'We're *all* individuals': group norms of individualism and collectivism, levels of identification and identity threat

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Abstract

Three studies were conducted to investigate the power of group norms of individualism and collectivism to guide self-definition and group behavior for people with low and high levels of group identification. Study 1 demonstrates that in an individualist culture (North America), those who identify highly with their national identity are more individualist than low identifiers. In contrast, in a collectivist culture (Indonesia) high identifiers are less individualist than low identifiers. Study 2 manipulates group norms of individualism and collectivism, and shows a similar pattern on a self-stereotyping measure: High identifiers are more likely to incorporate salient group norms prescribing individualism or collectivism into their self-concept than low identifiers. Study 3 replicates this effect and shows that high identifiers conform more strongly to group norms, and self-stereotype themselves in line with the salient norm than low identifiers when their group is threatened. Hence, the findings suggest that when there is a group norm of individualism, high identifiers may show individualist behavior as a result of conformity to salient group norms. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Cross-cultural research suggests that individualism dominates self-definitions in Western cultures (e.g. North America and Europe), whereas self-definitions are of a more collectivist nature in East Asia, Latin America and Africa (Triandis, 1989). Research in this domain has often compared cultures (or nations) that are believed to differ in collectivism, individualism, or on other intercultural dimensions (e.g. Hofstede, 1980). In individualist cultures people give priority to personal goals

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over collective goals, whereas in collectivist cultures personal goals tend to be second to collective goals. While a person is seen as a separate entity in individualist societies, the person's identity is defined as part of a larger collective or group in collectivist societies (Hofstede, 1980; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder & Bourne, 1982; Triandis, 1989; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988; Triandis, McCusker & Hui, 1990).

The present research focuses on a relatively under-researched area within the collectivism–individualism research tradition by investigating whether collectivism and individualism may function as ingroup norms in addition to being inter-cultural differences or individual differences. In this conception, groups may be a social entity that influence social behavior in a similar way (and sometimes along similar dimensions) to culture. As a background for our ideas of how individualism and collectivism can assume normative properties within a group, we draw on principles of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization theory concerning normative group behavior (Hogg & Turner, 1989; Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1991; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), and try to integrate these ideas with the cultural approach to collectivism-individualism. We suggest that it is useful to investigate whether the degree of conformity to group norms of collectivism or individualism varies as a function of group members' commitment to the group. More specifically, we predict that the stronger the individual is attached to the group, the more likely it is that the person will turn to ingroup norms as a guide for behavior. Strongly committed group members would therefore be more likely to follow collectivist group norms ('we are all united'), than those who do not feel strong ties with the group. Rather paradoxically, it is also more likely that people who are strongly attached to their group act in an individualist manner if that is the dominant ingroup norm ('we are all individuals'). We argue that the influence of the group is not attenuated when groups promote individualism (cf. Postmes, Spears & Cihangir, 2001). Rather, individualist behavior in such a group is still achieved through conformity with salient group norms and is therefore the product of a group process.

COLLECTIVISM AND INDIVIDUALISM AS INGROUP NORMS

There generally is a tendency in research to focus either on differences between individualism and collectivism at the cultural level, or to examine individual differences within cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clark, 1985; Triandis, 1989; see also Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Some research has focused on sub-cultures that are more or less collectivist or individualist than the larger national culture that they are part of. For instance, it is clear from research that urban samples are more individualist whereas rural areas tend to be more collectivist (Georgas, 1989). Likewise, religious groups such as the Quakers in the USA are more collectivist than the American culture in general is (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tripton, 1985). However, less attention has been given to the analysis of collectivism and individualism at *the group level*. This paper aims to explore if cultural characteristics of individualism and collectivism may be transmitted through the social identity of groups, and therefore if the normative influence exerted by the social groups may reinforce the characteristics that we usually associate with cultures.

The social identity approach is a perspective that encompasses all varieties of groups and aims to be a general theory about intragroup and intergroup behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It is assumed that group norms express important aspects of the group's identity and that group members are motivated to act in accordance with them in order to achieve a positive identity (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). 'Group norms arise from the interaction between group members and they express a generally accepted way of thinking, feeling or behaving that is endorsed and expected because it is perceived as

the right and proper thing to do' (Turner, 1991, p. 3). According to social identity theory and the closely related self-categorization theory, there are three stages of conformity to group norms. First, individuals identify with specific groups and may feel committed to them through self-categorization processes in particular social contexts. They learn the social norms of appropriate behavior in that group, and finally, they internalize these social norms and act in accordance with them (Hogg & Turner, 1989; Turner, 1975, 1982; Turner *et al.*, 1987).

A variety of studies have demonstrated that when social identity is salient, the norms attached to this identity will guide group members' behavior in areas such as group polarization (Hogg & Turner, 1989; Hogg, Turner, & Davidson, 1990), the consistency between attitudes and behavior (Terry & Hogg, 1996), intergroup discrimination (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996, 1997), collective behavior (Reicher, 1984, 1987), deindividuation (Postmes & Spears, 1998), and small-group interactions (Postmes *et al.*, 2001). In this research the focus has not only been on factors affecting the strength of the conformity process, but also on the specific content of ingroup norms. It is evident that in addition to the power of group norms to guide and channel behavior, the behavioral outcome of conformity depends on the content of these norms. For instance, a study by Jetten *et al.* (1997) demonstrated that group norms that prescribe or proscribe discrimination will particularly influence high identifiers' willingness to display ingroup bias. High identifiers showed more discrimination when the group norm was to discriminate than when the group norm was to be fair.

GROUP COMMITMENT AND NORMS

When individualism is the dominant orientation, persons tend to define themselves as independent of groups, autonomous, unique and guided by their personal goals and values. In contrast, in collectivist cultures there is a strong emphasis on social goals, a feeling of interdependence and a concern to maintain harmony within groups (Hofstede, 1980). According to Triandis (1989): 'A considerable literature suggests that collectivists automatically obey ingroup authorities and are willing to fight and die to maintain the integrity of the ingroup, whereas they distrust and are unwilling to cooperate with members of outgroups' (p. 509, see also Triandis, 1972). Research suggests that there is a larger distinction between ingroup and outgroup for collectivists than for individualists (Leung & Bond, 1984; Triandis, 1972, 1989).

