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# RESOLVING CONFLICT BETWEEN AUTONOMY AND RELATEDNESS IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH THEIR CONSTANT INTERCHANGE OR THROUGH SYNTHESIS

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of our qualitative research was to explore distinct ways individuals surpass ambivalent tendencies for autonomy and for relatedness in intimate relationships. Our study was based on principles of grounded theory and included 47 participants (55.3% female and 44.6% male) of Slovene nationality, whose average age was 30 years and 8 months and who had been in intimate relationship on average for 7 years and 4 months. Analysis of data collected with diary method identified two distinct ways of resolving fundamentally antagonistic tendencies: tendencies for autonomy and tendencies for relatedness can be satisfied by their constant interchange or by their synthesis. Lastly, the paper also discusses parallels and differences between our results and findings of attachment and interdependence theory.

**Keywords:** Autonomy, Relatedness, Intimate relationships, Qualitative research

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## **Introduction**

For majority of people achieving a satisfactory intimate relationship is a dominating theme throughout one's life (Cantor & Malley, 1991; Finkel, Simpson, & Eastwick, 2017; Fletcher, Rosanowski, & Fitness, 1994; Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005). According to some authors (Kumashiro, Rusbult, & Finkel, 2008; Prager & Roberts, 2004) the key issue in intimate relationships is resolving the conflict between autonomy and relatedness. Balancing the two is challenging, but necessary, since it forms the basis of satisfaction in intimate relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Visserman, Righetti, Kumashiro, &

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Van Lange, 2017). However, focused research on this dynamics seems to not be represented in the literature.

There are two prevailing theoretical models regarding intimate relationships in the research field of social psychology (Campbell & Rubin, 2012; Mashek & Aron, 2004 ); interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Murray & Holmes, 2009, 2011, 2017; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and attachment theory ( Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1982; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Fraley, Hudson, Heffernan, & Segal, 2015; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, 2007; Simpson & Rholes, 2017).

Interdependence theory builds on the assumption that humans are social animals who are fundamentally motivated to establish deep interpersonal relations (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Since social relations also pose an important source of threat for one's psychological welfare, humans' survival instincts strive for defending the self (McClure, Bartz, & Lydon, 2013; Murray et al., 2006). Interdependence theory considers self-protective behaviour in the form of increasing the distance between partners as a primary tendency of an individual, even at the cost of relatedness (Murray et al 2006). Consequently, the existence of intimate relationship is possible only due to mechanisms that limit individual's tendencies for self-protection. In the first phase of the relationship this mechanism is infatuation (Murray & Holmes, 2009) and later establishment of trust (Murray & Holmes, 2011). The theory also assumes that co-dependent nature of intimate relationship necessarily limits autonomy of both partners (Kelley et al., 2003). Satisfaction with intimate relationship namely intensifies the wish for higher closeness which always leads into limited freedom and autonomy of both partners. Murray and Holmes (2011) go even so far as to claim that autonomy is the most endangered in the most satisfying intimate relationships.

Attachment theory defines attachment in adulthood as a biopsychosocial process in which emotional bonds between adult partners are formed similarly to the way they are shaped in childhood between the child and his parents (Hazan & Shaver 1987). Just as the child finds safety in presence of a parent and is under stress when parenting figure is not available, partners in intimate relationship reciprocally provide solace and safety whilst react negatively at physical or emotional absence of one another (Simpson & Rholes, 2017). Contrary to interdependence theory, attachment theory considers getting closer to the partner as a primary tendency of an individual (Fraley & Shaver, 1998; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Only if the partner (called "object of attachment" in terms of attachment theory) proves out to be unreachable, the individual

develops defense mechanisms to increase interpersonal distance. While the defense behaviour of distancing oneself from the partner is considered normative behaviour in interdependence theory, attachment theory understands this behaviour as a secondary strategy of those individuals whose primary attachment needs are not satisfied (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). If these needs are satisfied the individual develops secure attachment and therefore does not consider interpersonal closeness (and whereby tendencies for relatedness) as opposite to satisfying tendencies for autonomy (Mikulincer & Shaver 2007).

