A Theory of Individualism and Collectivism

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of individualism and collectivism theory and research is reviewed. The antecedents of collectivism-individualism can be found in the ecology, family structure, wealth distribution, demography, history, cultural diffusion, and situational conditions. The consequences of collectivism-individualism include differences in attention, attribution, cognition, emotion, motivation, self-definitions, values, language use, and communication, as well as other kinds of social and organizational behavior. Applications of individualism and collectivism include improvements in conflict resolution, health, international relations, and cross-cultural training.

THE EVOLUTION OF INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM THEORY AND RESEARCH

Culture is to society what memory is to individuals (Kluckhohn, 1954). It consists of what “has worked” in the experience of a group of people so it was worth transmitting to peers and descendents. Another definition of culture was provided by anthropologist Redfield (1941): “Culture is shared understandings made manifest in act and artifact.” In short, culture is shared behavior and shared human-made aspects of the society. Thus, it includes “practices” (the way things are done here) and “values” (the way things should be done). These older definitions of culture focus on what is outside the person (e.g., do people drive to the right or left). The more recent definitions also stress what is inside the person (e.g., is the self independent or interdependent of in-groups). Almost every aspect of psychological functioning is influenced, to some extent, by culture. Thus, it is best to view culture and psychology as making each other up (Cole, 1996; Shweder, 1990).

Cultures differ in a myriad of ways. By far, the most well-researched dimension of culture to date is individualism and collectivism.
Within the twentieth century, there has been extensive discussion of the constructs in sociology (e.g., Durkheim, 1933; Parsons, 1949; Riesman et al., 1961), anthropology (Kluckhohn, 1956; Mead, 1967; Redfield, 1956), and psychology (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1995). Across each of these disciplines, scholars have been concerned with the nature of the relationship between the individual and the group. This theme has also been referred to as self-emphasis and collectivity (Parsons, 1949), Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft (Toennies, 1957), mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1933), individualism and collaterality (Kluckhohn and Strodbeck, 1961), agency and community (Bakan, 1996), individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980), autonomy and conservation (Schwartz, 1990), and independence and interdependence (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Although there are subtle differences in meanings of these terms, they all relate to a theme which contrasts the extent to which people are autonomous individuals or embedded in their groups (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1989).

Regardless of their labels, these constructs have been at the cornerstone of theory and research in culture and psychology. In this chapter, we trace the evolution of theory and research on individualism and collectivism, discussing their role first in ancient legal and religious institutions, in later political theory in the nineteenth century, and in empirical work in psychology in the mid and latter twentieth century. Although individualism—collectivism cannot be described as unified theory per se, research over the last four decades has illuminated the defining features of the constructs, their ecological, situational, and dispositional antecedents, and a wide range of consequences that they have for social psychological and organizational phenomena. To be sure, our review in this chapter is necessarily selective, as research in this area is extensive and warrants a volume into itself. After describing the evolution of theory and research on the constructs, we provide an evaluation of the constructs and discuss practical implications that have been derived from this collective research effort.

HISTORY OF THE INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM CONSTRUCTS: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM LAW, RELIGION, AND PHILOSOPHY

Although individualism and collectivism have been by now well researched in psychology, discussions of the constructs can be found in ancient legal writings, religious texts, and moral-political philosophies. The contrasts between the individualism and collectivism constructs were first found in ancient legal structures in the Middle East in the laws of Hammurabi. In particular, the King of Babylonia (1792–1750 BC) is credited with establishing some of the world’s first written laws, wherein universal codes of behaviors supplanted a focus on the rights of individuals. At the time, the codes replaced the more individualistic notion of tit-for-tat retaliation (revenge) with a system of monetary fines that were applied universally. More generally, the code of Hammurabi identified the need for individuals to maintain positive relations with others, lest they face heavy sanctions. The recognition of individuals as being interdependent and having duties and obligations to other group members are defining attributes of the cultural construct that we now call collectivism (Triandis, 1995). Notably, the Code of Hammurabi was not the only legal expression of the collectivist cultural construct in the ancient Middle East. Codes of conduct that centered on creating group standards of behavior were also part of the law of the Hebrews in the book of the Law of Moses (Kagan, 1966), the purpose of which was also to establish standards for individual behavior to protect the group, rather than to allow individual preferences to determine what is right and what is wrong (Durant, 1935).
As cultures later developed, the more individualistic notion of rational principles and individual rights became more prevalent within legal systems. The practice of presenting individual cases before formally appointed judges was prevalent in Athens and in Rome. For example, in the Law of Cincius (204 BC), legal representation was viewed as the most effective way to present the facts of a particular case. Importantly, this system was seen as superior to interpretations of right and wrong based on codes of normative behavior alone, the latter of which was common in earlier centuries and was more akin with collectivism.

The constructs of individualism and collectivism were also manifested in religious institutions throughout the centuries. In the West, concerns with group identity and ingroup–outgroup distinctions, both attributes of collectivism, can be seen in religious philosophies and practices. The ancient Hebrews' religion was based on the strong ethnic identity of the Jews (Durant, 1935), and was predicated on the belief that the group was the "chosen one" of God, as compared with other groups. Other religious groups also viewed their religions as a form of group identity as contrasted to other groups. For example, in the Koran of the Moslems it is stated—"Believers, take neither the Jews nor the Christians for your friends" (Dawood, 1956). Likewise, within the Christian tradition, for individuals to be saved they had to embrace the Christian God as the only true God and reject other conceptions of God that were found in other religions.

Religions in the East were much more focused on duties and obligations within a hierarchical structure, which is associated with some forms of modern-day collectivism. In India, and in ancient Japan, caste systems were also developed, and group identity was even further reinforced within a legal system that held entire families responsible for individual members' actions (Durant, 1935). These notions of group accountability predated empirical work in psychology which centuries later has indeed shown that East Asians hold many people, particularly groups and their leaders, accountable for a given action (Chiu and Hong, 1992; Chiu et al., 2000; Menon et al., 1999; Zemba et al., 2006).

