

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Symbiotic Bond Questionnaire – theoretical background and psychometric qualities

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BACKGROUND

The article describes the Symbiotic Bond Questionnaire (SBQ) – the theoretical background as well as its psychometric characteristics and psychological correlates. The items were created on the basis of the definition of symbiotic personality (Johnson, 1994a).

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

For these initial survey development and cross-validation studies, the factor structure and psychometric properties of the SBQ were examined. To assess the SBQ's reliability, the researchers conducted an exploratory factor analysis using a sample of 568 people. The analysis indicated that the Symbiotic Bond Questionnaire consists of 28 items that form four factors: Suppressing, Merging, Cognitive oversensitiveness, and Emotional sensitiveness.

RESULTS

The symbiotic bond is associated with attachment styles (Suppressing and Cognitive oversensitiveness positively with insecure attachment, and Merging and Emotional

sensitiveness positively with secure attachment), empathy (Suppressing and Cognitive oversensitiveness positively with personal distress, and Emotional sensitiveness positively with taking care of others and taking their point of view), differentiation of self (correlations indicate poor functioning of a person in terms of emotional and cognitive autonomy), interdependent-relational self (more relational people are more inclined to merging and emotional sensitiveness) and goal-oriented activity (suppressing is negatively associated with strategic and with life enrichment orientation, and positively with avoidant orientation, while Cognitive oversensitiveness is associated with avoidant orientation and emotional sensitiveness with life enrichment orientation).

CONCLUSIONS

The measure is sufficiently reliable and valid. Implications and directions for future research on the measurement are considered.

KEY WORDS

symbiosis; psychometrics; symbiotic bond

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THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The conception of a symbiotic bond may enrich hitherto acquired psychological knowledge concerning attachment styles as mediators of the connection between personality traits with the effectiveness of fulfilling the roles of partners and of parents. The term *symbiosis* has been borrowed from the realm of biology for the purpose of its application in psychology. As far as the functioning of an individual is concerned, it is applied to describe the inter- and intrapersonal (mental) levels of functioning. In the former case, it concerns a specific interpersonal relationship, whereas in the latter one it refers to mental state, which denotes the feeling of individuation from other people (Nikodemaska, 1997).

According to Johnson (1994a), the symbiotic problem is one that has an existential significance, and it is manifested throughout the entire life, exerting an influence on relationships with other people not only in childhood but also in adult life. The essence of symbiotic etiology is the process of separating a child from parents, which is blocked, or even actively punished, in connection with the anxiety of the latter, whereas the natural tendency of a child to reciprocate feelings is excessively strengthened. Through such reactions, parents pursue the goal of accomplishing the state of fusion with a child. The review of the developmental research conducted by Stern (1985) proves the existence of a strong need to experience a bond with the mother in the first year of life, accompanied by the simultaneously appearing need of individuation.

A typical symbiotic individual manifests problems in the sphere of separation from other people. Such an individual is in the possession of restricted awareness of one's own preferences because of the fact that, in the process of development, they did not experience support, and the acceptance of their own desires. Autonomy becomes a problematic area, and, simultaneously, reactions indicating a strong emotional dependence upon parents are strengthened. Blocking development within that scope, in combination with the negative reactions of the environment to the attempts to undertake independent activities and to manifest self-control, result in the elimination of the effects of learning through experience. As a result, an adult individual in the development of whom blocking factors were observed will resort to defences and strategies that are the direct consequence of the experiences from childhood. As stated by Johnson (1994a and b), in a symbiotic character, the incorrect development of self occurs. The manifestations of irregularities can be observed in the sphere of behaviour, feelings and cognition. Therefore, the major feature of a symbiotic personality is an extreme