The purpose of both above mentioned theoretical orientations is the development of broader models of partner dynamics. Consequently, these theories only indirectly concern the issue of balancing the tendencies for autonomy and for relatedness and therefore provide only partial answers to the nature of this dynamics. Based on above outlined theoretical assumptions and research findings of both theories we can conclude that interdependence theory does not assume the option of concurrent satisfaction of both studied tendencies (i.e. having satisfied needs for autonomy in context of a functional intimate relationship). That means that intrapsychic experience of the dynamics between tendencies for autonomy and relatedness is inherently conflicting. Moreover, within attachment theory there is no research dedicated to how ambivalent tendencies for autonomy and relatedness can be resolved. When it comes to securely attached individuals the dynamics is namely already resolved, while in cases of individuals who have developed defense strategies the conflict will be resolved by developing secure attachment style.

Consequently, this study aimed to focus on following research question: In what way do individuals surpass ambivalent tendencies between autonomy and relatedness in intimate relationships? Due to the lack of literature in this specific area we chose a qualitative research approach, which was based on principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2006). Being notably exploratory in nature, its aim is the formation of theory based on empirical data.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Our sample consisted of participants selected from population of adults who were involved in intimate relationships during our study, and who had been in that relationship for the minimum of 6 months. We namely assumed that current involvement in intimate relationships would enable easier identification of ambivalent tendencies between autonomy and relatedness. Minimum duration of the relationship was our selection

criterion which was related to theoretical sampling. As previous studies (e.g., Clark & Grote, 1998) showed, sentiment override prevails in intimate relationships that had lasted for a shorter period of time. These temporary overly positive emotions could distort the identification of dynamics of ambivalent tendencies for autonomy and relatedness. For that reason, only individuals that met the condition of their relationships' demanded duration were included in the research.

All 47 participants were of Slovene nationality. Of them 26 (55.3%) were female and 21 (44.6%) were male. The average age of the participants was 30 years and 8 months and their average duration of intimate relationship had been 7 years and 4 months. Our sample consisted mostly of higher educated individuals which is due to the fact that we used theoretical sampling combined with convenience sampling and chain-referral sampling. First participants included in our research were students of humanistic studies and with their help we also acquired their acquaintances.

### **Materials**

Empirical data collection was conducted with the diary method. The diary template consisted of questions prepared beforehand with the purpose of guiding thinking to this study's relevant areas of experience: In which ways do you try to solve the conflict between autonomy and wish for relatedness? What helps you to solve it? What would you advise others that are dealing with the same conflict? The design of diary template was based on the assumption that current conflicts in couple's everyday life aid in making one aware and consequently provide easier identification of different aspects of studied dynamics and ways the dynamics can be resolved. Our participants were given the instruction to write down their thoughts soon after the conflict with their partner had appeared or had been resolved. In cases when conflict had not arisen, participants wrote their thoughts in regard to the general happenings of the whole week.

Using diaries to collect data offers either a one-time or a repetitive reflective explication of subjective meanings that individuals attribute to certain subjects (James, Milenkiewicz, & Buckman, 2007). That is the reason researchers did not introduce their own definitions of autonomy and relatedness but the understanding and defining of these two phenomena was left to participants' "naive psychology". This intuitive understanding determines how they interpret events and therefore how and why they act as they do. The aim was – due to the degree of intimacy of contents – to offer the researchers the 'view from the inside' (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). Writing diaries namely enables the

participants to reflect their experience on their own, whenever time would allow and without the interruption of another person, e.g. the interviewer (Keightley, Pickering, & Allett, 2012).

The challenge with using the diary method to collect data is the demand for a longer commitment from the participants (Alaszewski, 2006; Nicholl, 2010). However, based on exploratory principles of qualitative research all diary records are relevant, even those of individuals that ended writing diaries earlier than anticipated.