Likewise, in China, Confucian philosophy emphasized the importance of group identity, conformity, and long-term relationships. Confucius also stressed the importance of obligations that individuals have within their family, within the nation, and within the world at large. For example, Confucian philosophy dictates that individuals are required to respect their fathers and elder brothers so as to maintain family harmony. This prepared the individual to respect the structures of the state, which was needed to maintain national harmony. Throughout his writings, Confucius emphasized the importance of subjugating personal wants and desires for the greater good of the group (Streep, 1995). This philosophy, while dating back 4,000 years, is still prevalent in much of Eastern Asia today.

The nature of the relationship of the individual to the state was also at the center of much philosophical thought and debate in the late eighteenth century. Conceptions of individualism were associated with liberalism and included the ideas of maximum freedom of the individual, voluntary groups that individuals can join or leave, and equal participation of individuals in group activities (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1953, Vol. 12: 256a). As a moral–political philosophy, liberalism placed a great importance on the freedom of individuals to use reason to make personal choices, and to have rights to protect these freedoms (Kim, 1994). Across societies, the importance of the freedom of individuals was also reflected in the American Revolution (all humans are created equal, and pursuit of happiness is their fundamental right) and the French Revolution (liberty, equality, fraternity).

At the same time, other philosophers, most notably Jean Jacques Rousseau, emphasized the importance of the collective over the individual. In the Social Contract (1762), Rousseau argued that the individual is only
free by submitting to the general will. The general will was conceived as the common core of opinion that remains after private wills cancel each other out. Rousseau argued that the general will, which can be ascertained by majority voting, is “always right and tends to the public advantage” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1953, Vol. 12: 256a).

Later, within the nineteenth century, the French intellectual Alexis de Tocqueville elaborated upon the concept of individualism based on his travels throughout the United States (Bellah et al., 1985). De Tocqueville used the term “individualism” in connection with democracy in American society and contrasted the American social structure with those found in the aristocratic European tradition. Later, political philosophers such as Dewey (1930), Dumont (1986), and Kateb (1992) also discussed ideas related to individualism. Dewey (1930) distinguished what he referred to as “old” individualism, which included the liberation from legal and religious restrictions, from the “new” individualism, which focused on self-cultivation. Dumont (1986) argued that individualism was a consequence of Protestantism (i.e., humans do not have to go to church to communicate with God), political developments (emphasis on equality and liberty), and economic developments (e.g., affluence).

In all, the constructs of individualism and collectivism received much theoretical attention in legal, religious, and philosophical writings for centuries. It wasn’t until the 1960s, however, that they began to receive systematic empirical attention in the field of psychology.

INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PSYCHOLOGISTS ACROSS FOUR DECADES

The development of theory and research on individualism and collectivism in psychology truly represents a collective effort of many psychologists. Rather than being primarily driven by one source of influence, there have been numerous people who have made important contributions. As the ancient Hindu saying dictates, “Truth is one; it has many names”; so too is the case in terms of individualism and collectivism theory and research. In what follows we trace the evolution of theories and research and the serendipity of collaborations and discoveries that have shaped and continue to shape our knowledge of the constructs.

On the origins of individualism–collectivism theory and research: the analysis of subjective culture

Arguably the first empirical evidence for individualism and collectivism in psychology can be traced to a large multinational project known as the Analysis of Subjective Culture (Triandis, 1972). The concept of culture, at that time, was reflected in the work of three anthropologists: Clyde Kluckhohn (1954), Melvin Herskovits (1955), and Ralph Redfield (1941). Herskovits had defined culture as the human-made part of the environment. The human-made part of the environment consists of physical (e.g., tools, bridges, educational systems, religious institutions), as well as subjective elements (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, norms, values). Following this lead, in the Analysis of Subjective Culture (Triandis, 1972) set out to develop a theory and psychological methods to study “subjective culture.” At the time, there were no psychological methods available and no overarching framework that examined the psychological underpinnings of culture.

The project that resulted in this publication, like many others described in this book, was the result of serendipitous events. In 1963, the Chief of Naval Operations asked the Office of Naval Research (ONR) to organize and support research so to better prepare Naval officers to manage cultural differences. ONR came to the psychology
department of the University of Illinois and asked us if it could undertake this project. Fred Fiedler put together a team that consisted of Charles Osgood, Larry Stolurow, and Harry Triandis. Triandis already had some cross-cultural experience, so it was natural that he was given the job of analyzing “culture” so that it could be converted into computer-supported teaching experiences by Stolurow, and communicated to students (Osgood), who would be organized into teams whose leadership would be studied by Fiedler.

Triandis was already familiar with culture-specific (emic) and culture-general (etic) constructs (Triandis, 1964), so he aimed at developing methods that could include some etic elements, so that cultures could be compared, as well as emic elements from each culture so that one could understand each culture from the “inside.” Many paper-and-pencil methods were developed which tapped different elements of “subjective culture” including, categorizations, associations, attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and norms, among others. What became clear in the analysis was that coherent themes cut across these different elements of subjective culture. The theme of individualism and collectivism began to emerge from psychological data for the first time across numerous countries, including the US, Greece, India, and Japan.

**Elements of subjective culture**

The basic element for the study of culture is categorization. What stimuli are treated as equivalent by members of the culture? Members of each culture have unique ways of categorizing experience. For example, who is a member of my ingroup? In some cultures it is those who were born in the same place, or belonged to the same tribe, race, social class, religion, or who were blood relatives. In other cultures it is people who think like I do.” The two categories might overlap, but they are not the same. Thus, there are both etic (common elements: my group) and emic elements (culture-specific elements: specific groups) defining this category. Later work (Brewer and Yuki, 2007) distinguished two kinds of definitions of ingroup: a category-based identity, such as “I am an American” and a relationship-based identity. In all, by studying how people categorize experience we learn much about their culture.