dependence upon other people in terms of activities. In every sphere of life, the presence of other people and the assessment of them is the prerequisite of undertaking an activity. The preferences of a symbiotic individual are adopted from other people, and they constitute the reflection of the functioning of others at a given moment of life important for an individual person (Cierpiałkowska, 2004). As a result of the lack of borders between I and other people, a symbiotic individual is particularly empathic and sensitive to the emotional states of other people, whereas he/she will manifest a stronger tendency to interpret the broad spectrum of emotional reactions as the conditions of rejection. The particular problems of symbiotic individuals will manifest themselves in the sphere of aggressive behaviours. Taking into consideration the early childhood experiences connected with punishing any manifestations of unwillingness, anger and aggression, such an individual is not assertiveness in relationships. In consequence, she/he is submissive in relation to others even in situations which constitute a threat to the individual functioning. One element of shaping a symbiotic personality is also blurring the borders between self and other people. In this case, a strong tendency to experience fusion in the form of excessive responsibility for the moods of other people is observed. The natural tendency of a child to experience excessive responsibility for other people undergoes strengthening, rather than weakening, which results in the fact that the process of individuation is perceived as hurting the feelings of other people. What is manifested is the generalized feeling of guilt, which secondarily makes it more difficult to function independently (Modell, 1971). In the model of the world constructed in such a way, acquiring something for oneself means taking it away from someone different (Weiss & Sampson, 1986). Recognizing a symbiotic problem in personality, and subjecting it to therapeutic activities, may result in the full and autonomous personality development. One of the objectives of the research planned within the framework of the project being presented is, therefore, the diagnosis of symbiotic relationships, both in the dyads of parents and a child, and in partner relationships, and the assessment of the effectiveness of the functioning of an individual having a symbiotic tendencies in the family. Within the framework of the project, we plan to continue work on standardizing and developing tools for the purpose of the measurement of symbiotic bonds in the case of adults and of children. The original character of that research project consists in concentration on the process of the development of family, rather than on the one selected situation of a family crisis. In the course of our work, we refer to the conception of Duvall (1977; quoting after: Namysłowska, 2000; de Barbaro, 1999). In accordance with the assumption of that conception, the family, going through the separate phases, develops new competences, and also

shapes the new patterns of behaviours and interactions. If that process proceeds as it was intended, the family is formed correctly, providing the members with the opportunity of autonomous development (Satir, 2000).

The problem of symbiotic bonds is noticed not only in the psychology of the family, but also in the clinical psychology. It is recommendable to quote the conception of M. Mahler (1973; Johnson, 1993, 1994a), the theses of which concerning symbiosis may be summarized in the following way:

The symbiotic phase is the developmental stage of the mutual influence exerted by the infant and his/her mother or by an individual providing care in which a child behaves and functions in such a way as if the infant and mother had one shared border.

In the course of development, a child attains his or her own actual identity, differentiates between the representation of "self" and the representation of the object, and also becomes capable of maintaining relationships with objects regardless of the state of one's own needs.

The physical and mental space between a child and the individual providing care, which is formed in the course of the process of separation-individuation, makes it possible for a child to optimally develop skills which the child needs for the purpose of development.

The sources of symbiotic tendencies ought to be seen as originating from the period of childhood, in which the natural attempts in the field of separation were blocked, or punished, by the individual providing care in connection with the anxiety of the latter.

Simultaneously, a child was strengthened by the assurances of parents that a child is in the possession of highly developed abilities to empathically reciprocate the feelings of other people.

In accordance with the theory of separation-individuation (Mahler, cf. Walewska, 2011), an important developmental moment is constituted by psychological birth, which is connected with the accomplishment of the foundations of one's own identity by the child, which are expressed by the child through the feeling of being an individual having separate needs, which can be communicated to other people. At that stage of development, a child is also capable of recognizing the needs of individuals in their immediate environment, taking them into consideration in their activities, and, even though a child is not yet capable of negotiating a joint plan, yet, thanks to the abilities to communicate and to control one's own behaviour, is capable of regulating the relationship with the individual providing care (Marvin & Greenberg, 1982).

That process occurs only with the assistance of another individual, usually the mother, and it constitutes the chief accomplishment of the stage of separation-individuation. So as to make it possible for a child to have a chance to separate him- or herself

from the individual providing care at all, the child has to form a more intimate relationship with that individual. The reason is that the mother constitutes a matrix in which a child may construct the representation both of oneself and also of other objects (Drat-Ruszczak, 2006). Therefore, in order to create the identity of a child, the presence of another person is needed, when a child is not capable of building the feeling of oneself without the assistance of other people.

A tendency to develop symbiotic relationships is formed as the result of a failure in the phase of rapprochement distinguished by Mahler (cf. Johnson, 1994a and b). At that time, parents ought to make it possible for a child to explore the surroundings, while simultaneously maintaining empathic readiness to provide the child with support when difficulties are encountered. The requirements formulated in that period ought to be adjusted to the possibilities of a child, who, in that period, needs very much to feel that they have the right to become independent. At the time when requirements are not adequate, and also contradict what a child is like, a child creates the compensational image of oneself, thanks to which a child may fulfil the exorbitant demands of people in their immediate surroundings (Dessuant, 2007; Porebiak, 2012). That behaviour is continued in the course of adulthood because the real self becomes completely covered by the "false self" (Winnicott 2010, 2011). However, if parents somehow inhibit or punish all manifestations of the autonomy of a child and, simultaneously, attach a lot of attention to all manifestations of compassion, dependence and identification, the development of identity and the feeling of one's own individuation may be disturbed. When the parent does not make it possible for a child to develop their own autonomy, parentification may occur (Schier, 2012) – the roles of an adult and of a child are swapped, and a child becomes the partner of one of the parents, or both of them. Symbiosis which has not been disconnected and swapping the roles in the family make a child experience enormous stress, which may be manifested in psychosomatic diseases, such as bronchial asthma (Schier, 2005; Stierlin, 1983). In accordance with the opinion of Johnson (1994a), individuals with a tendency to develop symbiotic relationships are characterized by a lack of lasting feeling of one's own identity, the illusion of the feeling of self, which is found exclusively in the state of fusion – merging with another individual. The symbolic extension of self by means of adding other individuals, referred to as the assimilation of other people to self (Wojciszke, 2010), results in the disappearance of one's own borders, and also of those of an individual close to the one in question. This happens at the cognitive level (overlaying of the mental representation of a close person on the self), emotional ("becoming infected" with the emotions of