### **Procedure**

The research was conducted between January and June 2014. In line with the above described diary method the participants were instructed to write down their thoughts about the researched topics once a week, until week 10.

### **Analysis**

In accordance with the iterative nature of qualitative research and principles of grounded theory we primarily used theoretical sampling in combination with convenience and chain-referral sampling. This means that phases of collecting, coding and analysis of data collected in the first phases of research guided subsequent sampling of participants. In that way it was possible to gain insight into the variety of structures, which had not yet been highlighted in previous phases of research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2006).

Coding represents the central part of a qualitative study and signifies the interpretation of analysed text through determining meaning (of codes and categories) of textual material (Charmaz, 2006; Flick 1998/2006) in order to form a theoretical explanation of the studied phenomenon (Vogrinč, 2008). In accordance with grounded theory and theoretical coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2006) we used open as well as axial and relational coding. The principle of coding was primarily inductive. The categories were therefore not predicted in advance, i.e. derived from certain theoretical models. We also used the deductive approach which allowed us to be more systematic and analytical during ongoing comparison of beforehand determined codes between different parts of certain participant's material and especially between materials of various participants. The possibility of integrating new codes was also present during the process of deductive coding which was important as it eliminated the possibility of drawing conclusions prematurely (Glaser, 1992). The latter could result in poorer matching of empirical data with grounded theory (Bryman, 2004). The codes that proved irrelevant from the view of our research goals were eliminated in later phases of

analysis. The process was distinctly hermeneutic. Re-reading the primary texts, re-evaluation of adequacy of the existing codes and ongoing comparison of defined categories were intended to add to the emergence of a theory that would be “loyal to evidence” as much as possible (Neuman, 1994, pp. 323).

The processes of coding guided the processes of theoretical sampling and the entire procedure strived towards gaining theoretical saturation both on levels of sampling and coding. Theoretical saturation as an important characteristic of grounded theory (Bryman, 2004; Flick 1998/2006) represents the point when the researcher determines data collection is adequate, since new data would not add anything relevant to explanation of designed categories.

## **Results**

Data analysis showed that absence of conflicting tendencies between autonomy and relatedness can be achieved in two ways. One possibility for the absence of conflict is that both types of tendencies are constantly interchanging and the second is resolution of antagonistic nature of tendencies through their synthesis. In this section we present both experiential positions of participants which are compared to other relevant studies in Discussion.

### **Resolving Conflict Between Autonomy and Relatedness as an Achieved Dynamic Balance Between Them**

Individuals involved in intimate relationships experience the dynamics between tendencies for autonomy on one hand and tendencies for relatedness on the other as a constant interchanging feeling of one or the other type of tendencies. After the state of satisfied need for autonomy the phase of increased need for relatedness follows and the sufficient satisfaction of the latter evokes the need for autonomy. The achieved state of satisfied need of one type of tendencies simultaneously means unfulfilled need of the other tendencies, i.e. satisfaction of both needs is in itself exclusive.

“I experience the tendency for my own autonomy very strongly. However, when I finally achieve autonomy the tendency for relatedness to the partner grows stronger. As my autonomy increases my tendency for relatedness also rises.”

“I would like to add that certain situations occur when the first tendency overflows the second and vice versa. For example, the tendency for autonomy disappears and the tendency for relatedness rises.”

Because the activation of felt tendencies is interchanging, their dynamics is not perceived as conflicting.

“I believe that the conflict between wish for relatedness and autonomy does not occur, since there is normally either only a wish for autonomy or for relatedness.”

“When a conflict arises, I try yo adapt the conditions in regards to the situation in which I want to be autonomous. Simply put, I go alone wherever I wish to go – into another company or just in bed. When the wish for relatedness increases, then I stay with my partner.”

The participants stress that enabling mutual autonomy is a essential condition dor maintaining a quality intimate relationship. When the do not feel autonomous enough they consider that their intimate relationship lacks in quality and that can be seen as a criterion for terminating the relationship.