Members of each culture have unique ways of associating one category with another. For example, is “socialism” referring to a political party, an ideology, or both? Are “fathers” in this culture assumed to be severe or lenient, with respect to children of different ages? In addition, cultures differ in the kinds of perceived antecedent-consequent relationships that people use (e.g., if you have “hard work” then you have “progress”; if you have “progress” then you have “health”), attitudes (e.g., is “socialism” good or bad, would members of the culture support a socialist party?), beliefs (e.g., “socialism” results in good health; or results in an impoverished society), expectations (e.g., if there is socialism then there is poverty), ideals (e.g., widows should not be passionate), memories (e.g., I remember the names of each of my cows), norms (e.g., members of this society give their seat to old people), role perceptions (e.g., the mother–son role is warmer than the father–son role in this culture), stereotypes (e.g., lower class people are not intelligent), tasks (e.g., to make this tool one has to first get some redwood), values (e.g., “security” is very important). Later work by Triandis (1977, 1980) resulted in a model linking behavioral intentions (e.g., I intend to do X) and behavior (X), which included also norms (most people I respect think I should do X), self-definitions (e.g., I am the kind of person who does X), habits (e.g., I frequently do X), and facilitating conditions (e.g., I am highly aroused to do X, I am capable of doing X; the situation calls for me to do X) The theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) was combined with elements of the 1980 model to form the unified theory of behavior (Fishbein et al., 2001). In addition, some “probes” (Triandis, 1972) into subjective culture were carried out, by studying stereotypes,
antecedent-consequent relationships, which also provided clues about the values of each culture, and role perceptions.

**Cultural syndromes: interrelated elements of subjective culture**

Most importantly, Triandis (1972) examined if the information obtained from each of the “probes” into culture, by the various methods, hangs together. Indeed, a comparison of multiple measures across the US and Greece, showed that the data from each of the methods can be summarized by using certain themes. Specifically, the Greek data indicated much more contrast between behaviors toward the ingroup and outgroup members in Greece than in the US. This turned out to be a major characteristic of collectivist cultures (Triandis, 1995). The traditional Greeks (of the 1960s, when the data were collected) defined their universe in terms of the triumphs of their ingroup over their outgroups, while for Americans this worldview was of little or no importance. In Greece, relationships with authorities and social relations in general reflected the ingroup–outgroup relationships where there is much association and intimacy and low hostility within ingroups whereas in the US, participants express some hostility within ingroups and emotional distance from ingroup members. An ingroup in Greece was defined as a group of individuals about whose welfare a person is concerned, with whom the person is willing to cooperate without demanding equitable returns, and separation from whom leads to anxiety.

Foreshadowing the large literature on culture and self, Triandis (1972) found that Greek self-definition depended on the way ingroup members saw the person, thus individuals’ worth was defined by the group. By contrast, American self-definition depended on the way individuals saw themselves. Consistent with the collectivist–individualist contrast, the concept MYSELF was rated (on semantic differential scales) “stronger” by Americans than by Greeks, but the concept MY RELATIVES was rated stronger by Greeks than by Americans. Greeks also perceived behaviors in context to a greater extent than did Americans, an attribute that later proved to be a key characteristic of collectivist cultures. For example, CHEATING was completely unacceptable for the Greeks when the target was an ingroup member, but was perfectly okay if the target was an outgroup member.

**Ecocultural framework of dimensions of culture**

Another contribution of the Analysis of Subjective Culture was that it placed the thematic elements of subjective culture into a larger ecological and historical framework. The theoretical framework that was developed included distal antecedents (e.g., climate) and historical events (e.g., wars), proximal antecedents (e.g., occupations, language used, religion), and immediate antecedents of action (which included all the elements listed in the following paragraphs), which result in patterns of action. For example, Greece is cut up into small segments, because of the numerous mountains and islands, and that results in ingroups that are linked to place. The 350-year Ottoman occupation required knowing who could be trusted (i.e., who was ingroup). Furthermore, competition for scarce resources made it difficult to be cooperative with outgroups. The framework offered other ecological antecedents of subjective culture. For example, when resources are abundant there is more individualism. Cultures that are relatively isolated from other cultures, and in which making a living requires people to work together very frequently are likely to be more collectivistic. Climate is also an important factor in shaping subjective culture. For example, self-expression is higher in wealthy countries with harsh climates (cold or hot) than in countries with temperate climates, whereas self-expression is lower in poor...
countries with harsh climates than in poor countries in temperate climates (Van de Vliert, 2007). In all, the Analysis of Subjective Culture was the first systematic study that illustrated cross-cultural differences in the emphasis on individuals versus groups, and began to trace the ecological and historical correlates of the constructs. As reviewed below, this became a central focus in later work in cross-cultural social psychology.

**Development of the individualism–collectivism constructs: the 1980s**

At the same time as Triandis was finalizing the Analysis of Subjective Culture findings, he happened to meet Geert Hofstede who was also collecting data on the constructs. It was 1971, at the Congress of the International Association of Applied Psychology, in Liege, Belgium, that Hofstede mentioned to Triandis that the dataset existed. Hofstede took Triandis to his office in Brussels and they there discussed the analysis of the dataset. A factor analysis included a factor which Hofstede named individualism–collectivism – arguably the first formal use of the terms in psychology. The factor had a strong similarity to the American–Greek dataset of Triandis (1972), and Hofstede (1980) later referred to Triandis (1972) when interpreting his findings.

In 1978, Triandis was asked to review Hofstede’s (1980) manuscript. Based on a factor analysis of the sum of all of the responses in each culture, Hofstede named one of the factors individualism versus collectivism, and defined it as follows (1980: 51):

> Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

Triandis enthusiastically endorsed the book and began a research program which examined the question: How should the collectivism-individualism contrast be defined? In the next decade, a number of studies coming from the University of Illinois sought to elucidate the meaning of the constructs. In the first study, Hui and Triandis (1986) asked a sample of anthropologists and psychologists to provide their insight into the meaning of the concepts. They emphasized the centrality of groups versus the centrality of individuals. The next set of studies sought to address the question: How should the constructs be operationalized? The first measurement was provided in Hui’s (1988) dissertation which was based on the themes that were identified in Hui and Triandis (1986), and which eventually became the INDCOL measurement of the construct (for later measures developed in this research program, see Triandis and Gelfand, 1998; Triandis et al., 1986, 1988, 1990, 1995, 1998).