other people, or reacting to what happens to other people from the perspective of an actor, and not from that of an observer), and behavioural (not fulfilling one's own needs in a relationship). In the behaviour of symbiotic individuals, there are two dominating tendencies – those individuals either become completely united with the partner, or become extremely distanced from them. In both of those cases, those activities are connected with fusion – they either serve the purpose of making it happen, or support the anxious avoidance of it. Also problems with recognizing and naming one's own emotions, desires, preferences and opinions are connected with that. The lack of a feeling of the borders of one's own self is connected with the fact that the individual building symbiotic relationships may sensitively feel the emotional states of other people, becomes easily infected with them, which, however, is not accompanied by maintaining the feeling of one's own individuation, but rather occurs in accordance with the principle of emotional inundation or absorption. The high level of empathy which is manifested by symbiotic individuals serves the purpose of building relationships, but only until a certain moment in time, when it does not involve conflicts, and does not threaten those individuals. The unpleasant emotions which appear in the course of a conflict or of a crisis in

a relationship are associated by the individual forming a symbiotic relationship with being deserted or of rejection. In such a situation, the relationships of symbiotic individuals are filled with anxiety and sensitiveness to the opinions of other people, and, because of that, those individuals engage in numerous activities intended to maintain a balance in the relationship. The consequence is a lack of internal approval for expressing one's own needs in relationships with those in intimate relationship(s) with them and the lack of interest in one's own impulses, and also finding it easy to adopt an identity from other people. Nevertheless, in both of those cases there occurs the negation of the existence of borders and individuation, because one of the partners has to constitute the integral part of the other one. Symbiotic individuals may manifest two extreme attitudes. They may either strive to dominate the other person entirely, or adopt an excessively submissive attitude towards their environment. In both of these cases, there occurs the same process – the reason is that one of the participants in a relationship is questioned. When there is too much submissiveness, a symbiotic individual entirely abnegates their own rights and thoughts; in the case of excessive domination, it is the other individual that may not be individuated.

Table 1

Profile of symbiotic personality

Symbiotic personality (Johnson, 1994a)

- Undertaking autonomous activity, independent of another individual and not connected with other people is perceived as egoistic, causing the hurt of other people and dangerous
 - Undergoing experiences only in relationships with other people
 - Unwillingness to, and difficulty in, undertake independent activity without being accompanied by another individual
 - A small number of personal interests and hobbies
 - Tastes and preferences only adopted from other people – poorly developed interests
 - Modelling one's behaviour in accordance with the expectations of other people
 - Sensitiveness to the emotional states of other people – the feeling of being inundated with the emotions of other people
 - Sensitiveness to the negative emotions of individuals of importance for oneself, directed towards the latter – the feeling of being rejected
 - Ability to adjust to the needs and emotions of other people
 - A very well-developed ability to empathize
 - Individuals of importance (acquaintances and friends) are selected so as to repeat the features of the relationship with the original object (relationships which require taking care of the other individual, adjusting oneself to them, and which can easily be hurt, are formed)
 - It is still possible to experience suffering connected with family and passed on from generation to generation (delegate of family)
 - Grievances and grudges directed at other people connected with making the individual threatened by anxiety, making them experience the feeling of guilt, lowered moods, putting the blame on the individual
 - A disturbed attitude to one's own aggression (suppressing aggression or directing it towards oneself) and self-expression
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WORKING ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The objective of the project is to develop an innovative method serving the purpose of measurement of the symbiotic bond in the context of family relationships in the phase of the reconstruction of the family system.

The work on this original method was initiated within the framework of the grant BW: 538-7413-0698-1, 'Personality correlates of effectiveness of fulfilling partner and parental roles in the situation of normative and non-normative crises'. That method constitutes the starting point for more profound analyses of the functioning of the family system in the phase of reconstruction (the situation of the birth of a child, difficult situations connected with looking after a child and the process of upbringing, and the disintegration of family).