“I find this dynamics crucial for a successful intimate relationship since I believe that the lack of feeling autonomous often plays an important role in ending the relationship. Autonomy seems to me so crucial that I would probably end the relationship if it was endangered (of course here I do not refer to compromises but to the expectation of a perfect adjustment).”

“The better the relationship the lower the wish for excessive autonomy /.../ This dynamics is important because if the relationship is not good you can retreat and enjoy your own autonomy.”

Partners' autonomy is considered as a basis of intimate relationship because it enables i) sincerity and authenticity of both partners and consequently true mutual understanding; ii) further personal development of both partners and iii) a higher quality of intimate relationship.

“I strive strongly for autonomy; to me it is a basis, without which intimate relationship cannot exist. Both need to be free in each other's presence or they never really get to know each other. Wish for relatedness is not a problem for me and I do not think that these two are contradicting. I think that when two individuals are autonomous in a relationship and they have the right to act according to their conscience, they either fall out and break up or they get to know each other better and they bond. In the first case it is better they break up and in the second they develop sense of relatedness through freedom and autonomy.”

“In our relationship I feel the space for individual expression and some sort of formulating my own self or myself as an individual. Nevertheless, I have a feeling that besides my personal growth within the relationship, the relationship between us also grows.”

The dynamics between needs for autonomy and needs for relatedness in an intimate relationship becomes conflicting in the case when an individual's autonomy is prevented by his partner, which can also happen because of partner's attempts to develop feeling of relatedness.

“These two types of tendencies could in my case become contradicting if the partner would not give me enough personal space and autonomy. Then I would have to decide between my freedom and autonomous decisions versus feeling of relatedness that I do experience in intimate relationship.”

“If this dynamics exists it exists because one thinks you can only feel related if you win more attention of the partner and you consequently start restricting personal autonomy of this other person.”

Conflicting tendencies for autonomy and for relatedness are resolved by establishing and maintaining a sufficient degree of satisfied need for autonomy in both partners. When respect for personal autonomy in intimate relationship is established, while simultaneously relatedness is maintained, this dynamics ceases to be antagonistic.

“I experienced this dynamics as more stressful at the beginning of the relationship, because I had to adjust the ratio between autonomy and relatedness with my partner, but now we both know and respect our own 'freedom' while still feeling related.”

“These tendencies are not opposing in my eyes, even though sometimes it seems they are. This dynamics is not as important as it is annoying. If two people love each other as they are and they defend the partner's personal autonomy in the same way as their own, the dynamics does not exist because they run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. And they hunt with the hare and run with the hounds.”

The mere existence of tension between tendencies for autonomy and tendencies for relatedness means that in intimate relationship – where needs for relatedness are primarily satisfied – tendencies for autonomy are also preserved. Because the latter are connected with positive

aspects of tendencies for individual's growth and development, the attitude to the entire dynamics is positive.

"I believe that dynamics of these two tendencies is very important or needs to exist. Even though it is sometimes hard and it seems that the tendencies contradict each other, they need to exist. I do not say that partners in an intimate relationship can do what they want but one needs to preserve his or her self, which is what gives him or her meaning in life."

"The dynamics influences the intimate relationship in a way that despite the wish for relatedness and being in a close relationship I still remain autonomous, independent and I try to spend time alone with myself, my thoughts, goals, wishes."

### **Resolving the Conflict Between Autonomy and Relatedness as an Achieved State of Synthesis Between Them**

The other way some participants experienced the dynamics of both types of studied tendencies is as inherently interconnected amongst themselves. In that case it becomes hard to distinguish the two on the level of generalised ideas about the relationship's dynamics as well as regarding particular decisional situations. This means that the conflicting nature of needs for autonomy and relatedness is resolved in a way that the wish for relatedness is understood as an expression of autonomy or that the expression of autonomy is done through the tendency for relatedness.