Triandis and his students found general consensus, and based on their results, they developed more items to further investigate the constructs. In a series of studies, Triandis et al. (1986) examined the structure of these items at the culture level in nine countries. Their culture-level analysis revealed four factors, two of which were reflective of individualism (self-reliance with hedonism and separation from ingroups) and two of which were reflective of collectivism (family integrity and interdependence with sociability). They found Hofstede’s (1980) nation scores on individualism and collectivism were only correlated with scores on family integrity (collectivism) (r = 0.78). Triandis et al. (1993) extracted multiple universal (i.e., etic) and culture-specific (i.e., emic) independent dimensions of individualism and collectivism across cultures. Thus, unlike previous analyses, Triandis and colleagues found evidence of the multidimensionality of the constructs at the culture level, while at the same time confirming the overlap of some of the dimensions with Hofstede’s (1980) original work.

At the same time that Triandis was validating new measures of individualism and collectivism, Shalom Schwartz and his
colleagues (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz and Bilsky, 1990) were exploring universals in individualism and collectivism values. In a study of the structure of values among over 44,000 teachers and students in 54 countries, Schwartz examined the extent to which people view themselves as autonomous versus embedded in groups, reflecting what they referred to as emphasis on autonomy versus conservation.

While work by Triandis and Hofstede was largely "bottom up" (emerging from the data), Schwartz predicted a priori the nature of value dimensions, such as autonomy (individualism) and conservation (collectivism), as well as the relations among these values and other values in the circumplex (for other large scale studies of individualism–collectivism see the Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; House et al., 2004; and Smith et al., 1996; for more recent measures, see Fischer et al., 2009; Shteynberg et al., 2009; Zou et al., 2009).

**Individualism–collectivism meets social cognition research: the 1990s and beyond**

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, two papers had a profound influence on the direction of individualism–collectivism research by connecting theory and empirical work on the constructs with basic social cognition research on the self. In his *Psychological Review* paper “The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts,” Triandis (1989) set forth a theory of how different aspects of the self (private, public, collective) are sampled with different probabilities in different kinds of social environments. It was in this paper that Triandis argued that the more individualistic the culture, the more frequent the sampling of the private self and the less frequent the sampling of the collective self. By contrast, he argued that collectivism, external threat, competition with outgroups, and common fate increase the sampling of the collective self. At much the same time, a seminal paper by Markus and Kitayama (1991) also advanced key propositions linking the constructs (which they labeled independence and interdependence) to fundamental cultural differences in cognition, emotion, and motivation. The importance of these papers cannot be underestimated, as they, for the first time, situated the study of individualism and collectivism in the mainstream of social psychology. "Basic" findings on the self that were thought to be universal, whether related to self-efficacy, self-enhancement, self-verification, self-actualization, self consciousness, self-control, among others, were challenged and illustrated to be reflective of Western norms and assumptions of individualism (see Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

The influence of the social cognition movement on research on individualism and collectivism can also be seen in other scholars’ works. In a landmark study, Trafimow et al. (1991) showed that, as with other constructs that can be primed, asking people to think for a few minutes if they are similar or different from family and friends increases the probability of collectivist or individualist responses. Likewise, Hong et al. (2000) showed that bicultural individuals could be made to have collectivist or individualist mindsets depending on the primes they have received. In a seminal meta-analysis, Oyserman and Wing-sing Lee (2008) illustrated that individualism and collectivism primes have reliable and consistent effects on values, relationality, self-concept, and cognition, across different types of primes and samples. More generally, they showed that the "cognitive tools" that are brought online when collectivism is primed focus on connecting, integrating, and assimilating the figure with the ground and the self with other. By contrast, the "cognitive tools" that are brought online when individualism is primed focus on pulling apart and separating, and contrasting the figure and ground, self and other. Much work by Nisbett and his collaborators (2001) also connected individualism and collectivism research to basic thought processes as discussed below.
DEFINING ATTRIBUTES AND CORRELATES OF INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM

We began this chapter with the roots that individualism and collectivism had in the Analysis of Subjective culture. In the decades since this book was published, and through many scholarly efforts, much research has documented key defining attributes of the constructs and its antecedents and consequences, which are reviewed below.

Defining attributes

Research has illuminated a number of defining attributes of individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995):

1. In collectivistic cultures, the self is interdependent with some group versus in individualistic cultures, the self is independent of groups (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). For example, when asked to complete 20 sentences that begin with "I am...," in collectivist samples about 35 percent of the responses have "social" content (I am an uncle, I am a member of my fraternity). By contrast, only about 15 percent of the responses from individualist samples have social content. In fact, the mode of social content of 500 Illinois students was zero (Triandis et al., 1990).

2. In collectivist cultures, the goals of the group have priority over individual goals and ingroup and individual goals are usually the same; in individualistic cultures, the goals may be different, and if they are in conflict the individual's goals have priority over the goals of the group (Triandis, 1995).

3. In collectivist cultures, norms, obligations, and duties guide behavior, whereas in individualist cultures attitudes, personal needs, individual rights, and the contracts the individual has established with others are important determinants of behavior (e.g., Davidson et al., 1976).

4. In collectivist cultures, communal relationships (Mills and Clark, 1982) are most frequent, and individuals stays in unpleasant groups or relationships; in individualist cultures individuals tend to leave unsatisfactory relationships (Kim, 1994).

Antecedents of individualism and collectivism

Numerous ecological, institutional, situational, and demographic antecedents of individualism and collectivism have been advanced in the literature. As a general principle, factors that increase the need for people to rely on others and which activate common fate promote collectivism. Factors that allow individuals to separate from others promote individualism.