STAGES OF DEVELOPING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The profile of symbiotic personality, presented in Table 1, was presented to the group of 40 individuals (students of the final years of psychology, psychologists actively involved in their profession and individuals not involved in psychology), who were requested to generate statements which could reflect the attitudes, behaviour and convictions typical of a symbiotic individual.

After collecting 123 statements and the linguistic analysis of them, and also after the elimination of statements similar in terms of their contents to those in the first version of the tool, 89 statements – the profiles of the behaviours of individuals with a symbiotic bond – were selected. The basis of the factor analysis was constituted by the results of 260 individuals who were requested to express their opinions concerning the provided statements with the application of a five-degree Likert scale, in which "1" meant "I completely disagree", and "5" meant "I completely agree". After the statistical verification (exploratory factor analysis – the results of it are presented in Table 2), 28 statements were included in the final version of the tool.

The scree chart proved that the most logical structure is the one taking into consideration four factors, and the assignment of a position to a given factor was determined by the loading of the latter – it was necessary that it exceeded the value of 0.40. The size of the variance explained by four factors is 32.39%. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure reached the value of 0.737, exceeding the suggested value of 0.60. Also, the Bartlett Spherical Test reached the value of statistical significance, confirming the arrangement of the matrix of correlation coefficients in four independent factors ($\chi^2 = 1994.13$; $p < .001$).

PROFILE AND RELIABILITY OF THE SBQ SCALES

In the final version of the Symbiotic Bond Questionnaire, the version for adults is composed of 28 statements in which responses are provided with the application of a five-degree Likert scale. The factor analysis made it possible to separate four factors – the components of a symbiotic bond in a romantic relationship:

SUPPRESSING (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$) means the tendency to subordinate oneself to other people, and also avoiding expressing one's own emotions and needs in order to satisfy the partner in the relationship, or to avoid a possible conflict with them and experiencing anxiety in the situation in which one behaves differently than the partner. The example statements of the subscale is as follows: "I feel anxious when I do something different from my partner."

MERGING (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$) means willingness to unite with the other individual and to develop an emotional fusion with them, which may be determined by striving to adjust to their partner entirely. One of the statements belonging to this scale is as follows: "I can sympathize with the feelings of others, and I am deeply moved by people's unhappiness or misfortune."

COGNITIVE OVERSENSITIVENESS (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$) is a scale measuring sensitiveness to the assessment of other individuals. The more symbiotic an individual is, the more sensitive they are to the way in which they are perceived by other individuals due to fear that the negative assessment will result in the partner's, or another individual closely bound to one, distancing – "I often feel frustrated by the behaviour of other people".

EMOTIONAL OVERSENSITIVENESS (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) means oversensitiveness to the emotional state of another individual. The individual being examined expressing their opinion about the statements belonging to that scale (for example, "My partner's wishes become mine") assesses the degree of sensitization to the emotional state of other individuals, the consequence of which in the case of symbiotic individuals is adopting the feelings of other people as one's own.

In the case of the three factors, the internal consistency index (Cronbach's α) has satisfactory values, higher than .70. The lowest reliability was obtained by the scale measuring the tendency to subordinate oneself to other people (suppressing oneself) – its internal consistency was lower than .70.

VALIDITY OF THE SBQ

Apart from factor analysis, validity measurement of the SBQ through the correlations of the results of it with other people, using tests measuring variables

Table 2
Component factor analysis and factor loadings for the SBQ

SBQ item	Text	Factor loading			
		I	II	III	IV
Factor I: Suppressing					
SBQ 28	I have a tendency to hold back my anger.	.625			
SBQ 22	I try to bury negative emotions for a long time and rarely reveal them.	.624			
SBQ 21	I try to avoid open conflicts or expressing my opinions when expecting an unfavourable reception.	.580			
SBQ 13	I do not show initiative; I'd rather depend on others.	.578			
SBQ 17	I prefer to follow others than to be a leader.	.557			
SBQ 8	I feel anxious when I do something different from my partner.	.514			
SBQ 2	We watch films chosen only by my partner.	.459			
Factor II: Merging					
SBQ 15	I am able to sympathize with emotions which are experienced by a person close to me at a given moment.		.788		
SBQ 16	I understand the needs of other individuals.		.777		
SBQ 26	It is easy for me to sense what others feel.		.762		
SBQ 19	I can sympathize with the feelings of others, and I am deeply moved by people's unhappiness and misfortunes.		.714		
SBQ 12	I am able to recognize the feelings of others.		.683		
SBQ 27	I try to protect people who are vulnerable and more sensitive than me.		.625		
SBQ 10	I like looking after other people.		.578		
Factor III: Cognitive oversensitiveness					
SBQ 25	I am sensitive to any comments made by people, even strangers.		.741		
SBQ 20	I am sensitive to people's opinions, and I treat comments as a personal insult.		.738		
SBQ 23	I need positive feedback and approval in order to feel well.		.667		
SBQ 14	I am frequently burdened with guilt.		.599		
SBQ 24	I often blame other people for my bad moods.		.594		
SBQ 18	I often feel frustrated by the behaviour of other people.		.408		
SBQ 9	I am of the opinion that other people are responsible for my bad moods.		.338		
Factor IV: Emotional sensitiveness					
SBQ 3	I feel that I and my partner are one.				-.726
SBQ 5	I spend every spare moment with my partner.				-.669
SBQ 4	I feel anxious when thinking of being apart from my partner even for a short while.				-.665
SBQ 6	I spend every holiday with my partner.				-.621
SBQ 7	I feel better in a relationship than being alone.				-.568
SBQ 1	My partner's wishes become mine.				-.64
SBQ 11	I feel better when doing things approved of by people close to me.				-.491

