationship between felt understanding and health outcomes.
- Based on cultural differences in self-construal, the results suggest that there may be cultural differences in how felt understanding in daily interaction relates to well-being.

RESULTS

HLM Model:

Level-1 Model:

$$DS/HS = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * (U) + \beta_2 * (MU) + \epsilon$$

Level-2 Model:

$$\begin{aligned} \beta_0 &= \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} * (\text{INTERD}) + \gamma_{02} * (\text{INDEP}) + \eta_0 \\ \beta_1 &= \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11} * (\text{INTERD}) + \gamma_{12} * (\text{INDEP}) + \eta_1 \\ \beta_2 &= \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21} * (\text{INTERD}) + \gamma_{22} * (\text{INDEP}) + \eta_2 \end{aligned}$$

Felt understanding, self-construal, daily satisfaction and health symptoms

Parameter	DS		HS	
	Coefficient	p	Coefficient	p
Intercept (γ_{00})	4.84	<.01	1.46	<.01
INTERD effect (γ_{01})	0.05	0.47	0.31	0.04
INDEP effect (γ_{02})	0.18	0.01	-0.03	0.82
U main effect (γ_{10})	0.40	<.01	-0.09	<.01
INTERD mod (γ_{11})	0.03	0.54	-0.05	0.31
INDEP mod (γ_{12})	0.01	0.86	0.01	0.90
MU main effect (γ_{20})	-0.94	<.01	0.08	<.01
INTERD mod (γ_{21})	0.04	0.23	-0.06	0.30
INDEP mod (γ_{22})	-0.04	0.27	-0.00	0.99

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