Ecology

Numerous cross-cultural scholars have posited that cultural differences in individualism and collectivism develop as adaptations to the ecological context (Berry, 1976). Collectivism is generally found in agricultural societies wherein conformity and obedience are crucial for survival, whereas more individualism is found among hunters and in complex (e.g., information) societies than in nomadic or agricultural societies wherein self-reliance and freedom are crucial for survival (Barry et al., 1959). An open frontier (Kitayama et al., 2006) also increases the probability of individualism given that it allows people to separate and live at a distance from other people (Triandis, 1995). Likewise, rural contexts in which there is low mobility and people need to fit into their communities are more collectivistic than urban contexts (Realo et al., 1997). In sum, when the ecology requires connection versus separation, this increases the probability of collectivism versus individualism, respectively.

Family structure

Family structures that promote embeddedness among individuals promote collectivism whereas family structures that allow separation among individuals promote individualism. Individualism is often associated with nuclear family structures, whereas collectivism is associated with extended family structures (Triandis, 1989). In a 16-culture study, Georgas et al. (2001) found that members of
individualistic cultures lived farther away from grandparents, aunts/uncles, and cousins and visited them less than members of collectivist cultures. In families with many children and therefore greater interdependence, there is a higher probability of collectivism, whereas in families with only children there is a greater probability of individualism (Falbo, 1992). Individualism at the country level is also significantly related to divorce rates (Lester, 1995).

**Distribution of wealth**

Wealth affords separation from others and has been associated with higher individualism. Hofstede (1980) found a positive correlation between individualism and wealth, with industrialized wealthy countries scoring higher on individualism than developing countries. Hofstede (1980) later addressed the issue of causality, and argued that an increase in national wealth causes an increase in individualism in a culture, and not vice versa. In this view, individualism is thought to increase as the discretionary capital that is available to people. As people become more affluent, they have more freedom to do their own thing, and accordingly “financial independence leads to social independence” (Triandis, 1994: 165).

**Situational conditions**

Situations in which common fate and the need for interdependence are made salient (Campbell, 1958) and in which there are crises and threats to the ingroup (McKelvey, 1982) increase the probability of collectivism. The more people are rewarded for group action, the more likely it is that the culture will be collectivist, whereas the more they are rewarded for individual actions the more likely it is that the culture will be individualist (Lillard, 1998). Disjunctive tasks (that can be accomplished by just one member of a group) increase individualism, whereas conjunctive tasks (that require all members of the group to contribute) increase collectivism (Breer and Locke, 1965).

As noted above, subtle situational priming also affects individualism and collectivism. When the collective self of collectivist participants is primed (by asking people to think of what they have in common with their family and friends, or by exposing participants to words like “we” or “us”; Oyserman and Wing-sing Lee, 2008) participants emit collectivist responses. Collectivist languages, like Chinese or Nepali, can also be used as primes. Samples that are exposed to themes of independence and autonomy in the media are more individualist. For example, exposure to Hollywood-type media increases individualism (McBride, 1998).

**Demographics**

In general, the lower the status of a group in a social hierarchy, the more likely it is to be collectivistic. Low status requires sharing of resources and the development of values that emphasize security, reliability, and tradition (e.g., Kohn, 1969; Triandis, 2009a). Indeed, research has shown that across many societies, the lower social classes are more collectivist than the upper classes (Kohn, 1969). Schwartz and Smith (1997) also reported that younger and more educated individuals tend to be more individualistic than older and less educated individuals across many societies. In the US, persons of color have scored higher on collectivism (defined as an orientation toward the welfare of one’s larger community) and familism (defined as an orientation toward the welfare of one’s immediate family) as compared to Caucasians (Gaines et al., 1997; but see Jones, 1997 for a contrasting analysis). With respect to gender, Kashima et al. (1995) found no difference between males and females across five countries on individualism and collectivism. Gender differences, however, were found for a separate construct: relationality (see also Gabriel and Gardner, 1999).

**Consequences of individualism and collectivism**

Individualism and collectivism have been shown to have wide-ranging consequences
for social–psychological phenomena. As a general principle, collectivism promotes cognitions, motivations, emotions, and behaviors all in the service of connecting with one’s group, while individualism promotes cognitions, motivations, emotions, and behaviors all in service of pulling apart and separating from others. Below is a summary of a number of important implications of individualism and collectivism (see Gelfand et al., 2004; Kitayama and Cohen, 2007; Triandis, 1995).^2

Focus of attention
In collectivistic cultures, relationships are the figure, and individuals are in the background; in individualistic cultures, individuals are the figure and groups are in the background.

Attributes
In collectivistic cultures, individuals tend to make external attributions (e.g., norms, roles, group pressure) concerning the determinants of behavior whereas in individualistic cultures, individuals tend to make internal attributions (e.g., attitudes, personality) (Morris and Peng, 1994). In collectivistic cultures, individuals tend to attribute success to the help received from others and failure to a lack of effort. By contrast, in individualistic cultures, individuals tend to attribute success to their own ability and failure to luck or task difficulty.

Self definition
In collectivistic cultures, individuals define the self in context and see the environment as more or less fixed and themselves as changeable, whereas individualists see themselves as more or less stable (invariant attitudes, personality, rights) and the environment as changeable (Chiu et al., 1997; Chiu and Hong, 1999). People in collectivistic cultures generally know more about others than about themselves, whereas people in individualistic cultures generally know more about themselves than about others (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). For collectivists, the self includes the achievements of the group; for individualists, the self includes the achievements of the individual.

Goals
Individuals in collectivistic cultures are motivated by others’ choices, whereas individuals in individualistic cultures are motivated when they have a personal choice (Iyengar and Lepper, 1999). Likewise, there is more self-efficacy experienced when working alone in individualistic cultures whereas there is more self-efficacy experienced when working in groups in collectivistic cultures (Earley, 1993). People in collectivistic cultures are also more prevention-focused whereas people in individualistic cultures are more promotion focused (Laiwani et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2000).

