THE ONE; THE MANY ...

Triandis, H., Bontempo, R., Villareal, M., Asai, M., & Lucca, N. (1988). Individualism and collectivism: Cross-cultural perspectives on self-ingroup relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54*, 323-338.

If one characteristic of human nature might be agreed upon by virtually all psychologists, it is that *behavior never occurs in a vacuum*. Even those who place the greatest emphasis on internal motivations, dispositional demands, and genetic drives make allowances for various external, environmental forces to enter the equation that ultimately leads to what you do and who you are. Over the past 30 to 40 years, the field of psychology has increasingly embraced the belief that one very powerful environmental influence on humans is the culture in which they live. In fact, researchers *rarely* find observable patterns of human behavior that are consistent and stable in all, or even most, cultures (see the discussion of Ekman's research on facial expressions for an extended analysis of cross-cultural consistency). This is especially true of behaviors relating to human interactions and relationships. Interpersonal attraction, sex, touching, personal space, friendship, family dynamics, parenting styles, childhood behavior expectations, courtship rituals, marriage, divorce, cooperation versus competition, crime, love, and hate are all subject to profound cultural influences. So, it is safe to say, that an individual simply cannot be understood with any degree of completeness or precision, without careful consideration of the culture in which he or she lives.

Conceptually, that's all well and good, but in practice, culture is a tough nut. Think about it. How would you go about unraveling all of the cultural factors that have combined to influence who you have become? Most cultures are way too complex to draw many valid conclusions. For example, colon cancer rates in Japan are a fraction of American rates. Well, Japan and the United States are diverse cultures, so what cultural factors might account for this difference? Differences in amount of fish consumed? Amount of rice? Amount of alcohol? What about differences in stress levels and the pace of life? Perhaps differences in religious practices of the two countries have effects on health? Could variations in the support of family relations and friendships contribute to health and wellness? Or, as is more likely, does the answer lie in a combination of two or three or all of these factors plus many others? The point is, if you are going to include culture in a complete understanding of human nature, you will need reliable and valid ways of defining cultural differences. This is where Harry Triandis enters psychology's recent history.

Since the 1960s, and throughout his career in the psychology department at the University of Chicago, Urbana-Champaign, Triandis has worked to develop and refine fundamental attributes of cultures and their members that allow them to be differentiated and studied in meaningful ways. This article, published in 1988, explains and demonstrates what is probably his most influential contribution to cross-cultural psychology, the delineation of *individualistic* versus *collectivist* cultures. Today, this dimension of fundamental cultural variation forms the basis for literally hundreds of studies each year in psychology, sociology, and several other fields. In this article, Triandis proposes that the degree to which a particular culture can be defined as individualistic or collectivist determines the behavior and personalities of its members in complex and pervasive ways.

In very basic terms, a collectivist culture is one in which the individual's needs, desires, and outcomes, are *secondary* to the needs, desires, and goals of the larger group to which the individual belongs, called an *ingroup*. Ingroups may include a family, a tribe, a village, a professional organization, or even an entire country depending on the situation. In these cultures a great deal of the behavior of individuals is motivated by what is good for the larger group as a whole, rather than that which provides maximum personal achievement for the individual. The ingroups to which people belong tend to remain stable over time, and individual commitment to the group is often extremely high even when a person's role in the group becomes difficult or unpleasant for him or her. Individuals look to their ingroup to help meet their emotional, psychological, and practical needs.

Individualistic cultures, on the other hand, place a higher value on the welfare and accomplishments of the individual than on the needs and goals of the larger ingroups. In these cultures, the influence of the ingroup on a member's individual behavior is likely to be small. Individuals feel less emotional attachment to the group and are willing to leave an ingroup if it becomes too demanding and join or form a new ingroup. Because of this minimal commitment of individuals to groups in individualistic cultures, it is quite common for a person to assume membership in numerous ingroups, while no single group exerts more than a little influence on his or her behavior. In this article, Triandis, and his associates from several diverse cultures, describe a multitude of distinguishing characteristics of collectivist and individualistic cultures. These are summarized in Table l. Such distinctions are, of course, broad generalizations and there are always exceptions in any culture whether individualistic or collectivist.