There is a similarity in the distinctions between collectivist versus individualist tendencies, and the distinctions between group members who identify strongly versus weakly with their social group. It is frequently acknowledged that it is useful to distinguish between group members who are strongly committed to the group (high identifiers) and members who value their group membership less (low identifiers). In recent research, differences found between high and low identifiers bear a resemblance to the distinctions between collectivists and individualists. For instance, research has shown that low identifiers take a more individualist stance toward the group and are more likely to dissociate themselves from the group when their identity is threatened (e.g. Branscombe, Wann, Noel, & Coleman, 1993; Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Jetten, Spears, Hogg, & Manstead, 2000; Postmes, Branscombe, Spears, & Young, 1999; Roccas & Schwartz, 1993; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). In contrast, high group identification is likely to be associated with a more collectivist attitude toward the group. Like collectivists, high identifiers are more willing than low identifiers to work for the group, give priority to group goals, conform to group standards and norms and be attentive to needs of other group members. Indeed, previous research has shown that moderately strong relationships exist between group identification and perceptions of collectivism (Triandis *et al.*, 1985).

If we assume that there is a positive relation between a collectivist orientation and one's commitment to a certain group, an interesting question is what the consequences are for group behavior when group members are strongly committed to a group that has individualist norms, or a group that is collectivist but some members do not identify strongly with that group. Although these combinations of norms and group commitment may be somewhat less likely to occur in real life than the more balanced combinations, we believe that all of these social situations exist and cannot be dismissed as being merely theoretical cases. American culture, for example, is generally considered to be one of the most individualist cultures in the world (Hofstede, 1980). In this culture where individual goals are valued more than group goals, those who identify strongly as Americans are more likely to stress their individuality. Moreover, those who identify themselves strongly as Americans may even stress their individuality more so than those who do not identify strongly as Americans. Thus, paradoxically, it is conceivable that the outcome of strong identification with a group is the pursuit of an individualist goal (cf. Postmes *et al.*, 2001). The combination of low commitment to a group with collectivist norms seems less paradoxical. For instance, in organizations it is likely that not all employees care as much for the welfare of their company as managers hope when they stimulate a collectivist company culture.

The present research is concerned with the interaction between group identification and the content of group norms. The aim of the present research is to integrate our knowledge of collectivism/individualism in cross-cultural settings with our understanding of group norms. We investigate our hypothesis in cultures that are defined as individualist and collectivist and, in addition, we manipulate ingroup norms of collectivism and individualism. It has been demonstrated in previous research that individualist and collectivist tendencies can be manipulated successfully in the laboratory (Trafimow, Triandis & Goto, 1991; Ybarra & Trafimow, 1998). Social identity theory proposes that identity salience leads to behaviors consistent with that identity and the appropriate norms (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In addition, because group membership is by definition more important for high than for low identifiers, high identifiers are more likely to act in accordance with salient group norms than low identifiers. That is, high identifiers will perceive themselves as more collectivist when the group norm is collectivist, and they will perceive themselves as more individualist when the group norm is individualist. Low identifiers should be less likely to follow group norms and their self-definition is predicted to be less influenced by salient group norms. It is even possible that low identifiers might react against group norms that are imposed upon them by acting in opposition to the group norm.

STUDY 1

These predictions were first tested in two different countries, the USA and Indonesia, whose cultures have been characterized as individualist versus collectivist respectively (Hofstede, 1980, 1984). We expected that participants who are highly identified with their national identity would be more likely to endorse the national cultural orientation than low identifiers. Thus, we predicted more endorsement of individualism among highly identified Americans (referring to US citizens) than among low identifiers. In contrast, we hypothesized that highly identified Indonesians endorse individualism less than low identified Indonesians. With regard to collectivism we predicted the opposite pattern of results: highly identified Americans should be less collectivist than low identified Americans, and highly identified Indonesians should be more collectivist than low identifying Indonesians. Due to the problems associated with cross-national comparisons (see below) we will only make the additional prediction that the direction of differences between high and low identifiers is not the same in each country. That is, we predict an interaction between nationality and identification level.

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 101 Indonesian and American respondents (45 male, 56 female, aged 21 years on average). Indonesian respondents were 35 undergraduate and graduate students of the University of Indonesia at Depok, Jakarta, approached in the library with the request to complete a brief questionnaire. American respondents were 66 undergraduate students of the University of Kansas, who participated in exchange for course credit. Participants were asked to reflect on their national group identification, on the basis of which they were divided into high and low identifiers. The design constituted a 2(nationality: Indonesian versus American) × 2(identification: low versus high) factorial design.

Procedure and Measures

Each participant individually completed a brief questionnaire concerned with 'examining aspects of Indonesian and American culture'. American and Indonesian questionnaires were back-translations so as to ensure comparability. Participants were asked to complete the following three items tapping their national group identification: 'I am glad to be an [American versus Indonesian]', 'I identify with my fellow [Americans versus Indonesians]' and 'I feel connected with my fellow [Americans versus Indonesians]'. Responses were measured on Likert-type scales with endpoints ranging from 'not at all' (1) to 'very much' (7). The reliability of the scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.70$).