"I do not experience that I would feel less autonomous because of belonging to my partner since my wish for relatedness is a part of my autonomous decision and tendency."

"I think it has never happened that I would want both, because it seems to me that autonomy can be achieved through relatedness to relationship."

Even though the questions in the diary template were based on the assumption that the dynamics is conflicting, the participants reflected upon it and some concluded differently. In these cases, studied tendencies were understood as complementary and the dynamics of intimate relationship was marked by a dynamic balance of their synthesis.

"As I mentioned before, I am realising that I do not feel the conflict between wish for autonomy and wish for relatedness. However, if we

look for conflict, we will find it. What if instead of the word conflict we use the word symbiosis? I believe that the word symbiosis outlines the dynamics of intimate relationship more colourfully. To me symbiosis means being true to myself and belonging... At the same time.”

“When I am re-reading the questions above, I am realising that I actually do not experience wishes for autonomy and being in an intimate relationship as opposing ... Rather as complementary, coexisting ...”

Relatedness within intimate relationship (mutually) enables both individuals to achieve higher autonomy.

“I experience intimate relationship as something that makes me who I am.”

“True partnership is the one in which individuals support each other and stand by each other's side no matter what. They believe in each other and allow and support each other to become increasingly stronger individuals that are and will always be able to stand on their own feet. If they divide assignments, they do it because things are faster and better done in that way and not because they would want to make each other dependent.”

## **Discussion**

Analysis of data identified two distinct and mutually exclusive ways in which resolution of antagonistic dynamics between tendencies for autonomy and tendencies for relatedness can be achieved. One is characterized by the experience of interchanging relevance of mentioned tendencies and the other by their synthesis.

We compared findings of our study with the characteristics of normative dynamics in intimate relationships as understood by two, to this day probably most dominant theories of interpersonal dynamics in context of intimate relationships, i.e. interdependence theory (Murray & Holmes, 2009, 2011, 2017; Murray et al., 2006; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1982; Brennan et al., 1998; Hazan & Shaver 1987; Fraley et al., 2015; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, 2007; Simpson & Rholes, 2017). We found some parallels between our results and both mentioned theories. However, our findings that differ from current theories could turn out to be crucial additions to better understanding of partners' dynamics. Since attachment theory considers experience and behaviour of securely attached individuals as normative intra- and interpsychological dynamics in intimate relationship (Bowlby, 1969/1982, 1973, 1979, 1980, 1982),

we compared findings of our qualitative research only with characteristics of this style of attachment.

Theory of interdependence predicts that the consequence of getting closer to the partner is reflected in a decrease in individual's autonomy and vice versa (Murray & Holmes, 2009, 2011, 2017). The individual can always satisfy only one type of tendencies at a given time, because dissatisfaction of the other tendencies follows as a consequence, i.e. satisfaction of tendencies is in itself exclusive. The conducted qualitative study demonstrated that some individuals experience the dynamics between tendencies for autonomy and relatedness in intimate relationships as a constant interchanging feeling of one or other types of tendencies. In detail, state of satisfied need for autonomy is followed by the phase of increased feeling of needs for relatedness, sufficient satisfaction of which evokes activation of needs for autonomy. This interchanging relevance of feelings and satisfaction of both types of tendencies allows individuals to perceive their dynamics as non-conflicting. Our research identified higher relevance of satisfying tendencies for autonomy as opposed to tendencies for relatedness in individuals that experience these tendencies as interchanging. The mere state of intimate relationship's existence namely satisfies tendencies for relatedness in partners and consequently satisfaction of needs for autonomy becomes more relevant. Participants of our study reported that satisfaction of needs for autonomy in context of intimate relationship is an essential condition of one's welfare and a basis of intimate relationship. Both partners feeling autonomous in the relationship namely allows authenticity and therefore honesty between them which leads to personal development and to higher quality of their relationship.