In general, according to Triandis, individualistic cultures tend to be in Northern and Western Europe and in those countries that have been influenced by Northern Europeans historically. In addition, highly

individualistic cultures appear to share several characteristics: possessing a frontier, large numbers of immigrants, and rapid social and geographical mobility, "all of which tend to make the control of ingroups less certain. The high levels of individualism ... in the United States, Australia, and Canada are consistent with this point" (p. 324). Most other regions of the world, he maintains, are collectivistic cultures.

THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS

Triandis states at the beginning of this article:

> Culture is a fuzzy construct. If we are to understand the way culture relates to social psychological phenomena, we must analyze it by determining dimensions of cultural variation. One of the most promising such dimensions is individualism-collectivism. (p. 323)

So, his assumption underlying this and many of his studies and publications is that when cultures are defined and interpreted according to the individualism-collectivism model, we can explain a large portion of the variation we see in human behavior, social interaction, and personality. In this article, Triandis was attempting to summarize the extensive potential uses of his theory (see Table 1) and to report on three scientific studies he undertook to test and demonstrate his individualism-collectivism theory.

TABLE 1 Differences between Collectivist and Individualistic Cultures

COLLECTIVIST CULTURES	INDIVIDUALISTIC CULTURES
• Sacrifice: emphasize personal goals over ingroup goals	• Hedonism: focus on personally satisfying goals over ingroup goals
• Interpret self as extension of group	• Interpret self as distinct from group
• Concern for group is paramount	• Self-reliance is paramount
• Rewards for achievement of group	• Rewards for personal achievement
• Less personal and cultural affluence	• Greater personal and cultural affluence
• Greater conformity to clear group norms	• Less conformity to group norms
• Greater value on love, status, and service	• Greater value on money and possessions
• Greater cooperation with in group, but less with outgroup members	• Greater cooperation with members of ingroup and members of various outgroups
• Higher value on "vertical relationships" (child-parent, employer-employee)	• Higher value on "horizontal relationships" (friend-friend, husband-wife)
• Parenting through frequent consultation and intrusion into child's private life	• Parenting through detachment, independence, and privacy for the child
• More people oriented in reaching goals	• More task oriented in reaching goals
• Prefer to hide interpersonal conflicts	• Prefer to confront interpersonal conflicts (leading to more lawsuits)
• Many individual obligations to the ingroup, but high level of social support, resources, and security in return	• Many individual rights with few obligations to the group, but less support, resources, and security from the group in return
• Fewer friends, but deeper, lifelong friendships with many obligations	• Make friends easily, but friends are less intimate acquaintances
• Few ingroups and everyone else is perceived as one large outgroup	• Many ingroups, but less perception of all others as outgroup members
• Great harmony within groups, but potential for major conflict with members of outgroups	• Ingroups tend to be larger and interpersonal conflicts more likely to occur within the ingroup
• Shame (external) used more as punishment	• Guilt (internal) used more as punishment
• Slower economic development and industrialization	• Faster economic development and industrialization
• Less social pathology (crime, suicide, child abuse, domestic violence, mental illness)	• Greater levels of all categories of social pathology
• Less illness	• Higher illness rates
• Happier marriages; less divorce	• Less happy marriages; higher divorce rates
• Less competition	• More competition
• Focus on family group rather than larger public good	• Greater concern for greater public good

Summarized from Triandis, 1988, pp. 323–335.

METHOD

As mentioned earlier, this article reported on three separate studies. The first study employed only American participants and was designed to define the concept of individualism more clearly as it applies to the United States. The second study's goal was to begin to compare an individualistic culture, the United States, with cultures assumed to be fundamentally collectivist, specifically Japan and Puerto Rico. In Study 2, the focus was on comparing the relationships of individuals to their ingroups in the two types of cultures. The third study was undertaken to test the hypothesis that members of collectivist cultures perceive that they receive better social support and enjoy more consistently satisfying relationships with others, whereas those in individualistic cultures report that they are often lonely. All the studies gathered data from participants through the use of questionnaires. Each study and its findings will be summarized briefly here.