Measures of Individualism and Collectivism

Participants then completed an abbreviated version of a well-known individualism and collectivism scale (Triandis *et al.*, 1990). For individualism, selected items were 'I would rather make an important decision by myself than discuss it with my friends', 'One should be independent of others as much as possible', 'When faced with a difficult personal decision it is better to decide yourself rather than follow the advice of friends or relatives' and 'If the group is slowing me down, it is better to leave it and work alone'. For collectivism, the items were 'Aging parents should live at their children's home', 'Children should live at their parents' home until they are old enough to get married', 'I can count on my relatives for help if I find myself in any kind of trouble', 'I feel it is all right to depend on family and friends for many important things' and 'I would help within my means if a relative told me that he (she) is in financial difficulty'. Responses were made on 7-point scales ranging from 'not at all' (1) to 'very much' (7). Cronbach's alphas for the individualism and collectivism and scale were 0.66 and 0.62, respectively. Although this is rather low according to conventional standards, it falls within the boundaries of acceptability, especially when comparing with other studies which show that reliability is a well-known problem for measures of individualism and collectivism (see Kashima, Yamaguchi, Kim, Choi, Gelfand, & Yuki, 1995).

Analytic Strategy

There are some well-known scaling problems with making cross-national comparisons, due to the fact that it can not be assumed *a priori* that the distribution of responses is comparable with the type of

dependent measures we use in this study. In other words, the cross-cultural comparison of scores is based on the assumption that scales are identical in each culture. Of course this is a tenuous assumption, if only for the language differences between these two countries: The response 'not at all' might not carry the same weight in the USA as in Indonesia. A similar problem exists for the distribution of responses. For this reason the scores for each of the national groups have been standardized. This ensures that intra-national comparisons can be made (i.e. that predictions can be tested), and that the direction of intra-national comparisons between high and low identifiers can be compared cross-nationally (i.e. we can test the interaction term). However, we are not in a position to make cross-national comparisons.

Results

Median Split

A median split was performed on the averages of the identification measure for each national group separately. The factor group identification differentiates between high identifiers ($M_{Americans} = 6.69$, $SD = 0.29$, $M_{Indonesians} = 6.42$, $SD = 0.43$) and low identifiers ($M_{Americans} = 5.45$, $SD = 0.54$, $M_{Indonesians} = 4.85$, $SD = 0.56$) ($F_{Americans}(1, 64) = 137.70$, $p < 0.001$, $F_{Indonesians}(1, 33) = 89.41$, $p < 0.001$. It should be noted that even in the low identification condition, identification is still above the midpoint of the scale, reflecting the strength of people's national affiliation in both countries.

Individualism and Collectivism

In order to enable the testing of the interaction term, we standardized the individualism and collectivism scores of each national group separately. A 2(nationality) × 2(identification) MANOVA was performed on these standardized scale scores. The predicted two-way interaction between nationality and identification was highly reliable, $F(2, 96) = 6.17$, $p < 0.01$, while main effects were not (F's < 1). The standardized individualism and collectivism scores are displayed in Figure 1. The univariate two-way interaction was marginally significant for collectivism, $F(1, 97) = 3.42$, $p = 0.07$. The predicted simple main effect of identification was reliable for Indonesians, $F(1, 97) = 4.02$, $p < 0.05$, but for Americans it was not, $F < 1$. As predicted, highly identified Indonesians were more collectivist ($M = 0.26$, $SD = 1.00$) than low identified Indonesians ($M = -0.44$, $SD = 0.87$). For individualism, the two-way interaction was highly reliable, $F(1, 97) = 10.40$, $p < 0.01$. Analysis of the simple main effects showed that identification had a reliable effect on the individualism of Indonesians, $F(1, 97) = 4.04$, $p < 0.05$, and that of Americans, $F(1, 97) = 7.54$, $p < 0.01$. Highly identified Americans were more individualistic ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 1.07$) than low identifiers were ($M = -0.35$, $SD = 0.79$). Conversely, highly identified Indonesians were less individualistic ($M = -0.25$, $SD = 0.96$) than low identifiers were ($M = 0.42$, $SD = 0.95$).

Discussion

The results of Study 1 provide evidence that those who identify highly with their national identity are more likely to act in accordance with the dominant societal normative orientation. In a culture that is traditionally defined as individualist, highly identified Americans were more likely to endorse individualism than low identified Americans. In contrast, those who identified highly as Indonesians
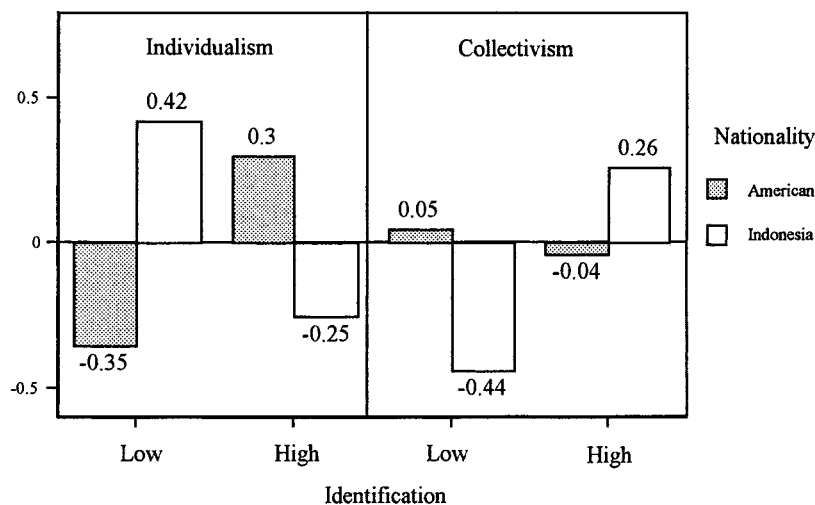
Figure 1.   Study 1: Individualism and collectivism as a function of identification and nationality

were less likely to endorse individualism than those whose identification with their national identity was weaker. A similar, although only marginally reliable interaction was found for collectivism. In this case, the predictions were partially confirmed: highly identified Indonesians scored higher on collectivism than low identified Indonesians. No differences in collectivism were observed for highly and low identified Americans, however.

