

Individualist-Collectivist Orientations and Achievement Value in College Students

Orientación de trabajo y valor del éxito en estudiantes universitarios

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Abstract

The present investigation examined individualist-collectivist orientations and achievement value in two groups of college students studying under different settings in the city of Kolkata (Calcutta), India. One group of students was from general stream while the other group was studying a specially designed value orientation course emphasizing Indian culture and values. Findings indicate significant differences between the two groups with respect to vertical individualism, and horizontal and vertical aspects of collectivism. However coexistence of both individualism and collectivism were observed among the students, particularly in general stream students. The students differed significantly with respect to their upward striving for achievement in two different settings. A significant positive relationship between achievement value and individualism for general stream students and a significant negative relationship with collectivism for both groups was observed. The study demonstrates the impact of value orientation educational courses on one's individualist-collectivist orientation and achievement value.

Keywords: value, orientation, individualism, collectivism, achievement value

Resumen

Esta investigación analiza la orientación individualista y colectivista, así como el valor del éxito, en dos grupos de estudiantes universitarios bajo dos diferentes marcos educativos en la ciudad de Calcuta, India. Un grupo de estudiantes pertenecía a un marco educativo estándar, mientras que el otro pertenecía a un marco educativo especial donde se enfatizaban los valores y cultura indios. Los resultados muestran una diferencia significativa entre los dos grupos respecto a los aspectos de individualismo vertical y horizontal, así como a los aspectos de colectivismo vertical. No obstante, también se observó una coexistencia de los valores individualistas y colectivistas en los estudiantes, sobre todo en los estudiantes correspondientes al marco educativo estándar. Los estudiantes se diferenciaron significativamente respecto a su esfuerzo por el éxito en los dos marcos educativos, mostrando los pertenecientes al marco estándar una relación significativamente positiva hacia el valor del éxito con respecto al individualismo mayor que los estudiantes del grupo especial, y una relación significativamente negativa hacia el colectivismo en ambos grupos de estudiantes. El estudio demuestra la influencia que una educación centrada en los valores tiene en el estudiante respecto a su orientación individualista o colectivista, así como en el valor del éxito.

Palabras clave: valor, orientación, individualismo, colectivismo, valor del éxito

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Introduction

Culture shapes one's personality. Culture is the mindset or mental framework resulting from shared values, beliefs, symbols and social ideals (Hofstede, 1980). Culture independently influences one's thought, belief system and action either directly through the socialization of the individual within a culture or indirectly as the individual learns the language of a culture.

Value is the hard core of culture; it is the motivating force of human beings. Values are defined as desirable, abstract goals that apply across situations (Schwartz, 1992). Values serve as guiding principles in people's lives. They function as the criteria that people use to select and justify the actions and to evaluate other people and events. In Indian culture different patterns are observed in different contexts. In Indian Society, Hinduism is meant not only in the usual sense of the word as religion, but as a tradition or duty. "Hinduism is an inheritance of thought and aspiration living and moving with the movement of life, an inheritance to which every race in India has made its contribution. Its culture has a unity though, on examination, it dissolves into a variety of shades and colours" (Radhakrishnan, 1947). This Hindu culture, intensely practical, taking in their totality the sum of human aspirations and needs has classified values as *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. This lower tier of values i.e. *artha* (wealth), *kama* (sensuous pleasure) and *dharma* (morality or duty) always go together but *dharma* governs *artha* and *kama*, and it is given prominence. The upper tier of value in Hindu culture is *moksha or mukti*, which is the final end of human aspiration. The lower tier of values may be regarded as instrumental values, although they do not necessarily lead to *moksha or mukti*.

Values motivate and regulate human action. Energy (*prakriti or sakti*) is the causal power which is manifested in all existence and in all forces of human action. It has three qualitative aspects or *gunas*, namely, *sattva* which is reflected in the sharpness of intellect, *rajas* is expressed in the intensity of desire, the restlessness for achievement, and *tamas* is expressed in indifference to feeling, to pleasure or to pain. It is also expressed in depression, lethargy and inertia (Yuktananda, 1989). These *gunas* are inseparable in any manifestation of energy. However, at any moment one of the qualities may be dominant while the other two remain less forceful or dormant.

The desire to accomplish interesting and challenging tasks and be recognized for this, is a desirable value found in individuals. This concept for the need for achievement (McClelland, 1961) is found mostly in individualist societies. Yu & Yang (1994) pointed out that the concept of achievement motivation as defined by McClelland strongly implies an orientation toward the individual or the self. They mentioned about social oriented achievement motivation which states that the society prescribes the content and form of achievement goals for the individuals. Singhal and Misra (1989) argue that Western and Non Western groups are not necessarily more or less motivated as a group, rather they are motivated to achieve different goals through different means. Niles (1998) observed that Australians reflect an individualist orientation in preferred achievement goals, whereas Sri Lankans, although predominantly more family and group oriented, still have important individual goals.

In the context of individualism collectivism also, the coexistence of both are observed in the individual's behavior (Ghosh, 2004; Mishra, 1994; Sinha & Tripathi, 1994) in Indian culture. The Indian form of collectivism contains strands of individualism as observed by Tripathi (1988), who remarks that the coexistence of mutually contradictory things either in an individual's mind or in reality does not show or give surprise to an Indian.