Emotions
People in collectivistic cultures tend to have more engaged emotions, such as sympathy, while people in individualistic cultures tend to have more disengaged emotions, such as pride (Kitayama et al., 2007). Collectivists express both good and bad feelings, and tend to be moderate in their expression (Mesquita and Leu, 2007).

Cognitions
The more collectivist the culture the more are individuals likely to use holistic and circular thinking and pay attention to the field, whereas the more individualist the culture the more people are likely to use linear and analytic thinking and pay attention to the object (Nisbett, 2003). People in individualist cultures tend to make more judgments based on explicit rules, while people in collectivist cultures tend to make more judgments based on the family resemblance of the various stimuli (Kitayama et al., 2007). Collectivists also tend to use dialectical thinking and are tolerant of contradiction (Peng and Nisbett, 1999).

Norms
Equality and need are emphasized in the distribution of resources among collectivists, particularly with ingroup members, and equity is emphasized among individualists (Leung, 1997). Norms for behavior are more cooperative among collectivists and more
competitive among individualists (Gelfand and Realo, 1999).

**Values**
The values of collectivists tend to emphasize family security, social order, respect for tradition, harmony, politeness (Schwartz, 1994). Loyalty to the employer and the country are also important (Engel, 1988). The values of individualists tend to emphasize being curious, broadminded, creative, and having a varied and exciting life (Schwartz, 1994). Independence and self-sufficiency are also important (Engel, 1988).

**Calamities**
In collectivistic cultures, a major calamity is ostracism; in individualistic cultures, a major calamity is dependence on others (Triandis, 1995).

**Ingroups**
Collectivists have few ingroups and relationships within them are intense. Individualists have many ingroups, and relations are superficial. In collectivistic cultures, self-sacrifice for ingroup is expected and there is cooperation within ingroups; in individualistic cultures, less willingness for self-sacrifice is expected and debate and confrontation are acceptable in ingroups. In collectivistic cultures, the ingroup is perceived as more homogeneous than outgroups, whereas in individualistic cultures, the ingroup is perceived as more heterogeneous than outgroups. In collectivistic cultures, ingroups are defined by similarity to kinship, tribe, religion, race, language, and village whereas in individualistic cultures, ingroups are defined by similarity in achieved attributes (e.g., profession). When making judgments about the trustworthiness of others, people in collectivistic contexts rely on situational signs (e.g., benevolent interactions with the other) whereas people in individualistic cultures tend to rely on dispositional signs (e.g., ability and integrity) (Branzei et al., 2007).

**Social behavior**
In collectivistic cultures, behavior is mostly a function of norms and there is a large difference when behavior is toward an ingroup versus an outgroup member. In individualistic cultures, behavior is mostly a function of attitudes and there is less of a distinction between ingroups and outgroups. In the former, people have few skills to enter new groups; in the latter people are skilled in entering and leaving groups. In the former there are communal exchanges and much intimacy. In the latter there are contractual exchanges and less intimacy.

**Perceived determinants of social behavior**
In collectivistic cultures, ingroup norms, group memberships, context, age, gender, and social relations are especially important determinants of social behavior. In individualistic cultures, beliefs, attitudes, values, and achieved roles are especially important determinants of social behavior.

**Language and communication**
Language and communication in individualistic cultures is direct and emphasizes the individual whereas it is more indirect and de-emphasizes the individual in collectivistic cultures. For example, pronouns such as “I” and “you” are widely used in individualistic cultures and are frequently dropped in collectivistic cultures (Kashima and Kashima, 1998). In individualistic cultures people use more adjectives which suggest more of a dispositional perspective wherein there is low contextual focus. In collectivist cultures they use more action verbs which suggest more of a contextual and situated focus (Zwier, 1998). The more collectivist the culture the more people are likely to communicate indirectly (paying attention to gestures, body position, tone of voice, and loudness of voice) (Holtgraves, 1997; Triandis, 1994).

**Group processes**
Individualism is associated with general resistance to teams at the individual and
group level of analysis (Kirkman and Shapiro 2001a, 2001b). Individuals in collectivistic cultures are more likely to perceive groups as "entities" which have agentic qualities and dispositions as compared with individuals in individualistic cultures (e.g., Chiu et al., 2000, Kashima et al., 2005, Morris et al., 2001). Collectivism is associated with greater conformity (Bond and Smith, 1996), cooperation (Cox et al., 1991; Eby and Dobbins, 1997; Wagner, 1995), and more organizational citizenship behaviors (i.e., prosocial behaviors) (Moorman and Blakely, 1995). Schemas for what constitutes "successful" workgroups also vary across cultures. Collectivists perceive that socioemotional behaviors are important for group success, whereas individualists perceive that high task orientation and low socioemotional behaviors are important for group success (Sanchez-Burks et al., 2000). Individuals also hold groups and organizations more accountable for failed actions in collectivistic cultures as compared to individualistic cultures (Chiu and Hong, 1992; Chiu et al., 2000; Menon et al., 1999; Zemba et al., 2006).

**Conflict and negotiation**

Individualism and collectivism affect how individuals perceive and manage conflict. Individualists perceive conflicts to be more about violations of individual rights and autonomy whereas collectivists perceive the same conflicts to be about violations of duties and obligations (Gelfand et al., 2001). Negotiators in individualistic cultures tend to be susceptible to host of competitive biases in negotiations, including self-serving biases (Gelfand et al., 2002), fixed-pie biases (Gelfand and Christakopoulou, 1999), and dispositional attribution biases as compared to negotiators in collectivistic cultures (Morris et al., 1999). Negotiators tend to share information directly (e.g., through questions about preferences) in individualistic cultures whereas they tend to share information indirectly (through offer behavior) in collectivistic cultures (e.g., Adair et al., 2001). Situational factors, such as being accountable to constituents (Gelfand and Realo, 1999) or having a high need for closure (Fu et al., 2007, Morris and Fu, 2001) amplify cultural differences in conflict and negotiation.