Thus, most of our predictions were confirmed. Most importantly, we showed that there are differences between high and low national identifiers on those dimensions that their national group is culturally known for. Highly identified Indonesians are more collectivist than low identifiers, while highly identified Americans are more individualist than low identifiers. It could be argued that the finding for Indonesians is a 'normal' and expected finding for those who identify strongly with their group. After all, collectivism is associated with 'groupiness', and high identifiers seem to display more of it (Triandis *et al.*, 1985). In this light, it is notable that the interaction between identification and nationality was reliable. This demonstrates that highly identified Americans did not display higher collectivism, and hence it does not appear to be the case that identification necessarily leads to higher collectivism: in this study identification and collectivism go together only in the culture which prescribes collectivism as a cultural norm. The results of individualism more straightforwardly support the argument that cultural traits can assume normative properties, as they show that highly identified Americans are more individualist than low identifiers. This, we argue, provides direct support for our prediction that high identifiers are more likely to act in accordance with salient group norms than low identifiers are, even when the group norms in question prescribe behaviors and beliefs that would seem to be inconsistent with high group identification.

STUDY 2

The interpretation of these results as consistent with our argument would be strengthened if we were able to make direct comparisons between the groups in question. This, as we argued above, is highly problematic for national groups. Therefore we sought to conceptually replicate these results in the

laboratory. This has the additional advantage that one can manipulate the content of group norms directly, rather than rely on supposedly pre-existing cultural norms. In addition, in order to rule out the possible influence of other differences between individualist and collectivist countries, we aimed to replicate the result of Study 1 within one sample.

The second study was conducted to strengthen our argument that conformity to salient norms underlies the differential endorsement of collectivism and individualism by high and low identifiers. We provided participants with false feedback that their group (in this case an organization) was either collectivist or individualist. As in Study 1, identification was measured and group members were classified as low and high identifiers on the basis of a median split. To investigate the extent to which participants internalize individualist versus collectivist norms as a function of group identification, measures were taken of self-stereotyping on individualism and collectivism.

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 140 students at the University of Queensland who received course credits for their participation (40 male, 98 female, and 2 missing responses, aged 19 years on average). The 2×2 factorial design consisted of one manipulated variable, group norms (individualism versus collectivism), and one measured variable that produced low versus high identification on the basis of median split.

Procedure and Group Norm Manipulation

In this study, participants were asked to think of themselves as an employee of the organization Horizon Industries. They were told that the company was one of Australia's largest sunshade manufacturers and distributors. In order to create some sense of identification with the organization, participants were asked to form groups of 4 to 5 participants and were given 5 minutes as a group to design a logo for the company. After this task, participants individually completed the questionnaire. Identification with Horizon Industries was measured on 9-point scales ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (9) 'strongly agree'. The items were the same as used in Study 1, except for one item ('I am glad to be an American/Indonesian') that was replaced by another item in Study 2 ('Being an employee at Horizon Industries is important to me'). The scale was reliable ($\alpha = 0.94$). The normative orientation of the organization was then manipulated by providing a description of the dominant culture of Horizon Industries. Participants read the following paragraph leading them to believe that the organization could either be described as individualist or collectivist [in brackets]:

'The workplace environment and employees at Horizon Industries can be described as quite *individualist* [collectivist]. Employees focus on achieving *their personal* [departmental] production goals, and it is believed that maintaining the *individual's* [group's] well being is the best guarantee for success. The demands of the job require employees to *rely on their individual strengths and skills* [combine their strengths and skills and they have to work closely with co-workers]. The *individualist* [collectivist] workplace at Horizon Industries has been very beneficial in helping establish Horizon Industries as one of the leading companies in Australia. *Individuality and independence* [Collectivism and cooperation] undoubtedly have contributed to this success.'

The effectiveness of the group norm manipulation was checked with two semantic differentials on which participants were required to indicate to what extent each of these traits reflects the orientation of Horizon Industries employees ('individualist versus collectivist' and 'self-oriented versus group-oriented'). The evaluations were averaged ($\alpha = 0.95$), with scores closer to 1 higher perceptions of Horizon Industries as an individualist organization and scores closer to 9 indicating higher perceptions as a collectivist organization.

Self-stereotyping

To examine the extent to which the group norms were internalized, self-stereotyping was assessed with the same two semantic differentials as used to assess the success of the norm manipulation. Participants were required to indicate to what extent the traits 'individualist versus collectivist' and 'self-oriented versus group-oriented' were applicable to themselves. The evaluation of the self on these traits was averaged ($\alpha = 0.78$), with scores closer to 1 higher self-stereotyping on individualism and scores closer to 9 indicating higher self-stereotyping on collectivism.

Results

Median Split and Manipulation Check

Participants were classified as low identifiers ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 0.55$) and high identifiers ($M = 7.60$, $SD = 0.60$) on the basis of a median split. The factor group identification again differentiated successfully between the two levels, $F(1, 136) = 147.24$, $p < 0.001$.

To determine whether the organizational norm feedback effectively induced an individualist versus collectivist group norm, a 2(identification) $\times$ 2(group norm) ANOVA was conducted on the group norm manipulation check. Only a significant main effect for group norm was found, $F(1, 136) = 313.38$, $p < 0.001$. In accordance with the manipulation, participants in the collectivist group norm condition perceived Horizon Industries as more collectivist ($M = 7.70$, $SD = 1.55$), than participants in the individualist group norm condition ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.74$).