Study 1

Participants in Study 1 were 300 undergraduate psychology students at the University of Chicago where Triandis is a professor of psychology. Each student was given a questionnaire consisting of 158 items structured to measure his or her tendency toward collectivist versus individualistic behaviors and beliefs. Agreement with a statement such as, "Only those who depend on themselves get ahead in life," represented an individualistic stance, while support for an item such as, "When my colleagues tell me personal things about themselves, we are drawn closer together," was evidence for a more collectivist perspective. Also included in the questionnaire were five scenarios that placed subjects in hypothetical social situations and asked them to predict their behavior. The example provided in the article was for the subjects to imagine they wanted to go on a long trip that various ingroups opposed. The participants were asked how likely they were to consider the opinions and wishes of parents, spouses, close relations, close friends, acquaintances, neighbors, and coworkers in deciding whether to take the trip.

When the response data were analyzed, nearly 50% of the variation in the participants' responses could be explained by three factors: "self-reliance," "competition," and "distance from ingroups." Only 14% of the variation was explained by the factor called "concern for ingroup." More specifically, Triandis summed up the results of Study 1 as follows:

> These data suggest that U.S. [individualism] is a multifaceted concept. The ingredients includc more concern for one's own goals than the in group goals, less attention to the views of ingroups, self-reliance combined with competition, detachment from ingroups, deciding on onc's own rather than asking for the views of others, and less general concern for the ingroup. (p. 331)

He also suggested that the items comprising the questionnaire and the scenarios are effective ways to measure the degree of individualism in one individualistic culture, the United States, but that this scale mayor may not produce equally valid results in other cultural settings.

Study 2

The question asked in this study was, "Do people in collectivist cultures indicate more willingness to subordinate their personal needs to the needs of the group?" The participants were 91 University of Chicago students, 97 Puerto Rican and 150 Japanese university students, and 106 older Japanese individuals. A 144-item questionnaire designed to measure collectivist characteristics was translated into Spanish and Japanese and completed by all subjects. Items from the scale had been shown in previous research to tap into three collectivist related tendencies: "concern for ingroup," "closeness of self to ingroup," and "subordination of own goals to ingroup goals."

In this study, the findings were a fascinating mixed bag with some results supporting the individualistic-collectivist theory and others seeming to refute it. For example, the Japanese students were significantly more concerned with the views of coworkers and friends than were the Illinois students, but this difference was not observed for the Puerto Rican students. Also, the Japanese subjects expressed feeling personally honored when their ingroups are honored, but they paid attention to the views of and sacrifice their personal goals to only *some* ingroups in their lives, but not others. And, while conformity is a common attribute of collectivist cultures, very little conformity was found for the Japanese participants-less, in fact, than the American students. One finding suggested that as collectivist cultures become more affluent and westernized, they may undergo a shift to greater individualism. As evidence of this, the older Japanese participants perceived themselves to be more similar to their ingroups than did the Japanese university students.

So, you might be asking, how do the findings of the second study figure into Triandis's theory? Triandis interpreted them as a warning that conclusions about collectivist and individualistic cultures should not be overly sweeping and must be carefully applied to selective, specific behaviors, situations, and cultures. He stated this idea as follows:

> The data of this study tell us to restrict and sharpen our definition of collectivism ... that we must consider each domain of social behavior separately, and collectivism, defined as subordination to the ingroup's norms, needs, views, and emotional closeness to ingroups is very specific to ingroup and to domain .... Collectivism takes different forms ... that are specific to each culture. (p. 334)

Study 3

The third study reported attempted to do exactly what Triandis suggested in the above quote: restrict and sharpen the research focus. This study extended previous findings that collectivist societies provide high levels of social support to their members, while those in individualistic cultures tend to experience greater loneliness. Here a 72-item collectivist-individualist questionnaire was completed by 100 subjects, equally divided by sex, at the University of Chicago and at the University of Puerto Rico. Participants also filled out questionnaires measuring their perceived degree of social support and perceived amount of loneliness.