showing the theoretical connection with a symbiotic bond, concerning the functioning of a person in relationships and their ability to maintain a balance between the motives of autonomy and intimacy (self versus other people – Hermans, 1987) – Attachment styles (Plopa, based on the ECR by Hazan & Shaver, 1987), Empathy (SWE by Kaźmierczak et al., based on the IRI by Davis, 2007), Relational-interdependent self-construal (Kaźmierczak, based on the RISC, Cross et al., 2012), the Differentiation of self (Błażek based on the DSI by Skowron & Friedlander, 2009) and Goal-oriented activity (Błażek, 2001) – was also applied. The study participants were 95 married couples with children at school age (mean age = 40.02; *SD* = 8.98), 258 adult individuals (mean age = 24.31, *SD* = 7.42), and 60 dyads of a mother (mean age = 55.70, *SD* = 5.40) and a daughter (mean age = 28.50, *SD* = 3.30).

SYMBIOTIC BOND AND ATTACHMENT STYLES

Attachment styles were measured with the application of an attachment style questionnaire (ASQ) (Plopa, 2006). That tool measures the three attachment styles: secure, anxious-ambivalent and avoidant. It is composed of 24 statements (8 statements for every style), being assessed with the application of a seven-degree scale, with the categories of responses ranging from “definite lack of agreement concerning the contents of the statement” to “complete acceptance of the contents of the statement”.

As it can be concluded from Table 3, “Suppressing” and “Cognitive oversensitiveness” are significantly

positively connected with insecure attachment styles, whereas “Merging with other people” and “Emotional sensitiveness” remain in connection with a trusting attachment style. Also, the results on the scale “Merging with other people” differentiate individuals having insecure attachment styles – they positively correlate with anxious-ambivalent attachment style, and negatively with avoidant attachment style.

SYMBIOTIC BOND AND EMPATHY

Another tool used in assessing the validity of the SBQ was the Empathic Sensitiveness Scale (Kaźmierczak, Plopa, & Retowski, 2007). It is a questionnaire composed of 28 statements, in which the responses are provided with the application of a five-degree Likert scale. The Empathic Sensitiveness Scale includes three subscales which concern the ability to take the perspective of another person (perspective taking), the ability to manifest sympathy in the situation in which another individual experiences a failure (empathic concern), and also the inclination to experience discomfort in such situations (personal distress).

Taking into consideration the statistically significant difference between women and men within the scope of the separate dimensions, the SBQ and the SWE analyses of correlation were presented separately for both groups. In both groups, “Suppressing” was revealed to be positively correlated with “Personal distress”, similarly to “Cognitive oversensitiveness”, which in the group of women is additionally negatively correlated with the ability to take the perspective of another individual.

Table 3

Pearson correlations between SBQ scales and Attachment styles (n = 258)

SBQ subscales	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant
Suppressing	-.154*	.246***	.292***
Merging	.268***	.151*	-.135*
Cognitive oversensitiveness	n.s.	.342***	.259***
Emotional sensitiveness	.244***	n.s.	n.s.

Note. ^a*p* < .10, **p* < .05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < .001
n.s. – non-significant

Table 4

Pearson correlations between SBQ scales and Empathy (n = 190) (women/men)

SBQ subscales	Empathic concern	Personal distress	Perspective taking
Suppressing	n.s./n.s.	.333***/.366***	-.182 ^a /n.s.
Merging	n.s./ <u>.244*</u>	n.s./ <u>-.247*</u>	n.s./n.s.
Cognitive oversensitiveness	n.s./n.s.	.548***/.359***	-.270**/n.s.
Emotional sensitiveness	.442***/ <u>.521***</u>	n.s./ <u>-.186^a</u>	.162 ^a / <u>.470***</u>

Note. ^a*p* < .10, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001
n.s. – non-significant

Table 5

Pearson correlations between SBQ scales and Differentiation of self (n = 190) (women/men)