**Leadership**

The attributes that are perceived as important for effective leadership vary across individualistic and collectivistic societies (House et al., 2004). Collectivistic societies and organizations are more likely to endorse charismatic leadership, self-protective leadership (i.e., face-saving leader behaviors), and team-oriented leadership as compared with individualistic societies (Gelfand et al., 2004). Also, leaders' behavior is interpreted differently depending on the culture. For example, "talking behind one's subordinates back" is perceived to be negatively related to considerate leadership in the US, where it is seen as inappropriate to indirectly speak to one's employees. However, such behaviors are positively related to consideration in Japan where face saving and indirect communication are seen as important (Smith et al., 1989).

**Additional distinctions: vertical and horizontal dimensions of individualism and collectivism**

Triandis (1995) argued that there are many "species" of individualism and collectivism. One such distinction -- which was found also in the original *Analysis of Subjective Culture* -- is that individualism and collectivism can be both horizontal and vertical. In vertical cultures individuals are motivated to stand out. In horizontal cultures individuals avoid standing out (they try to blend in) (Daun, 1992). Traditional India is vertical, while Australia and Sweden are horizontal. In India individuals seek status, and figuratively they want to stand out, to be "on top of an elephant" parading the streets to the applause of an adoring population. On the other hand, in Australia tall poppies are brought down (Feather, 1994) and in Sweden people avoid standing out (Daun, 1992).
The major value of vertical individualists is achievement. Americans are offended if someone tells them that they are “average” (Weldon, 1984) which suggests considerable vertical individualism. Vertical individualism increases the probability of competition (Triandis, 1995). In vertical individualist cultures people are high in the need for power, achievement, and prestige (Daun, 1992). The major value of horizontal individualists is uniqueness (Triandis and Gelfand, 1998). Horizontal individualism increases the probability that individuals will be motivated by (a) the good, comfortable life, and (b) will seek to be unique without standing out (Inglehart, 1997). The major value of horizontal collectivists is cooperation. The Israeli kibbutz is an example of such a culture. In horizontal collectivist cultures people are high in the need for affiliation, and in modesty (Kurman, 2001, 2003). The major concern of vertical collectivists is to do their duty. Traditional cultures (e.g., Indian village) are high in this tendency. In vertical collectivists cultures people are motivated, more than in other cultures, to conform to authorities (Bond and Smith, 1996). While there are considerable cross-cultural differences on the constructs, it is also important to point out that individuals have all four of the cognitions (Triandis et al., 1998).

There is now a literature (e.g., Cho, 2001; Kurman and Srim, 2002; Nelson and Shavit, 2002; Soh and Leong, 2002) that shows that vertical collectivists are quite different from horizontal collectivists and vertical individualists are different from horizontal individualists.

Cultures may emphasize, at particular time periods, a particular syndrome more than the other syndromes. For example, Galtung (1979) divided the history of Europe into three parts: Antiquity up to the fall of the Roman Empire (476 AD), which was dominated by vertical individualism; the Middle Ages, up to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, which was characterized by vertical collectivism; and the modern period, which was characterized by vertical individualism, with the exception of Scandinavian cultures which tend to be higher on horizontal individualism (Triandis, 1995).

**Evaluation of individualism and collectivism**

Both individualism and collectivism have positive and negative effects on societies and individuals therein. There are data suggesting that divorce, delinquency, drug abuse, heart attacks, and suicide are higher in individualist than in collectivist cultures (Eckersley and Dear, 2002; Triandis et al., 1988). Eckersley, an Australian epidemiologist, argues that individualism is undesirable from the point of view of mental health. Torrey and Miller (2001) reported that the number of insane persons per 1,000 has increased steadily since the beginning of the industrial revolution in England, Ireland, Canada, and the US. The four curves that cover the 1807–1961 period (when insane people were placed in communities in all four countries, so that there is no longer any reliable measurement of this rate) are impressively steep. During this period there have been increases in both affluence (i.e., cultural complexity), and looseness. Thus, theoretically, there has been an increase in individualism. The authors hypothesize that living in cities, changes in diet, alcohol consumption, more toxins in the environment, improved medical care that does not eliminate unfit babies, infectious agents or a combination of these factors might account for the fact that the rates increased seven-fold between 1750 and the present. While there are likely different definitions of mental illness across the world, it is important to consider this work in evaluating the constructs.

On the other hand, subjective wellbeing is higher in individualist than in collectivist cultures (Diener et al., 1995). The US is thirteenth in the world on subjective wellbeing (Tov and Diener, 2007). Japan, which is
generally tighter and more collectivist than the United States, scored thirty-fifth. Individualism is also related to high life expectancy, higher satisfaction, and higher scores on the Human Development Index (see Gelfand et al., 2004).

The picture is complex and difficult to evaluate. Individualism is a desirable cultural pattern for those who want to achieve, to become distinguished; collectivism is a desirable cultural pattern for those who want to be embedded in social relationships. Longevity is higher in Japan (82) than in most of the West. “Life without disease” averages 74.5 years in Japan, 73.2 in Australia, 73.1 in France, 72.8 in Spain, 72.7 in Italy, 72.5 in Greece, 72.5 in Switzerland, and is only 70.0 in the US (The Economist, 2009). It maybe that extreme individualism is not desirable, and a culture that has both collectivist and individualist elements is ideal.

**Practical implications of individualism and collectivism**

As a major dimension of cultural variation, individualism and collectivism has much practical relevance for managing interdependence in an increasingly “flat” world. The sheer amount of intercultural contact across many areas of life is unprecedented. For example, it is estimated that over 175 million people migrated across national borders each year' and 1 in every 35 people in the world lives in a country different than their birth (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2009). Globalization has dramatically increased contact among people of different cultures, with new mergers, acquisitions, and global ventures happening on a daily basis and millions of expatriates crossing boarders every year. Pressing global concerns, such as preserving the environment, require intercultural collaboration at the international and local levels. And in a world of global threats of conflict and terrorism, understanding cultural differences can arguably be a matter of life or death. Indeed, in the recent Iraqi Study report, James Baker noted that understanding cultural differences on behavior is of the highest national priority (Baker and Hamilton, 2006).