The results of this study clearly indicated that collectivism correlated positively with social support, meaning, as the degree of collectivism increased, the level of social support also increased. Moreover, collectivism was negatively associated with loneliness, implying that as the effect of collectivism increased, participants' perceived level of loneliness diminished. Finally, as further evidence for Triandis's model, the most important factor in this study for the American students (accounting for the most variance) was "self-reliance with competition," while the most influential factor for the Puerto Ricans was "affiliation" (interacting with others). These results are exactly what you would expect from the individualistic-collectivist theory.

DISCUSSION

Overall, Triandis explained, the studies described in this article supported, but also modified his definitions of collectivism and individualism. Looking back at the characteristics of each type of culture in Table 1, the picture that emerges is one of opposition. That is, individualistic and collectivist cultures appear to be nearly exact opposites of each other. This article, however, seems to demonstrate that these cultural descriptions fall at two ends of a continuum, and a particular society will be best described as falling somewhere in between the two but usually clearly closer to one end than the other. In addition, within any single culture will be found specific individuals, groups, subcultures, and situations that may violate that culture's overall placement on the continuum by fitting better toward the opposite end. A graphical, hypothetical representation of this interpretation is shown in Figure 1. "In short," Triandis states, 'The empirical studies suggest that we need to consider individualism and collectivism as multidimensional constructs ... [each of which] depends very much on which ingroup is present, in what context, and what behavior was studied" (p. 336).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINDINGS AND RELATED RESEARCH

Over a relatively short period of historical time, Triandis's work has found its way into the fundamental core of how psychologists view human behavior. You would be hard pressed, for example, to open any recent text in most subfields of psychology—introductory psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology, personality psychology, human sexuality, abnormal psychology, cognitive psychology, to name a few—without finding multiple references to this and many other of his individualism-collectivism studies. Arguably, the individualistic-collectivistic cultural dimension, as articulated, clarified, and refined by Triandis, is the most reliable, valid, and influential factor seen in current studies on the role culture plays in determining the personalities and social behaviors of humans. Moreover, the range of research areas to which this dimension has been applied is remarkably broad. Here are just two examples.

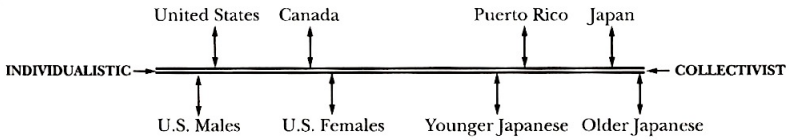

FIGURE 1 Collectivist–individualistic cultural continuum (culture and subculture placements approximate).

In the article that is the subject of this discussion, Triandis offers evidence that the psychosocial concepts of collectivism and individualism may playa significant part in the physical health of the members of a given culture. A case in point relates to coronary heart disease. In general, heart attack rates tend to be lower in collectivist societies than in individualistic ones. Triandis suggests that unpleasant and stressful life events often related to heart disease are more common in individualistic cultures where pressures are intense on solitary individuals to compete and achieve on their own. Along with these negative life events, individualistic social structures inherently offer less social cohesion and social support which have been clearly demonstrated to reduce the effects of stress on health. Of course, there are many factors that might account for cultural differences in heart attack rates or any other disease as discussed at the beginning of this reading. However, numerous studies have shown that members of collectivist cultures who move to countries that are individualistic become increasingly prone to various illnesses including heart disease.

Perhaps, even more convincing, are studies of two different subgroups within the same culture. As Triandis points out (p. 327), one study of 3,000 Japanese Americans compared those who had acculturated, that is, had adapted their lifestyle and attitudes to American norms, to those who still maintained a traditional Japanese way of life *within* the United States. Heart attack rates among the acculturated subjects were *five times greater* than among the nonacculturated participants even when cholesterol levels, exercise, cigarette smoking, and weight were statistically equalized for the two groups.