Self-stereotyping

A 2(identification) $\times$ 2(group norm) ANOVA was conducted on the self-stereotyping measure. A main effect was found for group norms, $F(1, 136) = 22.17$, $p < 0.001$, indicating participants in the collectivist condition perceived themselves as more collectivist ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 2.06$), while participants in the individualist condition perceived themselves as more individualist ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.57$). This main effect was qualified by a significant interaction between group norms and identification, $F(1, 136) = 9.38$, $p < 0.005$. The mean self-stereotyping scores as a function of group norm and identification are displayed in Figure 2. In line with predictions, high identifiers perceived themselves as more collectivist when the group norm represented collectivism ($M = 6.18$, $SD = 1.91$) and were more individualist when the group norm represented individualism ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.51$), $F(1, 137) = 30.75$, $p < 0.001$. As predicted, the difference between low identifiers who were presented with an individualist group norm ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.55$) and those presented with a collectivist group norm ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 2.13$) did not reach acceptable levels of significance, $F(1, 137) = 1.61$, *ns*. There was only one other significant simple main effect: when the group norm represented
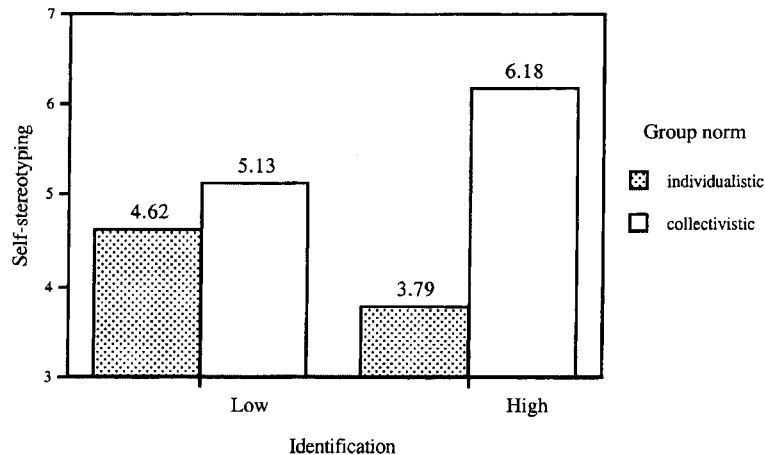
Figure 2.   Study 2: Self-stereotyping on collectivism versus individualism as a function of identification and group norms

collectivism, high identifiers described themselves as more collectivist than low identifiers, $F(1, 137) = 6.94$, $p < 0.01$.

Discussion

In line with predictions, self-definition as individualist versus collectivist was affected by the content of ingroup norms. However, this effect of ingroup norms on self-definition was qualified by the level of identification with the social group: Only high identifiers acted more in line with the salient group norm. This finding provides evidence for our hypothesis that incorporation of group norms into the self concept is a function of the importance of specific social identities. High identifiers defined themselves as more collectivist when the group norm was collectivist and perceived themselves as more individualist when the group norm represented individualism. In sum, results of Study 2 provide further support for the predictions and confirm that results of Study 1 may also be obtained in one sample population and with manipulated norms of collectivism and individualism.

STUDY 3

The third study was designed to examine in more detail the conditions under which high identifiers will act in accordance with salient group norms prescribing individualism versus collectivism. One way to clarify how group norms guide group behavior of low and high identifiers is to examine moderating factors. It is proposed that factors that increase intergroup differentiation — such as external threat or competition with the outgroup — should also increase the probability that group norms become more salient to guide and direct behavior (LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Triandis, 1989). The concept of threat has occupied a central position in much recent psychological theorizing (see Branscombe *et al.*, 1999, for an overview of different types of identity threat). Threat is usually defined

as threat to the value of a group identity. It is predicted from social identity theory that people will attempt to defend the value of an important group membership when it is attacked or threatened (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It is generally the case that responses to threat are different for low and high identifiers: highly identified group members are more likely to defend the integrity of the group when threatened than low identified group members are (Branscombe *et al*., 1993). Extending this finding we predict that when under threat, high identifiers are also more likely to embrace salient group norms and act in accordance with these norms than low identifiers. In a third study we investigated the moderating power of identity threat. We expect to find support for our hypotheses especially when a group is under threat. Identity threat is manipulated by giving participants feedback that the ingroup compares favorably or unfavorably with other groups on a relevant dimension of comparison.

Study 3 also included different dependent measures due to the somewhat disappointing reliability of the collectivism scale and individualism scales in the first study. The relatively low reliability of the Triandis *et al*. (1990) collectivism scale may be caused by the fact that these items focus on family and relatives as the group unit, which may be a less relevant reference group in certain contexts. We therefore decided to use a measure by Yamaguchi (1994) in Study 3 that measures individualistic versus collectivist tendencies as a uni-dimensional construct.[1] This collectivism scale was originally designed for Japanese culture, but it is assumed to be reliable in other cultures as well. In addition to collectivism, the same self-stereotyping measure as used in Study 2 was included to assess internalization of group norms into the self-concept. We predict a similar pattern of results on measures of collectivism and self-stereotyping.

To summarize our main predictions, it was hypothesized that high identifiers would act more strongly in accordance with group norms of individualism and collectivism when their group identity is threatened. When identity threat is low, it was predicted that conformity concerns would be less important for high identifiers and less dominant in determining behavior compared to the motivation to show loyalty to the group. Low identifiers would, in general, be less likely to act in accordance with group norms and they would be less affected by identity threats.

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 261 introductory psychology students of the University of Amsterdam who participated in return for course credit in several mass testing sessions. The $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial design consisted of two manipulated variables, group norm (individualism versus collectivism) and identity threat (low versus high). Identification was the third independent variable that distinguished between low and high identifiers on the basis of a median split.

Procedure

The questionnaire was introduced as an investigation of the student culture in different disciplines. It was explained that a similar study was conducted the previous year and that participants would be provided with the main conclusions of that study for psychology students. Next, participants received

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[1]Although it has been argued that individualism and collectivism are two separate dimensions and that individualism is not necessarily synonymous to low collectivism (see Kashima *et al*., 1995), we felt this issue to be less central to the argument of this paper. For this reason, and also for reasons of parsimony, we decided to use a single-dimension measure of collectivism versus individualism.

information about the normative orientation of psychology students (collectivist or individualist) and identity threat was manipulated. The dependent variables consisted of collectivism and self-stereotyping on collectivism versus individualism.