SBQ subscales	Emotional reactivity	Low 'I' position	Emotional cutoff	Fusion with other people
Suppressing	n.s./ <u>.347**</u>	n.s./ <u>.304**</u>	-.280*/ <u>.325**</u>	n.s./ <u>n.s.</u>
Merging	n.s./ <u>n.s.</u>	n.s./ <u>n.s.</u>	n.s./ <u>-.208^a</u>	n.s./ <u>.197^a</u>
Cognitive oversensitiveness	<u>.552***</u> / <u>.525***</u>	<u>.259**</u> / <u>.256**</u>	<u>.489***</u> / <u>.405***</u>	n.s./ <u>n.s.</u>
Emotional sensitiveness	<u>.197*</u> / <u>.256**</u>	-.222*/ <u>n.s.</u>	n.s./ <u>n.s.</u>	n.s./ <u>.384***</u>

Note. ^a $p < .10$ * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

n.s. – non-significant

Emotional sensitiveness is positively associated with sympathizing with other people, taking care of them and taking their point of view. In addition, in the case of men "Merging" is positively correlated with "Empathic concern", and negatively with "Personal distress".

SYMBIOTIC BOND AND THE LEVEL OF THE DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF

For the purpose of the assessment of the validity of the SBQ, the DSI (Differentiation of Self Inventory) of Skowron and Friedlander in the adaptation by Błażek (2009) was also used. The DSI is intended to be applied in examining the level of the Differentiation of self based on of the Theory of Family Systems of Murray Bowen (1987). The individual being examined responds to 43 statements by selecting one of the six categories of responses in which 1 means not true at all, whereas 6 means definitely true. With the application of the DSI, it is possible to describe the global level of the difference of self, as well as to obtain the measurement of the factors such as "Emotional reactivity" – which means the degree to which a given individual reacts to emotional stimuli originating from the external environment, "I position", which measures the strength of the feeling of self, and also how much an individual is able to adhere to their own convictions, values and goals, and also how susceptible they are to pressure exerted by other individuals, "Emotional cutoff" – the scale depicting the feeling of intimacy or the fear of intimacy, and also "Fusion with other people" – it measures the degree to which an individual becomes emotionally involved in the lives of other people. In extreme cases, the involvement is expressed in the form of triangulation or excessive identification with parents. The higher the obtained result is, the higher is the level of Differentiation of self of the individual.

As it can be concluded from the above table, in the group of men "Suppressing" is associated with emotional reactivity, low "I position" and "Emotional

cutoff". "Merging with other people" and "Emotional sensitiveness" are associated with "Fusion with other people" and "Merging with other people" is associated negatively with "Emotional cutoff". In the women's group, "Emotional sensitiveness" is positively associated with emotional reactivity and negatively with low "I position". "Suppressing" negatively correlates with "Emotional cutoff".

In both of the groups, "Cognitive oversensitiveness" is associated with "Emotional reactivity", low "I position" and "Emotional cutoff", and "Emotional sensitiveness" with emotional reactivity. Those correlations indicate the poor functioning of an individual in terms of emotional and cognitive autonomy.

SYMBIOTIC BOND AND RELATIONAL SELF

Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale measures individual differences in the tendency to take into consideration the intimate relationships with other people in defining oneself adopted to Polish conditions (Cross et al., 2000). In the Polish version, the scale is composed of 9 items, and the opinion concerning them is expressed by an individual being examined with the application of a seven-degree scale, in which "1" means "I definitely disagree", whereas "7" means "I definitely agree". A detailed description of that scale can be found in the paper of

Table 6

Pearson correlations between SBQ scales and Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal

SBQ subscales	RISC – women	RISC – men
Suppressing	.185 ^a	n.s.
Merging	.208*	.286**
Cognitive oversensitiveness	n.s.	n.s.
Emotional sensitiveness	.235*	.322**

Note. ^a $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 7

Pearson correlations between SBQ scales and Goal-oriented activity

SBQ subscales	Strategic orientation	Avoidant orientation	Life enrichment orientation
Suppressing	-.284**/-.271*	.281**/.308**	-.324**/-.308**
Merging	n.s./ <u>.308**</u>	.379**/n.s.	n.s./ <u>.315**</u>
Cognitive oversensitiveness	-.260**/n.s.	.289**/ <u>.438***</u>	-.273**/n.s.
Emotional sensitiveness	n.s./ <u>.441***</u>	n.s./n.s.	.214*/ <u>.381***</u>

Note. * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, **** $p < .001$

Kaźmierczak (2012), published in *Polskie Forum Psychologiczne*.

More relational people (higher RISC scores) manifest a stronger tendency to merge and emotional sensitiveness (Table 6).

