Rethinking Individualism and Collectivism: Self-Construal, Cognition, and Communication

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Distal Culture
History, Traditions
(Linguistic, Philosophical, Religious)

Cognitive,
affective,
behavioral consequences
A Truism

- **Western cultures**
  - emphasize an *independent* perspective on the self
  - see the self as distinct from others

- **Other cultures**
  - emphasize an *interdependent* perspective on the self
  - see the self as interconnected with others

- This is more often asserted than tested.
Distal Culture History, Traditions (Linguistic, Philosophical, Religious)

Internalized Cultural Values
Social Scripts
Social norms

Cognitive, affective, behavioral consequences

individual  collective
A Meta-Analysis


- Included
  - 83 different studies that assessed IND and COL
  - 170 studies that addressed psychological implications of IND and COL
Effect Size Individualism

Effect Size Collectivism

ZIM  VIE  VEN  TUR  TAN  ESP  RSA  SLO  SIN  PRC  POR  PL  PER  PAK  NOR  NIG  NZ  NEP  MEX  LIT  KOR  JP  ITA  INDO  HUN  HK  GUA  GRE  GHA  GER  FRA  FIN  BUL  BAH  AUT  AUS  ARG
Effect size $d$

Collectivism by region of the world

Note: Israel was not included in this analysis.
Country Differences

• European Americans are:
  – More individualistic than Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Indians
  • Effect sizes for Japan, Korea, India are small, large only for Chinese heritage groups
  – More collectivist than Chinese, Indians
  • Not less collectivistic than Japanese or Koreans

• Chinese fit the truism:
  – They are both less individualistic and more collectivistic than European Americans and most Europeans.
  – Effect sizes moderate to large, stable across scale content
  – For Japanese and Koreans, effects are small and not stable across scale content.

• Understudied areas – Middle East, Africa, Latin America may hold more promise for showing large differences
Consequences of IND/COL

• Review identifies reliable cross-national differences with regard to
  – Self-concept,
  – Well-being,
  – Relationality (ways of engaging with others)
  – Cognitive style

• But can we safely attribute these differences to differences in IND/COL?
Individual and Collective

Distal Culture
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Internalized Cultural Values
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Evolution, Natural & Sexual Selection & Adaptation

Cognitive, affective, behavioral consequences
Distal Culture
History, Traditions (Linguistic, Philosophical, Religious)

Internalized Cultural Values
Social Scripts
Social norms

Evolution, Natural & Sexual Selection & Adaptation

Situated Culture
Social Situations

Cognitive, affective, behavioral consequences
Individual and Collective

Distal Culture
History, Traditions
(Linguistic, Philosophical, Religious)

Internalized Cultural Values
Social Scripts
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Situated Culture
Social Situations

Cognitive, affective, behavioral consequences

Evolution, Natural & Sexual Selection & Adaptation
Distal Culture
History, Traditions (Linguistic, Philosophical, Religious)

Internalized Cultural Values
Social Scripts
Social norms

Subjective construal of the situation

Cognitive, affective, behavioral consequences

Situated Culture
Social Situations

Evolution, Natural & Sexual Selection & Adaptation

Individual and Collective
Isolating IND/COL

• To test the assumed causal role of IND/COL we can use priming procedures that make one or the other social orientation temporarily available.

• Assumes that all people possess the relevant knowledge and routines
  – After all, all societies that have no way of eliciting a sense of connection, obligation, and loyalty will not last long, and all individuals sometimes "doing your own thing."

• Cultures differ primarily in whether one set is chronically more accessible than the other.
• Report on priming experiments that temporarily induce independent vs. interdependent self-construals
  – Perception
  – Memory
  – Cognition & communication

• Highlight methodological implications

• Implications for the conceptualization of cultural differences
Basic Perceptual Processes

Separating target and context
Culture & Perception

• Our systematic review suggests collectivism is related to
  – incorporating the social into self-descriptions
  – using context to describe the self
  – using contextual information in making decisions, particularly if reminded of context

• Does how we think about ourselves and our social world influence perception more generally?


- **Independence Prime**
  
  I go to the city often. My anticipation fills me as I see the skyscrapers come into view. I allow myself to explore every corner, never letting an attraction escape me....

- **Interdependence Prime**
  
  We go to the city often. Our anticipation fills us as we see the skyscrapers come into view. We allow ourselves to explore every corner, never letting an attraction escape us...
Stroop Task

• Does the higher attention to context under COL interfere with the separation of target and context features?

• Stroop task
  – red red
  – requires separating or pulling apart word from color,
  – should be impeded by interdependence prime.
Stroop Task

- U.S. students
- Primed
  - COL (“we”) vs. IND (“I”)
- DV
  - color Stroop task (red, red)
- Oyserman, Sorensen, Cha, Schwarz (2004)
Stroop Task

- Korean female students
- Primed
  - COL ("we") vs. IND ("I")
- DV
  - color Stroop task (red red)
- Oyserman, Sorensen, Cha, Schwarz (2004)
What Do You See?

```
F       F
F       F
F       F
F       F
FFFFFFFFFFFFFFF
F       F
F       F
F       F
F       F

1       2
H       F
```
“Relational” vs. “Pop-Out” Processing

- Picture shows a large H, made up of small F’s.