Our research also identified the possibility of experiencing concurrent satisfaction of needs for autonomy and needs for relatedness. This is in line with attachment theory that understands simultaneous satisfaction of both sorts of needs – for love, intimacy and acceptance on one hand and for autonomy and growth on the other – as not only a reachable state but as a normatively expected experience of intimate relationships (Fraleley et al., 2015; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, 2007; Simpson & Rholes, 2017). Securely attached individuals do not consider interpersonal closeness and whereby satisfaction of tendencies for relatedness as opposite to satisfying tendencies for autonomy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Our participants also reported absence of conflict of both types of tendencies since the wish for relatedness is perceived as an expression of autonomy, while the wish for autonomy is expressed through tendencies for relatedness. Both types of studied tendencies become inherently interconnected amongst themselves and

are therefore perceived as complementary, while the intimate relationship's dynamics is marked by non-conflicting state of symbiosis. The reason that securely attached individuals have learned to connect search for closeness with achieving authentic and autonomous feeling of their own worth is because of their interpersonal experiences with consistently responsive attachment object (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Our research also showed that individuals who experience synthesis of studied tendencies do not perceive getting closer to the partner as endangering to their feeling of autonomy. They see relatedness within an intimate relationship as a crucial factor for achieving autonomy because the satisfied tendencies for relatedness enable personal development in the form of discovering and developing their true self.

As already explained there are two ways of resolving antagonistic dynamics between tendencies for autonomy and tendencies for relatedness. Some individuals reach synthesis of studied tendencies which is characterized by both tendencies being satisfied at the same time. However, our study demonstrated that participants who experienced the other way of resolving the conflict, that is by interchanging relevance of studied tendencies, showed an overall positive attitude towards this dynamics. That means that this positive attitude is also preserved in cases of feeling antagonistic dynamics between mentioned tendencies. Individuals in intimate relationships namely preserve autonomy despite having satisfied tendencies for relatedness. Since tendencies for autonomy are connected with positive aspects of striving for individual's development, the attitude towards the wholesome dynamics is positive. Achieved state of satisfaction of one type of tendencies simply redirects the motivation towards satisfying the other type of tendencies and therefore the tendencies cease to be conflicting. Contrary to the interdependence theory, which predicts a conflicting nature of this dynamics on the basis of excluding nature of satisfaction of both types of tendencies (Murray & Holmes, 2009, 2011, 2017), our study showed the experience of the dynamics ceases to be conflicting based on this very interchanging nature of tendencies.

Our findings indicate the possibility that getting closer to the partner can be connected with achieving increased autonomy of the partners. Therefore, satisfaction of tendencies for autonomy does not necessarily exclude satisfaction of tendencies for relatedness. In contrary to interdependence theory, attachment theory therefore succeeds in identifying the possibility of balance of studied tendencies to which we refer as synthesis of tendencies for autonomy and relatedness. Since tendencies for autonomy and tendencies for relatedness are inherently interconnected, autonomy can also be expressed through satisfaction of

tendency for relatedness. This means that increase in interpersonal closeness can be linked to the process of satisfying tendencies for autonomy, while the satisfied tendencies for relatedness keep enabling partners to increase their autonomy.

### Considerations About Quality of the Results, Advantages of the Study and Guidelines for Further Research

Even though some post-positivist qualitative methodologists (e.g., Silverman, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Willig, 2008) refuse to judge the quality of qualitative research's findings in terms of concepts such as validity, reliability, objectivity and sensitivity (of measuring instruments) that are used in quantitative research, these concepts still remain in use. However, they are often supplemented with concepts such as reflexivity of the researcher.

From the point of achieving validity of research findings the focus was on in-depth explanation of studied dynamics, well-grounded explanation of relations between sub-phenomena and on theoretically and empirically supported conclusions of the research. Diary template with beforehand prepared guiding questions via standardization helped to reduce subjective influence of the researcher's suggestive enquiry while collecting data. This would have been a bigger challenge, for instance, in the case of collecting data by means of interview method. On the other hand, this very template could have led the participants to fill in their diary in a certain way. We gave participants the instruction that concrete (conflict) happenings, e.g. everyday conflicts, should only help them to think about the studied dynamics without actually writing down concrete situations. With this instruction we might have passed too much of the abstraction process upon the participants and whereby negatively influenced validity of data. Since our data show a large measure of abstraction and whereby low measure of richness of data it would be reasonable to complement our understanding of the dynamics by using guided questions within in-depth interviews.