SYMBIOTIC BOND AND GOAL-ORIENTED ACTIVITY

The Strategic Activity Scale (Błażek, 2001) describes the three aspects of goal-oriented activity of a person: strategic (task) orientation, social-avoidant orientation (avoiding failures and a high level of uncertainty in action), and orientation on the diversity of life (devoting effort to numerous different spheres of life). It is theoretically based on the model proposed by Mądrzycki (2002), within the framework of which the author treated goal-oriented activity as the expression of the functional aspect of personality. Strategic orientation indicates one's concentration on goals and plans. Avoidant orientation indicates fear of devoting oneself to a plan and acting towards goal accomplishment. Life enrichment orientation indicates the variety of fields in which an individual is active. That scale is composed of 43 statements (17 are included in strategic orientation, 15 in the social-avoidant one, and 12 in orientation on the diversity of life). The responses are provided by the individuals being examined with the application of a five-degree scale in which "1" means "I definitely disagree", whereas "5" means "I definitely agree".

In the men's group, merging with other people and emotional sensitiveness are associated with strategic orientation, and merging with other people is associated with life-enrichment orientation. In the women's group, merging with other people is associated with avoidant orientation, and cognitive oversensitiveness is negatively associated with strategic orientation and life-enrichment orientation. In both of those groups, suppressing is negatively associated with strategic and with life-enrichment orientation, and positively with avoidant orientation, cognitive oversensitiveness is associated with avoidant orientation, and emotional sensitiveness with life-enrichment orientation (Table 7).

CONCLUSIONS FROM VALIDATION RESEARCH

The conducted statistical analyses the objective of which is to verify the theoretically presumed factor structure of the Symbiotic Bond Questionnaire differentiated four factors: Suppressing, Merging with other people, Cognitive oversensitiveness and Emotional sensitiveness. The version being presented includes 28 statements, 7 in each of the subscales. The validation research makes it possible to assess the questionnaire as reliable to an acceptable degree and valid, which may serve the researchers and clinicians to assess the intensification of a symbiotic bond interpreted as the personality mechanism being the consequence of early experiences in relationships with other people, and also exerting an influence on developing current relationships.

In this paper, the first version of the tool is presented. Further works on it will make it possible to confirm the received factor structure and/or to introduce modifications, if necessary, which may serve, among other purposes, to improve the reliability of the scale of Suppressing (that scale was revealed to be the least reliable one). The analysis of the validity of the tool revealed that it is valid, in a way which is predictable and compatible with the expectations based on theoretical models, connected with other variables describing the mechanism of developing relationships as an important aspect of the functioning of personality (cf. Sullivan; quoting after: Campbell, Hall, & Lindzey, 2012).

The current version of the Symbiotic Bond Questionnaire has been used in research, in which individuals in the situation of a family crisis participated. The obtained results will be presented in following publications. The results of that research also make it possible to assess positively the tool itself, and also show that the intensification of symbiotic bonds between family members explains the dynamics of the functioning of the entire family system, as well as the mechanisms occurring in interpersonal relationships.

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APPENDIX

KWS-D (Kwestionariusz Więzi Symbiotycznej – wersja dla dorosłych)

Magdalena Błażek, Maria Kaźmierczak, Aleksandra Lewandowska-Walter

Poniższy Kwestionariusz składa się z szeregu stwierdzeń, które dotyczą Twoich zachowań, myśli i uczuć w relacjach z innymi ludźmi. Nie ma tu odpowiedzi dobrych ani złych, ponieważ każdy człowiek jest inny. Obok każdego stwierdzenia znajduje się skala, która ma Ci pomóc w ustosunkowaniu się do nich. Wybierając dane miejsce na skali, wskazujesz, w jakim stopniu opisuje ono Twoje myśli, uczucia czy zachowania. Masz do dyspozycji następujące kategorie odpowiedzi:

– **całkowicie się nie zgadzam** – 1– **nie zgadzam się** – 2– **nie mam zdania** – 3– **zgadzam się** – 4– **całkowicie się zgadzam** – 5

Wybierając odpowiednią odpowiedź, otocz kółkiem właściwą literę. Jeśli po zaznaczeniu określonej skali chcesz zmienić odpowiedź, przekreśl zrobione kółko i otocz poprawny znak. Postaraj się jak najrzadziej używać odpowiedzi „nie mam zdania” (3). Nie opuszczaj żadnych stwierdzeń.