Identification Measure

Two weeks before the actual questionnaire was administered, identification as a psychology student was assessed with the same three items used in Study 2. Ratings were made on 9-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much). The internal consistency of the items was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.90$) and the three items were averaged.

Group Norms and Identity Threat Manipulation

An *individualist group norm* was manipulated by providing participants with information stressing that most psychology students perceived their own individual goals as more important than group goals and that the behavior of psychology students in general could be characterized as quite independent of other psychology students. A *collectivist group norm* was introduced by summarizing the results of the study as indicating that most psychology students perceived the group goals of psychology students as more important than their own individual goals and that psychology students were very concerned with the benefits of other students. After this information, participants were asked to list examples of the individualist or collectivist orientation of psychology students. Thereafter, the manipulation of group norms was checked.

Identity threat was manipulated by informing participants that the previous study also contained measures of academic achievements of psychology students at the University of Amsterdam. *Low and high identity threat* was manipulated by stressing that (a) the academic achievements of psychology students at the University of Amsterdam compared favorably [unfavorably] to the achievements of psychology students at other universities; (b) compared to the national average, students completed their degree slightly faster [slower] and there were less [more] drop-outs, (c) the prospect on the job market was slightly better [less positive] compared to the national average, and (d) it was expected that psychology students at the University of Amsterdam would also achieve quite well [academic achievement would not improve] in the years to come.[2]

Manipulation Checks

All ratings were made on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) unless indicated otherwise. As in Study 2, the effectiveness of the group norm manipulation was assessed by having participants evaluate on a semantic differential the extent to which psychology students can be characterized as 'individualist versus collectivist' and 'self-oriented versus group-oriented'. The evaluation of the group psychology students on these traits were averaged ($\alpha = 0.77$).

The effectiveness of the identity threat manipulation was checked with three items ('I feel uncomfortable when I receive this information about psychology students', 'I feel threatened when I read the information about psychology students' and 'My feelings are positive when I read the

[2]Note that the manipulation of low threat is manipulated as confirming the value of the group (i.e. high status) and not as the absence of threat.

information about psychology students'). The last item was recoded and the three manipulation checks for identity threat were averaged ($\alpha = 0.77$).

Measures

The 10-item scale adapted from Yamaguchi (1994) was administered to measure collectivism. Some items were slightly adjusted to improve their applicability to this specific group. Example items are 'I do not act as fellow psychology students would prefer', 'It is important to me to maintain harmony within the group psychology students', 'I respect decisions of psychology students', and 'I support psychology students whether they are right or wrong'. The reliability of the 10-item scale was satisfactory and the items were averaged ($\alpha = 0.71$).

Self-stereotyping was measured by the same two semantic differentials as used in Study 2. The reliability of the items was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.65$) and scores closer to 7 indicated higher self-stereotyping on collectivism and scores closer to 1 higher self-stereotyping on individualism.

Results

Median Split and Manipulation Checks

Participants were classified as low identifiers ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.07$) and high identifiers ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 0.88$) on the basis of a median split. Identification levels of low identifiers were well below the midpoint of the scale and were significantly different from those of high identifiers, $F(1, 249) = 644.69$, $p < 0.001$, who scored well above the midpoint of the scale.

Analysis of the group norm check in an ANOVA revealed a main effect for group norm, $F(1, 247) = 121.81$, $p < 0.001$, and no other effects. As predicted, psychology students were perceived as more collectivist when the group norm was collectivist ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.15$), than when the group norm was individualist ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.06$). Analysis of the manipulation check for threat to the psychology identity revealed the predicted main effect for identity threat, $F(1, 247) = 94.95$, $p < 0.001$. Participants perceived their identity as more threatened in the high identity threat ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.32$) than in the low identity threat condition ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.21$). The main effect for identity threat was qualified by a three-way interaction between identification, identity threat and group norm, $F(1, 247) = 4.86$, $p < 0.05$. Analysis of simple main effects revealed that when identity threat was low and the group norm was collectivist, low identifiers felt more threatened in their identity ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.35$) than high identifiers ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.01$), $F(1, 134) = 7.03$, $p < 0.01$.

In sum, the predicted effects for the group norm and identity threat checks were all highly significant, supporting our conclusion that these manipulations were effective. The unexpected effects for identification on the threat check is not surprising considering that high identifiers have a more collectivist relation with their group than low identifiers.

Collectivism

Analysis of the collectivism scale in a 2(identification) × 2(identity threat) × 2(group norm) ANOVA revealed a main effect for identification, $F(1, 245) = 32.72$, $p < 0.001$, qualified by a three-way interaction between identification, threat and group norms, $F(1, 245) = 4.03$, $p < 0.05$. The means are presented in Figure 3. When identity threat was low, the two-way interaction between group norms and
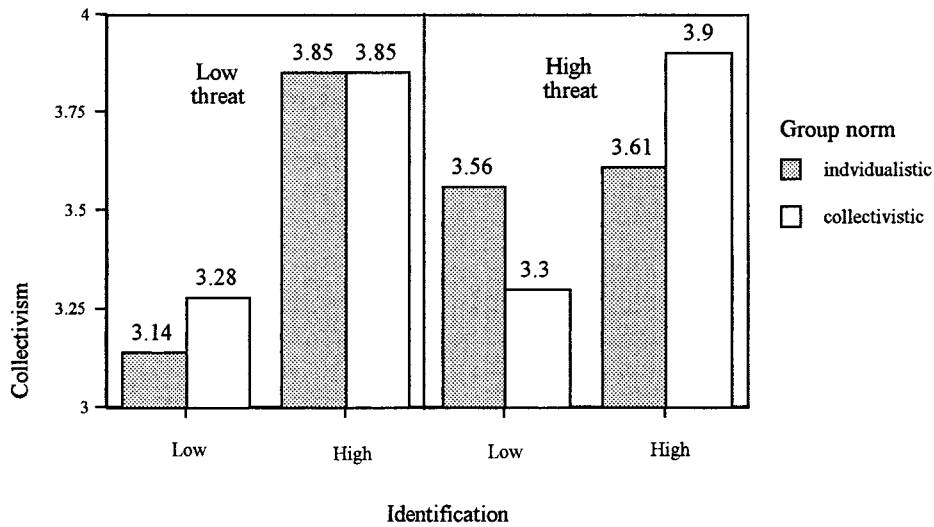
Figure 3.   Study 3: Collectivism as a function of identification, identity threat and group norms