In the case of qualitative research one cannot simply exclude the researcher who is according to C. Willig (2008) the main measuring instrument. Researcher's personal characteristics and epistemological assumptions necessarily influence all steps of research engagement, mostly subconsciously. They affect everything from the decision to study a certain theme to how the researcher understands meaning in the coding process and how he makes conclusions. Since these issues cannot be avoided, the role of the researcher is to make them explicit in order to enable the reader of the research paper to make a judgement

about their influence. In this specific study the authors stress their tendency for searching for autonomy in social context and their own experience of conflicting tendencies for autonomy and relatedness. Besides, the authors are under the impression that in social psychology the assumption about inherently conflicting nature of relation between the individual and social environment is somewhat overlooked. The above mentioned could have influenced detection of certain dynamics, e.g. the possibility of non-conflicting relation between the individual and social environment was identified. On the other hand, the researchers were sincerely surprised about identified options of resolving conflict between autonomy and relatedness due to their own assumption of inherently conflicting nature of studied tendencies. On this note we regret there was no possibility to include additional researchers who could attribute to, for example, intercoder reliability and consequently higher validity of data categorization.

The criterion of reliability cannot be evaluated in this study, however, potentially low reliability of gained data does not negate scientific and practical value of results. Contingent on satisfied condition of validity, every detected way of surpassing studied antagonistic dynamics presents one possible way of resolving conflicting dynamics and is thus relevant as such even though it is not again identified in later studies and therefore has low reliability. In context of qualitative research both representativeness and probability do not have to be fulfilled and we can therefore even consider the possibilities of generalization (for more on this issue see Gobo, 2008).

This also shows practical value of our findings in context of partner therapy or relationships education programmes. Individuals who are burdened by conflict of studied dynamics can namely find potential resolution in both identified ways of resolving this dynamics.

As for scientific relevance of this study, we find the orientation towards researching the experience of tendencies for autonomy and tendencies for relatedness as an advantage of the conducted study since that has, to our knowledge, never been done before. This is important, since authors (e.g., Kumashiro et al., 2008; Prager & Roberts, 2004) stress the importance of this dynamics but research focused specifically on this problem area does not exist.

Based on our study and considering theoretical orientations of interdependence and attachment theory we can additionally infer the suitability of understanding intimate dynamics from the point of both theoretical perspectives. Through distinguishing two distinct ways of

experiencing the relation between tendencies for autonomy and tendencies for relatedness we can find important similarities with explications of working models of both interdependence as well as attachment theory. This can present an important step towards the integration of both theories for which there are many appeals but little attempts (e.g., McClure et al., 2013).

Our research importantly identified the possibility that experiencing this dynamics – as opposed to in social psychology relatively often present assumptions – is not inherently conflicting. This can have important implications for the prevalent theme in social psychology, i.e. relation between individual and social environment. Our results are in line some findings of attachment theory that appeal to the possibility that dominant theories of social dynamics describe behaviour of un-securely attached individuals without further reflection and fail to incorporate interpersonal behaviour of securely attached individuals (for more see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). If further research confirms these indications, it will present nothing less than a change in current paradigm of social psychology.

Lastly, the advantage of our study is also connected with the chosen methodological approach, since qualitative research allows identification of diversity of individual's experiences within the studied group via content rich information. That is something that quantitative research allows only rarely or not at all. Nevertheless, further research in this field will need to determine how the characteristics of experience identified in this study are spread in the population. That is how quantitative research could significantly complement qualitatively gathered findings (Bryman, 2006; Willig, 2008; Silverman, 2016; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

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