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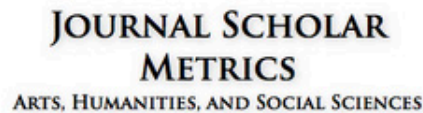
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# Collectivism Is Associated with Greater Self Observation

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## ABSTRACT

The present study evaluated the relationship between dimensions of individualism/collectivism and self observation tendencies in an American sample of 86 university students. Although the United States is generally an individualist culture there is a great deal of variation within American society in terms of the amount of embeddedness in social groups. Collectivism was strongly associated with self observation. Horizontal collectivism was significantly associated with both private and social/public self observation. Vertical collectivism was significantly associated with social/public self observation and there was a trend for it to be related to private self observation. In contrast, although vertical individualism was related to social/public self observation, there were no significant relationships between vertical individualism and private self observation, or horizontal individualism and private self observation or social/public self observation. These findings are consistent with cross cultural patterns in individualist and collectivist societies. Greater self observation would aid an understanding of one's own thinking and behavior and how one is responded to by other group members, as well as of one's place in the status hierarchy of the group. These are all important factors in group functioning/collectivism.

*Key words:* individualism, collectivism, self-consciousness, self observation.

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### *Novelty and Significance*

*What is already known about the topic?*

- Many studies suggest higher self observation in cultures which tend to be more collectivist compared to cultures which tend to be more individualist.
- The United States is an individualist culture, but there is a great deal of variation within Americans in terms of how they are embedded in social groups. It is not known how private as well as social/public self observation skills might vary in importance with whether one feels more or less embedded in a group.

*What this paper adds?*

- Collectivism was strongly associated with self observation, as in previous studies.
- Horizontal collectivism was significantly associated with both private and social/public self observation. Vertical collectivism was significantly associated with social/public self observation and there was a trend for it to be related to private self observation.
- In contrast, although vertical individualism was related to social/public self observation, there were no significant relationships between vertical individualism and private self observation, or horizontal individualism and private self observation or social/public self observation.

Individualism/collectivism has been conceptualized as the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups (Hofstede, 1980, 2001, 2018). In individualist societies, the ties between individuals are loose: Everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. In collectivist societies, people are integrated from birth onward into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families (with uncles, aunts, and grandparents), protecting them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. Markus and Kitayama (1991, 2010) use the terms independent and interdependent self construal to refer to an individual's perception of the self as autonomous vs. embedded in a context with others at a fundamental level. Individualism and collectivism have been

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conceptualized by other researchers (Triandis, 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995) as broader terms than the related independent and interdependent self construed terms used by Markus and Kitayama (1991, 2010). These researchers add vertical and horizontal dimensions. Their scale thus has four indices: Horizontal Individualism (HI), Vertical Individualism (VI), Horizontal Collectivism (HC), and Vertical Collectivism (VC). Collectivism involves seeing the self as part of a collective; in VC, inequality is acceptable whereas in HC, equality is stressed. Individualism involves seeing the self as autonomous, with inequality being accepted in VI, and equality being the expectation in HI.

How one sees oneself is thus integral to individualism/collectivism. Self observation is important in understanding one's motives and behavior as one acts in the world. In the social world, understanding one's individual thoughts is especially important so one can understand why they may be responded to by others in a certain way. In the social world it is also important to understand how one is viewed by other members of the group and to know one's place or status in the group.

A frequently used measure of one's private as well as social self-observation tendencies is the Self Consciousness Scale Revised (SCSR) of Fenigstein and Scheier and colleagues (Fenigstein, 2009; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975; Higa, Philips, Chorpita, & Daleiden, 2008; Scheier & Carver, 1985). Given the many meanings of the word "consciousness" it might be better to substitute "self observation" for "self consciousness." The SCSR evaluates a Public and Private dimension of self observation, as well as Social Anxiety. Private Self-Consciousness evaluates activities such as introspection and self-reflection on one's inner thoughts and feelings. Public Self-Consciousness includes evaluation of oneself in a social context; how one is viewed by others. The two types of self observation are largely independent, although modest relationships are sometimes reported (Buss, 1980; Carver & Scheier, 1981).