Within this global context, it is hard to underestimate the importance of the knowledge that has been gleaned from last four decades of individualism and collectivism research. Cross-cultural differences along the individualism and collectivism divide, if not understood and managed, can have disastrous consequences across many domains of life. Within organizational contexts, a lack of understanding of cultural differences can translate into failed mergers and ventures, premature expatriate return and turnover, and organizational conflict. In the US alone, for example, more than 100,000 companies conduct business overseas, and at least one-third of American profits are derived from international business dealings (Erez, 1994); thus, understanding key cultural differences related to individualism and collectivism is a key business imperative.

The need to understand individualism and collectivism to help negotiators negotiate effectively across cultures is also painfully obvious in today’s geopolitical scene, where the source of conflict among humankind is thought to be increasingly cultural in nature (Huntington, 1996). Anecdotal examples abound of failed intercultural negotiations, many of which can be linked to basic differences in individualism and collectivism (Gelfand and Realo, 1999; Triandis, 1994). For example, during a summit in 1969, Prime Minister Sato of Japan was told by President Nixon for Japan to exercise export restraint to which he responded, “zenso shimasu” (“I will do my best”). Although Sato really meant “no,” Nixon misunderstood this to mean agreement, and when there was no implementation, Nixon denounced Sato as a liar (Cohen, 1997). Without understanding of core elements of individualism and collectivism, such as indirectness versus directness in communication, as reviewed above, intercultural negotiations are seriously compromised.
As another practical example, in the area of health, a failure to understand individualism and collectivism can put patients at serious risk. Much research has relevance of cultural factors to health behaviors such as symptom recognition and help-seeking (e.g., Fabrega, 1994; Kleinman et al., 1978; Zola, 1966). In this respect, doctors’ understanding of core cultural differences is critical in the treatment of disease.

With Lewin’s famous adage that there is nothing as practical as a good theory in mind, cross-cultural psychologists have been translating the knowledge gained over the last four decades on individualism and collectivism into training programs. As early as the Analysis of Subjective Culture, knowledge of individualism and collectivism was developed into “cultural assimilator” training programs, which are books, or computer-based cross-cultural training devices (Fiedler et al., 1971). Assimilators consist of about 100 episodes that reflect a problematic interaction between members of two cultures. For example, an episode might be that an American teacher notices that a Hispanic child does not look at her when she is talking. Under each episode, in the format of a multiple-choice test, are four or five attributions that could explain what is happening in the episode. The trainee is asked to select one of the attributions, and then receives feedback. Some of the attributions are incorrect, and when the trainee selects one of them he/she is asked to try again. When the correct attribution is selected the feedback explains the cultural difference. In the example above the cultural difference is that in the US children are expected to look at a teacher who is talking; but in Latino countries one is “insolent” if one looks directly at a high status person in the eye, and the proper behavior is to respectfully look down.

The attributions are pre-tested with samples from the two cultures, and when members of the host culture select an attribution that is rarely selected by members of the trainee’s culture, they begin to understand why the response is not “culturally” accurate.

The effect of this training is that trainees learn to make “isomorphic attributions,” that is, attributions that are more or less like the attributions that are usually made by members of the host culture in the particular situation. Trainees randomly assigned to a training and a no-training condition show some improvement. The trained feel more comfortable when they are in the host culture.

Early assimilators were developed with a pair of cultures in mind, generally with the aim of training Americans to live in other cultures (e.g., Thailand, Honduras, Japan, Venezuela). For example, the Japanese culture assimilator has 57 incidents that are divided into themes (e.g., hierarchy, face saving behaviors, harmony and emotional control, group-related behaviors, and norm-related behaviors). Typical learnings include such do’s and don’ts such as “Students do not wear jewelry to school,” “Demeaning oneself is a proper behavior,” “Newcomers give small gifts,” and “Do not criticize supervisors,” among others (Bhawuk, 2001). More recently, however, it has been found that people learn better when the episodes provide feedback organized around cultural syndromes such as individualism and collectivism.

By organizing assimilators around elements of individualism-collectivism, trainees are able to move beyond “do’s and don’ts” in other cultures – typically superficial attributes – to understand cultural differences through a coherent framework. Bhawuk (2001) outlined such an approach, which includes critical incidents that capture the four defining features of individualism and collectivism reviewed above (Triandis, 1995), including the nature of the self, goal priorities, predictors of behavior, and nature of relationships, along with critical incidents that tap into horizontal and vertical dimensions of the constructs. Importantly, however, although people learn much about another culture through cultural assimilators, they do not change their behavior enough to be really successful in the other culture. Changes in behavior require clinical interventions and
behavior shaping. Nonetheless, this application is reported in several handbooks concerned with cross-cultural training (Landis and Bhagat, 1996).

CONCLUSION

Triandis (2009b) discussed the factors used by individuals to construct the way they see the world. Culture is one of them. Much international conflict is due to differences in the subjective cultures of various groups. The future of the planet may depend on further analyses of the subjective cultures around the globe in order to increase understanding, promote wellbeing, and manage our increasing interdependence.

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NOTES

1 The terms *emic* and *etic* in cross-cultural psychology have been derived from linguistics, where *emic* refers to sounds specific to a particular language and *etic* refers to sounds that are universal to languages.

2 Important caveats, however, are in order. First, a distinction needs to be made between data that use “culture” as the unit of analysis (e.g., Hofstede, 1980), and data that use “individuals” as the unit of analysis. When culture is the unit of analysis the sum or the responses of individuals are entered and the correlation is across cultures. When individuals are the unit of analysis the correlation is within one culture across individuals. Collectivism tends to be the opposite of individualism when culture is the unit of analysis. However, when individuals are the units of analysis, the tendencies toward individualism and collectivism can be orthogonal to each other (Gelfand et al., 1996). A person can be high in both attributes, or high in one and low on the other attribute. The best way to conceptualize this is to think that both collectivist and individualist cognitions are present in every individual, and the tendencies are elicited by the situation.

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