Of course, you would expect that the collectivism-individualism dimension would affect how children are raised in a particular culture and, indeed, it does. Parents in collectivist societies place a great deal of emphasis on developing the child's "collective self' characterized by conformity to group norms, obedience to those in authority within the group, and reliability or consistency of behavior over time and across situations. Children are rewarded in both overt and subtle ways for behavior patterns and attitudes that support and correspond to the goals of the ingroup (Triandis, 1989). In this context, refusing to do something that the group expects of you, just because you don't enjoy doing it, is unacceptable and rarely seen. Yet in highly individualistic cultures, such as the United States, such refusal is a very common response and is often valued and respected! That is because parenting practices in individualistic cultures emphasize development of the child's "private self." This focus means that children are rewarded for behaviors and attitudes leading to self-reliance, independence, self-knowledge, and reaching their maximum potential as an individual. Another way to look at this distinction is that in individualistic cultures rebellion (within certain socially acceptable limits) and an independent streak are seen as personality *assets*, whereas in collectivist societies they are seen as *liabilities*. The messages from the culture to the children, via the parents, about these assets or liabilities are loud and clear and exert a potent influence upon the kids' development into adulthood.

RECENT APPLICATIONS

Between 2000 and mid-2003, this single article by Triandis was cited in over 140 studies from a wide variety of scientific fields. One article applied Triandis's ideas to a study about the attitudes of college football fans in two cultures (Snibbe et al., 2003). Students at important football games in the United States (Rose Bowl) and in Japan (Flash Bowl) were asked to rate their own and their opponent's universities and students before and after the big game. In both games, the university with the better academic reputation lost the game. However, the reactions of the students in the two cultures were markedly different: "American students from both universities evaluated their in-groups more positively than out-groups on all measures before and after the game. In contrast, Japanese students' ratings offered *no evidence* of in-group bias .... Instead, Japanese students' ratings reflected each universities' statuses in the larger society and the students' status in the immediate situation" (p. 581).

Another study employed Triandis's model to examine loneliness across cultures (Rokach et al., 2002). Over 1,000 participants from North America and Spain completed questionnaires about the various causes of their loneliness, including personal inadequacies, developmental difficulties, unfulfilling intimate relationships, relocations and separations, and feeling marginalized by society. "Results indicated that cultural background indeed affects the causes of loneliness. North Americans scored higher on *all five factors*" (p. 70, emphasis added).

Finally, one study highlighted a very important aspect of Triandis's work. When collectivist and individualistic cultures are studied and compared, this is not, by any means, limited to comparisons *between* countries. Many countries contain *within* their borders pockets of widely varying levels of collectivism and individualism. Nowhere on earth is this more true than in the United States. An engaging study by Vandello and Cohen (1999) charted the United States on the basis of Triandis's model. Before you read this, stop and think for a moment about which states you would predict to find the strongest collectivist and individualistic tendencies. The researchers reported that states in the Deep South were most collectivist and Plains and Rocky Mountain states were highest on individualism. However, even within these divergent areas, smaller, subcultural groups of individualistic and collectivist Americans may be found. So, in a sense, Triandis has provided a new lens through which to view a vast country whose richness of diversity may be described less as a "melting pot," and more as an intricate patch-work quilt.

Rokach, A., Orzeck, T., Moya, M., & Exposido, F. (2002). Causes of loneliness in North America and Spain. *European Psychologist, 7*, 70-79.

Snibbe, A., Kitayama, S., Markus, H., & Suzuki, T. (2003). They saw a game: A Japanese and American (football) field study *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 34*,581-595.

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Vandello, J., & Cohen, D. (1999). Patterns of individualism and collectivism across the United States. *Journal of Emonality and Social Psychology, 77*(2), 279-292.