



Independent/Interdependent Self-Construal, Collectivism, & Individualism: What do these Cultural Variables mean for Psychopathology?

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Abstract

Introduction: Researchers have found that cultural variables may influence the development of psychopathology (Hong & Woody, 2007).

Method: In the current study we examined several indicators of psychopathology (social anxiety, body dissatisfaction, trait anxiety, depression) and their relation with interdependence, independence, individualism, and collectivism.

Results/Discussion: Our results suggest that independent self-construal may protect against social anxiety and body image disorders and that individualism may protect against depression and body image disorders.

Introduction

- Cultural values, such as independent & interdependent self-construal, collectivism, and individualism may influence the development of psychopathology (Chiao & Blizinsky, 2010; Hong & Woody, 2007)
- Self-construal** (Singelis, 1994)
 - Independent = internal attributes and uniqueness of individuals
 - Interdependent = stresses social connectedness
- Horizontal and Vertical Individualism/Collectivism** (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998)
 - Individualism = uniqueness
 - Collectivism = connectedness
 - Individuals with high levels of horizontal patterns assume that people are equal
 - Individuals with high levels of vertical patterns assume that people can be arranged in a meaningful hierarchy.
- We examined how these variables relate to social anxiety, trait anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction

Hypotheses

- Higher levels of independent self-construal and individualism would predict lower levels of psychological symptoms because these are the dominant values of the USA
- Higher levels of interdependent self-construal and collectivism would predict higher levels of psychological symptoms

Participants

- Participants were 155 adult students
 - Mostly women ($n = 102$; 66%)
 - Caucasian ($n = 91$, 59.1%), Asian/Asian American ($n = 46$, 29.9%), African-American ($n = 10$, 6.5%), Multi-racial ($n = 6$, 0.6%)
 - Median age was 19.82 ($SD = 1.74$)
 - Most ($n = 132$, 85%) were U.S. citizens
 - Ranged in generational status from first to fifth or more generations
 - Mean generational status of 3.19 generations ($SD = 1.52$).
 - English as the primary language spoken in home ($n = 121$, 78%)
 - Chinese ($n = 15$, 9.7%), Korean ($n = 14$, 9.1%), and other ($n = 4$, 2.6%) as the primary language

Psychopathology Measures

Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS; Mattick & Clarke, 1998)

- Describes anxiety-related reactions to a variety of social situations
- Good to excellent reliability, and good construct and convergent validity (Heimberg & Turk, 2002, for a review)
- For analyses, the reverse-scored items are dropped (Rodebaugh, Woods, & Heimberg, 2007)

Beck Depression Inventory 2 (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996)

- 20-item measure of depression
- Validated in psychiatric and non-psychiatric samples (Steer, Ball, Ranieri, & Beck, 1997)

Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ; Cash, 2000)

- 69-item measure that assesses body-image attitudes
- Current study used the 7-item appearance evaluation (AE) scale and 9-item body areas satisfaction scale (BS)
- Higher scores suggest satisfaction with physical attractiveness and body image

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI; Beiling et al., 1998)

- 7-item measure of trait anxiety

Cultural Value Measures

Revised Self-Construal Scale (SCS; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997)

- 30 item measure on a 7 point scale
- Two 15-item subscales: Independent & Interdependent
- Measure has been shown to be adequately reliable and valid (Moscovitch, Hofmann, & Litz, 2005)

Individualism/Collectivism Scale (ICS; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998)

- 16 item measure of individualism and collectivism
- 4 subscales: Vertical/Horizontal Individualism, Vertical/Horizontal Collectivism
- Has shown good convergent/discriminant validity

Results

Table 1. Zero-order correlations: The relationship between cultural values, social anxiety, trait anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction

	Social Anxiety	Depression	Trait Anxiety	Appear Eval	Body Area Sat
Independence	-.46**	-.11	-.25**	.25**	.21*
Interdependence	.22*	.10	.08	-.15	-.15
Horizontal Individualism	.03	.17*	.04	.17*	.15
Vertical Individualism	.10	.09	.18*	-.01	-.10
Horizontal Collectivism	-.14	-.18*	-.22**	.06	.01
Vertical Collectivism	.16*	.02	.01	-.16*	-.10

Note. Appear Eval = Appearance Evaluation; Body Area Sat = Body Area Satisfaction; Items in bold are in support of hypothesis; items in red are against hypothesis; * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .001$

Results

Multiple Regression Analyses:

- Both independence (part $r = -.39$, $p < .001$) and interdependence (part $r = .17$, $p = .043$) predicted social interaction anxiety over and above trait anxiety (part $r = .42$, $p < .001$)
- Independence (part $r = .19$, $p = .028$) predicted appearance evaluation over and above trait anxiety (part $r = -.24$, $p = .004$)
- Horizontal individualism (part $r = .17$, $p = .045$) and vertical collectivism (part $r = -.19$, $p = .025$) predicted appearance evaluation over and above depression (part $r = -.07$, $p = .417$) and trait anxiety (part $r = -.16$, $p = .058$)

Discussion

- Independent self-construal may be important in protecting against psychopathology, such as social anxiety and body image disorders
- Interdependent self-construal and vertical collectivism may contribute to the development of social anxiety and body image disorders
- Results for depression were *against* hypothesis: Higher levels of horizontal individualism was related to higher levels of depression and vice versa for horizontal collectivism
 - Triandis & Gelfand (1998) have suggested that it is *vertical* individualism that is consistent with American culture
- Trait anxiety results were also against hypothesis
 - It may be that depression and trait anxiety operate differently than social anxiety and body image disorders
- Future research should explore why these differences exist
- Additionally, future research should explore how these results change in an interdependent/collectivist culture