1. Pragnienia mojego partnera stają się moimi pragnieniami	1	2	3	4	5
2. Oglądamy tylko filmy, które wybierze mój partner	1	2	3	4	5
3. Mam poczucie, że ja i mój partner to jedno	1	2	3	4	5
4. Odczuwam lęk, gdy myślę o rozstaniu z partnerem nawet na chwilę	1	2	3	4	5
5. Spędzam z moim partnerem każdą wolną chwilę	1	2	3	4	5
6. Każde wakacje spędzam ze swoim partnerem	1	2	3	4	5
7. Lepiej się czuję, gdy jestem w związku, niż gdy jestem sama	1	2	3	4	5
8. Odczuwam lęk, gdy robię coś innego niż partner	1	2	3	4	5
9. Uważam, że inni ludzie są odpowiedzialni za moje złe samopoczucie	1	2	3	4	5
10. Lubię opiekować się innymi	1	2	3	4	5
11. Najlepiej się czuję, gdy podejmuję działania akceptowane przez najbliższe mi osoby	1	2	3	4	5
12. Umiem rozpoznawać uczucia innych osób	1	2	3	4	5
13. Nie podejmuję inicjatywy do działania	1	2	3	4	5
14. Często wpędzam siebie w poczucie winy	1	2	3	4	5
15. Umiem się wczuć w emocje, które przeżywa bliska mi osoba w danej sytuacji	1	2	3	4	5
16. Rozumiem potrzeby innych osób	1	2	3	4	5
17. Wolę by ktoś mną kierował, niż żebym ja kierował drugą osobą	1	2	3	4	5
18. Często czuję, że inni ludzie frustrują mnie swoim zachowaniem	1	2	3	4	5
19. Umiem współczuć innym i głęboko przeżywać ich krzywdę czy nieszczęścia	1	2	3	4	5
20. Jestem bardzo czuły na oceny innych, a zwrócenie mi uwagi odbieram jako atak na mnie	1	2	3	4	5
21. Staram się unikać otwartych konfliktów czy wyrażania swoich opinii, które są sprzeczne z opiniami innych	1	2	3	4	5
22. Staram się nosić negatywne emocje w sobie przez długi czas i czasami ich nie ujawniać	1	2	3	4	5
23. Potrzebuję informacji zwrotnej i aprobaty otoczenia, aby czuć się dobrze	1	2	3	4	5
24. Często obwiniam innych za swoje złe samopoczucie	1	2	3	4	5
25. Jestem wrażliwy i wyczułony na wszelkie uwagi ze strony nawet obcych mi ludzi	1	2	3	4	5
26. Łatwo mi jest wyczuć, co czują inni	1	2	3	4	5
27. Staram się chronić osoby, które są słabsze, wrażliwsze ode mnie	1	2	3	4	5
28. Mam skłonność do tłumienia w sobie gniewu	1	2	3	4	5

Dziękujemy!

APPENDIX

SBQ-A (Symbiotic Bond Questionnaire – version for adults)

Magdalena Błażek, Maria Kaźmierczak, Aleksandra Lewandowska-Walter

This questionnaire concerns your behaviours, thoughts, and feelings occurring in relations with others. Since each of us is different, there are no good or bad answers. Please read each statement and assess how much you agree with it using the following scale: When judging the statements, please think of your partner or, if you are not in an intimate relationship, of another emotionally close person.

- I do not agree at all – 1
- I do not agree – 2
- I neither agree nor disagree – 3
- I agree – 4
- I totally agree – 5

Please circle the chosen number next to the statement. If you wish to change your answer, please cross it out and circle a new one. Please try not to use the ‘I neither agree nor disagree (3)’ answer too often. Do not omit any statement.

1.	My partner's wishes become mine	1	2	3	4	5
2.	We watch films chosen only by my partner	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I feel that I and my partner are one	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I feel anxious when thinking of being apart from my partner even for a while	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I spend every spare moment with my partner	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I spend every holiday with my partner	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I feel better in a relationship than being alone	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I feel anxious when I do something different from my partner	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I can't stand being alone, but being with others I am afraid of not making them happy	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I like looking after other people	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I feel better when doing things approved of by people close to me	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I am able to recognize the feelings of others	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I do not show initiative; I'd rather depend on others	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I am often burdened with guilt	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I can relate to the feelings of somebody close to me	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I understand the needs of others	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I prefer to follow others rather than to be a leader	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I often feel frustrated by the behaviour of other people	1	2	3	4	5
19.	I can sympathize with the feelings of others, and I am deeply moved by people's unhappiness and misfortunes	1	2	3	4	5
20.	I am sensitive to people's opinions and I treat comments about me as an insult	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I try to avoid open conflicts or expressing my opinions when expecting an unfavourable reception	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I try to "bury" negative emotions for a long time and rarely reveal them	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I need positive feedback and approval in order to feel well	1	2	3	4	5
24.	I often blame others for my bad moods	1	2	3	4	5
25.	I am sensitive to any comments made by people, even strangers.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	I can easily relate to the feelings of others	1	2	3	4	5
27.	I try to protect people who are vulnerable and more sensitive than me	1	2	3	4	5
28.	I have a tendency to hold back my anger	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you!