A few studies have evaluated self observation cross-culturally using the Fenigstein *et alii* (1975) measure. Gudykunst, Yang, and Nishida (1987) reported that Japanese and Korean samples had higher Social Anxiety than an American group, and the American sample showed greater Public Self-Consciousness than a Japanese group. The Japanese group had higher Private Self-Consciousness than the Korean group and these groups did not differ from the American group. Abe, Bagozzi, and Sadarangani (1996) found that Private Self-Consciousness was higher for a Japanese sample than an American sample, with no group difference for Public Self-Consciousness. In adolescents, Delvecchio, Mabilia, Miconi, Chirico, and Li (2015) used another measure, the Adolescent Self-Consciousness Questionnaire (Nie & Ding, 2009; Delvecchio, Mabilia, Lis, Mazzeschi, Nie, & Li, 2014) and found that Chinese adolescents were more concerned about their social attitudes and behavior than an Italian sample, and the Italian adolescents were more focused on personal interests, personal satisfaction and physical appearance. Many of these studies suggest higher self observation in Asian cultures which tend to be more collectivist compared to western cultures which tend to be more individualist (e.g., Hofstede, 2018).

The goal of the present study was to evaluate the relationship between dimensions of individualism/collectivism and self observation tendencies in an American sample. Although the United States is generally an individualist culture (e.g., Hofstede, 2018), there is a great deal of variation within Americans in terms of how they are embedded in social groups. Private as well as social/public self observation skills might vary in importance with whether one feels more or less embedded in a group.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

Participants were 86 university students ( $M_{age} = 21.62$  years,  $SD = 1.47$  years, age range: 19-26; 79.1% females) that were offered extra credit for being in the study. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Connecticut.

### *Instruments and Measures*

*Horizontal & Vertical Individualism & Collectivism II Scale (INCOL; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).* The INCOL is designed to assess cultural orientation. It is a 16-item self-report measure that yields scores on 4 subscales: Horizontal Individualism (HI) assesses the extent to which individuals strive to be distinct without desiring special status (e.g., "I'd rather depend on myself than others"); Vertical Individualism (VI) assesses the extent to which individuals strive to be distinct and desire special status (e.g., "It is important that I do my job better than others"); Horizontal Collectivism (HC) assesses the extent to which individuals emphasize interdependence but "do not submit easily to authority" (e.g., "If a coworker gets a prize, I would feel proud"); Vertical Collectivism (VC) assesses the extent to which individuals emphasize interdependence and competition with out-groups (e.g., "It is my duty to take care of my family, even when I have to sacrifice what I want"). Several studies have evaluated the psychometric properties of INCOL and it is generally thought to be the most psychometrically sound index for measuring individualistic and collectivistic orientation at the individual level (Gyorkos *et alii*, 2013; Paquet & Kline, 2009). Internal reliability ranges from .64 to .83.

*Self-Consciousness Scale-Revised (SCSR; Scheier & Carver, 1985).* The SCSR provides information about the major components of self-consciousness. The SCSR is a 22-item rated inventory based on a 4-point Likert scale from "Not like me at all" (0) to "A lot like me" (3), divided into 3 subscales: Private self-consciousness (10 items) concerns habitual attendance to one's thoughts, motives, and feelings. A person high in Private self-consciousness describes himself as self-reflective and introspective (e.g., "I'm always trying to figure myself out"). Public self-consciousness (7 items) is defined by a general awareness of the self as a social object. High scores on Public self-consciousness reflect a concern for one's social appearance and the impressions one makes on others (e.g., "I care a lot about how I present myself to others"). Social Anxiety (6 items) reflects discomfort in the presence of others (e.g., "I get embarrassed very easily"). The SCSR showed good internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficients at .75 for Private self-consciousness, .84 for Public self-consciousness and .79 for Social Anxiety (Scheier & Carver, 1985). In the same study (Scheier & Carver, 1985) test-retest reliability coefficient was .76 for Private self-consciousness, .74 for Public self-consciousness and .77 for Social Anxiety. In the current study Cronbach's alphas was .66 for Private self-consciousness, .72 for Public self-consciousness and .80 for Social Anxiety.

### *Design and Procedure*

This research was designed as an exploratory and descriptive study to evaluate the relationship between dimensions of individualism/collectivism and self-observation tendencies in an American sample of university students. After informed consent was obtained, the participants were given the study questionnaires to fill out. When they finished, they gave these to the examiner.

### Data Analysis

IBM SPSS version 26 software was used for data analysis. The design was correlational. The data analysis included calculating measures of central tendency, such as means and standard deviations for the variables and doing Pearson correlations between public and private self observation, and the individualism and collectivism vertical and horizontal dimensions.