- Participants asked to find either
  - the large letter (relational processing)
  - the little letter (pop-out processing)

- Hypotheses
  - relational processing faster under COL
  - Pop-out processing faster under IND
  - Both *within* subjects
“Relational” vs. “Pop-Out” Processing

- U.S. students
  - N = 30

- Primed
  - COL (“we”) vs. IND (“I”)

- Task
  - Identify big vs. small letter

- DV
  - Time (log ml sec)

- Kuhnen & Oyserman, 2002
“Relational” vs. “Pop-Out” Processing

- Korean students
  - N = 31, between subjects
- Primed
  - COL (“we”) vs. IND (“I”)
- Task
  - Identify big letter (small letter)
- DV
  - Time ml sec
- Cha, Oyserman, Schwarz, 2004
Memory

Memory for objects and context
Memory for Objects and Context

• Does COL facilitate memory for the context in which objects are presented?

• If interdependent ss spontaneously process stimuli as contextually situated, they should perform better at a situated memory task than independent ss

• Material adapted from Chalfonte and Johnson (1996).
Memory Task
• U.S. students
  – N = 34

• Primed
  – COL (“we”) vs. IND (“I”)

• Task
  – View display 90 seconds
  – Told is a memory task
  – Recall items and place on grid

• DV
  – Items correctly placed (+/- one space)

• Kuhnen & Oyserman, 2002
Korean Replication

- Korean students
  - N = 66
- Primed
  - COL (“we”) vs. IND (“I”); no-prime Control
- Task
  - View display 90 seconds
  - Told is a memory task
  - Recall items and place on grid
- DV
  - Items correctly placed (+/- one space)
- Cha, 2004

![Bar chart showing number correctly located for different conditions]
Cognition & Communication

• Interdependence cultures put a premium on
  – Connection, fitting in, attending to one’s own obligations
  – and the relational obligations of others.
• Taking the common ground into account
• This requires monitoring of the social context.
Culture and Conversational Conduct

• Interdependence calls for maintaining relationships.

• Reading “between the lines” is more highly valued than direct expression.
  – If the speaker needs to be very explicit, the listener has failed!
Culture and Conversational Conduct

• To “read between the lines” listeners need
  – to monitor the common ground
  – to take the context into account

• Does culture influence sensitivity to common ground, in the example of possibly redundant questions and effort to provide new information?
Life-Satisfaction and Academic Satisfaction

- Students; Heidelberg, Germany & Beijing, China
- Life - Academic vs. Academic - Life
- Redundancy:
  - L-A: not redundant
  - A-L: redundant
  - No lead-in
- Haberstroh, Oyserman et al., JESP, 2002
• Different substantive conclusions:
  – Academic satisfaction contributes *equally* to life-satisfaction in both countries (life-academic)
  – Academic satisfaction contributes *more* in Germany (academic-life)
  – Latter apparently confirms that individual achievement is more important in individualistic cultures….

• All due to respondents’ sensitivity to conversational context??
Turning Germans Into Chinese

• If the key difference is sensitivity to conversational context, Germans should respond like Chinese when put into an *interdependent* frame of mind.

• Independence/interdependence priming
  – Read paragraph about trip to city
  – Circle pronouns (I vs. we)
  – Adapted from Brewer & Gardner, 1996
Turning Germans Into Chinese

- Students; Heidelberg, Germany
- I vs. we primed
- Redundant only: Academic - Life
- Comparison: Germans vs. Chinese, no prime
- Haberstroh, Oyserman et al., JESP, 2002
Turning Chinese into Americans (lite)

- Students; Hong Kong
- English, Chinese language
- Redundant: Academic - Life
- Non-redundant: Life-Academic
- Chen, Chang, Oyserman, Schwarz, 2004
Happiness and Satisfaction: Impact of Interdependence

- German students
- I-primed vs. we-primed
- Happiness & Satisfaction
  - Not redundant: last & first questions in 2 different Q.
  - Redundant: Last 2 questions in same Q.; no joint lead-in

- Haberstroh, Oyserman et al., JESP, 2002
Conclusions

• Interpersonal orientation influences conversational conduct:

  – Chronically (Chinese) or temporarily (we-primed) interdependent individuals pay more attention to the common ground

  – than chronically (Germans) or temporarily (I-primed) independent individuals.
Conclusions

• The resulting differences in question interpretation
  – are *pragmatic* (speaker meaning)
  – not semantic (meaning of words)

• Pragmatic differences
  – are not captured by translation and backtranslation
  – may be captured by cognitive pretests in both cultures
  – provided context is maintained
Take Home Points

• Differences in the obtained reports may be due to
  – actual differences in attitudes or behavior
  – difference in response process
  – unknown mix of both

• Unless we understand these processes, cross-cultural studies will face many “surprises.”
Source articles

- **PROCESS MODEL of HOW CULTURE INFLUENCES BEHAVIOR**

- **META-ANALYSES, DISCUSSION OF LIMITATIONS OF VARIOUS MEASUREMENT METHODS, SUMMARY OF WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF CULTURE**

- **PRIMING STUDIES SHOWING THAT CULTURE INFLUENCES WHAT WE PERCEIVE AND REMEMBER**

- **PRIMING STUDIES SHOWING THAT CULTURE INFLUENCES SENSITIVITY TO THE COMMUNICATIVE CONTEXT**