identification was not significant, $F < 1$. In line with predictions, the two-way interaction was significant when identity threat was high, $F(1, 112) = 5.49$, $p < 0.05$. Some support was found for our prediction that when identity threat was high, high identifiers would be more collectivist in the collectivist group norm condition than in the individualist group norm condition, $F(1, 114) = 2.61$, $p = 0.11$. Furthermore, when identity threat was high, high identifiers acted more in accordance with a collectivist group norm than low identifiers, $F(1, 114) = 12.95$, $p < 0.001$.

Self-stereotyping

A 2(identification) × 2(identity threat) × 2(group norm) ANOVA on self-stereotyping on individualism versus collectivism revealed the predicted three-way interaction between identification, identity threat and group norm, $F(1, 243) = 4.25$, $p = 0.05$, and no other effects. The means are presented in Figure 4. The two-way interaction between group norms and identification was again not significant when identity threat was low, $F < 1$, but was significant when identity threat was high, $F(1, 113) = 4.78$, $p < 0.05$. Simple main effects analysis revealed as predicted that when identity threat was high, high identifiers self-stereotyped themselves as more collectivist in the collectivist group norm condition than in the individualist group norm condition, $F(1, 115) = 6.34$, $p < 0.05$. There was also a tendency that when identity threat was high, high identifiers self-stereotyped themselves as more collectivist than low identifiers when the group norm was collectivism, $F(1, 115) = 3.33$, $p = 0.07$.

Discussion

To summarize, the manipulation checks indicated that both the group norm manipulation and identity threat manipulation were successful. Support was found for the prediction that group norms are a stronger guide for social behavior when the identity was threatened. In line with our prediction, under threat high identifiers were less collectivist and self-stereotyped as less collectivist when the group
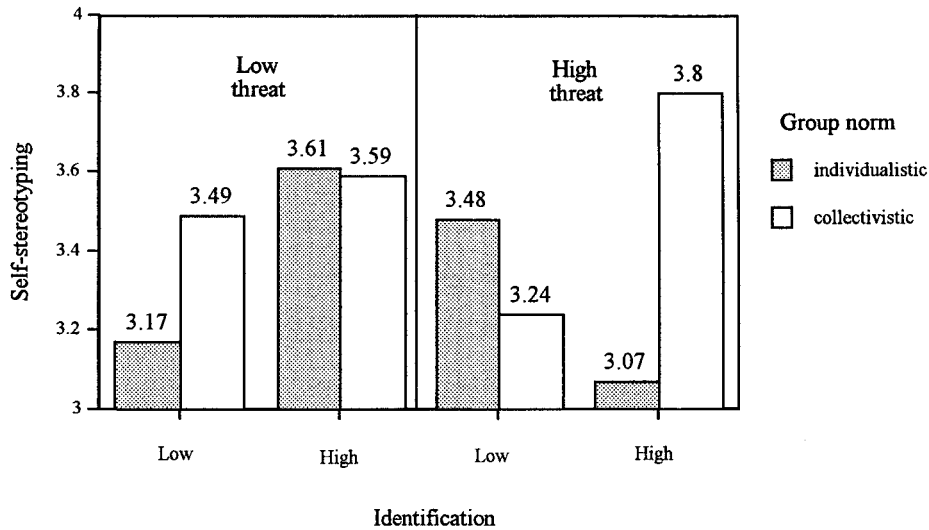
Figure 4. Study 3: Self-stereotyping on collectivism and individualism as a function of identification, identity threat and group norms

norm was individualist rather than collectivist. Moreover, although high identifiers were more collectivist than low identifiers on both dependent measures, there was also a trend that high identifiers self-stereotyped as less collectivist than low identifiers when the group norm was individualist. In line with predictions, low identifiers' collectivism ratings and self-stereotyping were not significantly influenced by group norms in this study. Note that there was even a tendency on both measures (although not reaching acceptable levels of significance) that low identifiers distanced themselves from the norms of the group when their identity was threatened. The finding that when they were under threat, low identifiers were less collectivist than high identifiers might be indicative of reactance against the norm on the part of low identifiers. Possibly, low identifiers sought to escape from collectivism when their group was under threat.

The finding that the interaction between group norms and group identification was not significant under low identity threat conditions might at first sight seem inconsistent with the results obtained in Study 1 and Study 2, where no identity threats were present. However, it should be noted that the overall levels of identification in Study 3 were much lower compared to the identification levels in Study 1 and Study 2. It is well possible that the overall lower levels of identification in this last study led to a greater reluctance to act in accordance with salient group norms. In other words, when the group identity is not all that important to participants, conformity to group norms is less likely.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Integrating the main findings of our studies, we found support in Study 1 that national cultural orientation determined levels of individualism for those who identify highly with their national identity, but not for those whose commitment was lower. This finding was strengthened in a second study where we found that those who identified strongly with their group incorporated group norms to a greater extent into their self-concept. High identifiers described themselves as more collectivist when

the norm was collectivist and more individualist when the group norm prescribed individualism. In line with predictions, low identifiers did not differentially endorse collectivism as a function of group norms (Study 1) and were less influenced in their self description by salient group norms (Study 2). Study 3 demonstrated the importance of identity threat to moderate the effects of conformity to group norms. Under high threat conditions, high identifiers were collectivist or individualist consistent with the manipulated group norms. This effect was found on measures of collectivism and self-stereotyping on individualism versus collectivism.