## RESULTS

The means (and *SD*) for the individualism/collectivism scales were 29.8 (4.2) for HI, 19.4 (6.8) for VI, 26.7 (5.5) for HC, and 26.4 (6.0) for VC. Public SCSR was 14.2 (3.6), Private SCSR was 18.6 (4.4), and Social Anxiety was 9.8 (4.4).

Table 1 shows the Pearson correlations between the individualism and collectivism scales and the Public and Private SCSR scales. Collectivism was strongly associated with self observation. Horizontal collectivism was significantly associated with both private ( $r=.257$ ;  $p=.009$ ) and social/public self observation ( $r=.288$ ;  $p=.004$ ). Vertical collectivism was significantly associated with social/public self observation ( $r=.278$ ;  $p=.005$ ) and there was a trend for it to be related to private self observation ( $r=.152$ ;  $p=.085$ ). Vertical individualism was related to social/public self observation ( $r=.202$ ;  $p=.034$ ).

Table 1. Correlations between individualism/collectivism and self observation.

			Self observation Private SCSR Correlation ( <i>p</i> value)	Self observation Social/Public SCSR Correlation ( <i>p</i> value)
INCOL	Individualism	Horizontal (HI)	.087 (.216)	.128 (.125)
		Vertical (VI)	-.007 (.475)	.202 (.034)*
	Collectivism	Horizontal (HC)	.257 (.009)*	.288 (.004)**
		Vertical (VC)	.152 (.085)	.278 (.005)*

Notes: INCOL= Horizontal & Vertical Individualism & Collectivism II Scale; HC= Horizontal Collectivism; HI= Horizontal Individualism; VC= Vertical Collectivism; VI= Vertical Individualism; \*= $p < .05$ ; \*\*= $p < .005$ .

The SCSR Social Anxiety scale was not significantly correlated with any of the individualism and collectivism scales.

## DISCUSSION

Collectivism was strongly associated with self observation. Horizontal collectivism was significantly associated with both private and social/public self observation. Vertical collectivism was significantly associated with social/public self observation and there was a trend for it to be related to private self observation. In contrast, although vertical individualism was related to social/public self observation, there were no significant relationships between vertical individualism and private self observation, or horizontal individualism and private self observation or social/public self observation.

The strong relationships between collectivism and self observation may reflect a certain higher level of importance or personal responsibility for one's thoughts and behaviors in individuals who are embedded in groups. Interdependent group interactions



would require self observation of one's thoughts and feelings (private self observation) so one can better understand why one is behaving a certain way and why others are responding to them in a certain way. An understanding of how one is perceived by other group members and one's own internal motives in interactions are essential for smooth intergroup relations.

It is interesting that the only measure of individualism that was associated with self observation was vertical individualism. Vertical individualism involves social self observation in terms of assessing one's place in the dominance hierarchy and assessing whether one is doing their job better/worse than others. This kind of social self observation might be useful in vertical individualism if the goal is improving the individual's social status in a social or work environment; "getting ahead." Outside of a vertical group such as a work environment, perhaps self observation is not necessary to function smoothly when one has self focused, individualistic values.

Heine, Takemoto, Moskalkenko, Lasaleta, and Henrich (2008) suggest that "participating in a culture in which people are encouraged to consider the perspective of others leads people to habitually conceive of themselves in terms of how they imagine others might view them... In contrast, those who participate in a cultural context in which the individual's point of view is prioritized... will rarely consider themselves from the perspective of others..." Americans were more self critical and cheated less when placed in front of a mirror than without a mirror. A Japanese group was expected to have a higher base level concern with how they were viewed by others and the Japanese participants were unaffected by the presence of a mirror. This is thus a cross cultural example about how greater collectivism (Japan) may be associated with presumably greater baseline self observation.

Other researchers have found that Asian cultures attend to the perspective of others more than Westerner cultures (Cohen & Hoshimo-Brown, 2005). In Asian cultures, people are more concerned about how they appear in society's view than in Western individualistic cultures (Heine, 2005; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; McVeigh, 2000, 2002).

The strong relationships between collectivism and self observation within this American sample warrant further investigation. As discussed, there have been some findings related to this cross culturally, and it would be very interesting to obtain additional data on individual variations within a culture.

A limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size. It would be very interesting to evaluate these variables in a much larger sample. Another limitation is the fact that the participants were all undergraduate students. Evaluating a community sample that included people from more diverse backgrounds would be informative. Additionally, the mean age of this sample was 22 years old. Further evaluation of other age groups would be a great interest.

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