It could be argued that the finding that high identifiers act in line with individualist group norms might reflect the strategy of high identifiers to profit from the 'exit' or dissociation opportunity provided by the individualist group norm. That is, the individualist norm might provide a legitimate reason to abandon the group by stressing individuality instead of collectivism, especially when the identity is under threat as in Study 3. However, it should be noted that this explanation runs counter to a number of findings reported in the literature that high identifiers are more likely than low identifiers to use every opportunity to defend their group identity, especially when this identity is under threat, and that high identifiers are less likely to use 'exit' strategies (e.g. Branscombe *et al.*, 1993; Doosje *et al.*, 1995; Jetten *et al.*, 2000; Postmes *et al.*, 1999; Spears *et al.*, 1997). Rather, we propose that the results support our prediction that individualism may well serve as a group goal and that under such conditions high identifiers believe that individualism is a 'proper' way to serve the interests of the group and that individualism has beneficial collective effects.

Note that in all three studies the difference in collectivism and self-stereotyping between low identifiers and high identifiers was greater when the group norm represented collectivism than when it represented individualism. This finding is consistent with the prediction that a group norm of collectivism resonates with the tendency of high identifiers to act for the benefit of the group. In contrast, a group norm of individualism may conflict with these collectivist tendencies of high identifiers, especially because high identifiers are sensitive to group norms. Thus, the individualist group presents an awkward situation for high identifiers: their inclination to stand by their group (i.e. to be collectivist by virtue of their high sense of identification) goes against the group norm of individualism. These two opposing tendencies might sometimes cancel each other out, leading to similar effects on the main dependent variables for high and low identifiers when the norm is towards individualism (Jetten *et al.*, 1997).

The central question in this research was whether induced group norms of collectivism and individualism can determine the behavior of group members who vary in their commitment to the group. The results generally support our prediction that high identifiers conform to group norms for collectivism as well as individualism. The most striking aspect of our results is that it is possible to be highly committed to one's group and to stick to the group's identity, and at the same time show individualist behaviors and define oneself as an individualist. Indeed, we would like to suggest that when the dominant culture — either the national identity or a culture specific to a group — is an individualist one, these highly identified people embrace their social identity when they are being individualist.

This finding implies that one may conceive of cultures such as the American not as 'individualist' in the sense of being impervious to social influences of social groups and of their culture, but as demonstrating collectivism through strong individualism. Our studies showed that those who are generally most likely to serve the group (high identifiers) may engage in individualist or collectivist actions depending on the content of group norms. This implies that people may reinforce their social norm — and by implication celebrate their cultural heritage — by engaging in collective actions along the individualism–collectivism dimension. Hence, our findings may shed light on the paradox that social influence can be powerful in a society where everyone claims to be independent and autonomous, and hence informs us about the existence, endurance, and promulgation of individualism

as a cultural phenomenon. Similarly, it has been argued that the individual self is usually more dominant in self-definitions in Western countries than the collectivist self (Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummendey, 1995; Simon, 1997). The present research suggest that this predominant self-definition may also be seen as the product of cultural influence and that people define themselves as individuals because of their cultural heritage.

Our results underscore the utility of cultural approaches to self and identity, but has three additional implications for this approach. The first is that the influence of intra-cultural variability should not be under-valued in searching for cultural invariance. As the present results demonstrate, subcultures or smaller groups within cultures may vary in the degree to which they view themselves as collectivist or individualist, and these differences may be meaningfully related to group members' actions. By implication, the utility of these theories might not just be confined to one or the other culture, but be restricted by the nature of *groups*. Indeed, as evidenced by the results of Study 2, much of the reasoning above can be extended from national cultures to organizational cultures, for example. Second, the nature of the differences between conditions was predicted from and informed by the theoretical frameworks of social identity and self-categorization. Therefore, these theories appear to be of value in explaining cultural influences, even when their view of social influence could be characterized as collectivist. Third, as argued above, we might infer from these findings that in those cases where individualism can be defined as a collective attribute, strong individualism may be evidence for collectivist tendencies. This would suggest it is fruitful to distinguish the content of culture and norms from the cultural and social influences by which this content is disseminated.

Of course, it would be presumptuous to argue that such small-scale experiments as ours can explain complex and extensive systems of social influence such as cultures, or that situationally-induced norms and those of larger groups, organizations, society or whole cultures are equivalent. Nevertheless, the similarity in patterns of results we found in collectivist and individualist countries to the results we found when we manipulated the content of organizational and group norms is quite promising. This suggest that the transmission and maintenance of such cultural systems can be studied in microcosm and that we can study how people reconcile the commitment and obligation they feel towards their group with an ideology of individuality or collectivism in the laboratory.

With respect to the implications of this research for social identity theory, it is generally assumed that there is a positive relationship between group identification and acting for the benefit of the group (Branscombe *et al.*, 1993; Doosje & Ellemers, 1997; Doosje *et al.*, 1995; Postmes *et al.*, 1999; Wann & Branscombe, 1990). The results of the present studies do not contradict this assumption, but suggest that it is important to take the power of group norms to channel group behavior into account, because they may moderate this relationship. Our findings demonstrate that group norms can strengthen but also reverse this relationship, particularly for those who value their group membership.

In sum, three studies investigating the relation between ingroup norms, group identification, and identity threat have demonstrated the impact that ingroup norms of individualism and collectivism may have to guide behavior. Results suggest that the content of group norms might change the way group members display their loyalty to the group. Results of these studies provide evidence that the findings of recent research examining intra-group differences in commitment to the group should be modified to take into account the nature of group norms. Contrary to some recent proposals derived from social identity theory, under high identity threat not only collectivism but also individualism may serve the function of showing loyalty to the group for high identifiers. These findings inform us that it may be important and instructive to take the collective dimension of individualism into account: When we hear people argue that 'we are all individuals', this may disguise (and paradoxically convey at the same time) the underlying social influence that permits individualism to endure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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