An individualist culture is described as one in which the goals and needs of the individual take precedence over in-groups such as extended family, community, work organizations etc., whereas individuals of collectivist cultures view personal goals and needs as subordinate to the goals and needs of these in-groups (Triandis, 1990; 1994). The incompatibility in value systems that distinguishes these two types of cultures, are found not only in the social conducts but also in different patterns of self understanding that are observed

in individuals living within these cultures. Singelis et al (1995) and Triandis & Gelfand (1998) made further distinctions between individualism and collectivism. They argued that both individualism and collectivism may be either horizontal that is emphasizing equality or it may be vertical that is emphasizing hierarchy. Brief descriptions of the four patterns are given below:

- (i) Horizontal individualism (HI) is a cultural pattern where an individual wants to be unique and distinct from groups and self-reliant but is more or less equal in status with others.
- (ii) Vertical individualism (VI) is a cultural pattern in which an individual wants to become distinguished or in having high status.
- (iii) Horizontal collectivism (HC) is a cultural pattern where an individual perceives the self as an aspect of an in-group and emphasizes common goals with others. In this pattern the self is interdependent and same as the self of others.
- (iv) Vertical collectivism (VC) is a cultural pattern where an individual views the self as an aspect of an in-group, but the members of the in-group are different from each other, some having more status than others.

In the light of this coexistence of opposing things in Indian culture, the present study aims to find out the individualist-collectivist orientations of college students when they are placed to study under different settings. It also wants to find out the relationship of achievement value of college students in relation to their individualist-collectivist orientation. The study is designed to be done across groups of college students studying in two different settings in the city of Kolkata (Calcutta). One group of students was studying in general stream in two local colleges of Kolkata. The other group was studying a specially designed value-orientation course that is also in the city of Kolkata. In this course the emphasis is given on self-development based on Indian ethics, culture and heritage so that the values filtered through there are transferred into behavioral norms, and can be applied to improve quality of life, preferably collectively. Here in this study we are using the distinction of horizontal and vertical aspects of individualism and collectivism in relation to achievement value.

Method

Participants

A total of 90 undergraduate participants took part in this study, 40 students were from general stream, studying in two different colleges of Kolkata and there were 34 students who were studying a specially designed value orientation course emphasizing Indian culture and heritage, and this was also located in Kolkata. The age range of the subjects were from 20-24 years. The subjects were from middle socio-economic class and from an urban metropolitan city exposed to modern facilities of life.

Measures

The following measures were used in this study:

Individualism-Collectivism Scale: Individualism-collectivism scale developed by Triandis and Gelfand (1998), based on the original scale of Singelis et al (1995), was used in this study. The scale has a total of 16 items having four items in each of the following four areas: (i) Horizontal individualism (HI), (ii) Vertical individualism (VI), (iii) Horizontal collectivism (HC), and (iv) Vertical Collectivism (VC). The respondents were asked to indicate their responses on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Achievement Value Scale: This forced choice sentence completion scale for measuring Achievement value was developed by Mukherjee (1965). This scale is used to assess an individual's verbalized desire for upward striving and can be regarded as an inner personality factor capable of influencing cognitive behaviors in general and one's perception of self in particular. This is somewhat similar to the need for achievement as conceptualized by McClelland (1961). The high score in this scale indicates an individual's desire for objective accomplishment of the task with a standard of excellence. These two scales were administered on both the groups of students in group situation.

Results

The means, standard deviations and t-tests for horizontal and vertical aspects of individualism and collectivism were calculated for the two groups of students and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Mean, SD and t-value for Horizontal and Vertical aspects of Individualism and Collectivism in two groups of students

Dimension	General stream		Value oriented		t-value
	N = 40		N = 34		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
HI	18.92	4.88	19.20	4.77	0.25
VI	19.02	5.58	16.70	3.87	2.11*
HC	18.00	3.74	23.06	3.03	6.43**
VC	18.38	4.86	22.29	4.37	3.65**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

HI = Horizontal Individualism VI = Vertical Individualism

HC = Horizontal Collectivism VC = Vertical Collectivism

Table 1 reveals significant differences between the two groups with respect to vertical individualism, and horizontal and vertical aspects of collectivism, which show that the students studying in general stream are more individualist, whereas students studying in value orientation course are more collectivist. It is observed that the highest mean score for general stream students was in the area of vertical individualism (VI), and the lowest for horizontal collectivism (HC). Though participants scored the highest in vertical individualism, their scores in the other three areas were more or less similar. This indicates that both individualist and collectivist orientations coexist among these students. They want to be self-reliant, but at the same time they perceive themselves as an aspect of the in-group, while the members of the in-group are different from each other. On the other hand, value-oriented students in the present study, though living in an urban metropolitan atmosphere, were more collectivist in their orientations than individualists. They scored the highest in horizontal collectivism and the lowest in vertical individualism. That is, they perceive themselves as being similar to other people and emphasize common goals with others, interdependence and sociability.

The means and standard deviations for the achievement value scores for the two groups of students were obtained and a t-test was calculated to find out if there is any significant difference between the two groups with respect to achievement value. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Mean, SD and t-value of Achievement value scale for two groups of students

	General Stream Students (N = 40)	Value-oriented group students (N = 34)
Mean	23.90	16.32
SD	9.58	5.30
t-value	4.28**	

Note: ** $p < .01$

The values reported in Table 2 depict that the students differ significantly with respect to their upward striving for achievement in two different settings. General stream students are more achievement oriented than value-oriented groups of students. We may explain this on the basis of Indian philosophy. That is the students who are more achievement oriented, *raja guna* are dominant among themselves. On the other hand, this *guna* was not as prevalent in the value orientated group of students. It may be that due to the impact of value orientation courses, students use the *sattva* aspect of *guna* dynamics for a value motivated action.

The relationship between individualist-collectivist orientation and achievement value was analysed for these two groups of students and the correlation values are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Correlation of coefficients between Achievement value and different aspects of Individualism-Collectivism in two different groups

Dimensions ^a	General Students (N = 40)	Value-oriented Students (N = 34)
HI	.82**	.12
VI	.90**	.31
HC	-.55**	-.53**
VC	-.65**	-.51**

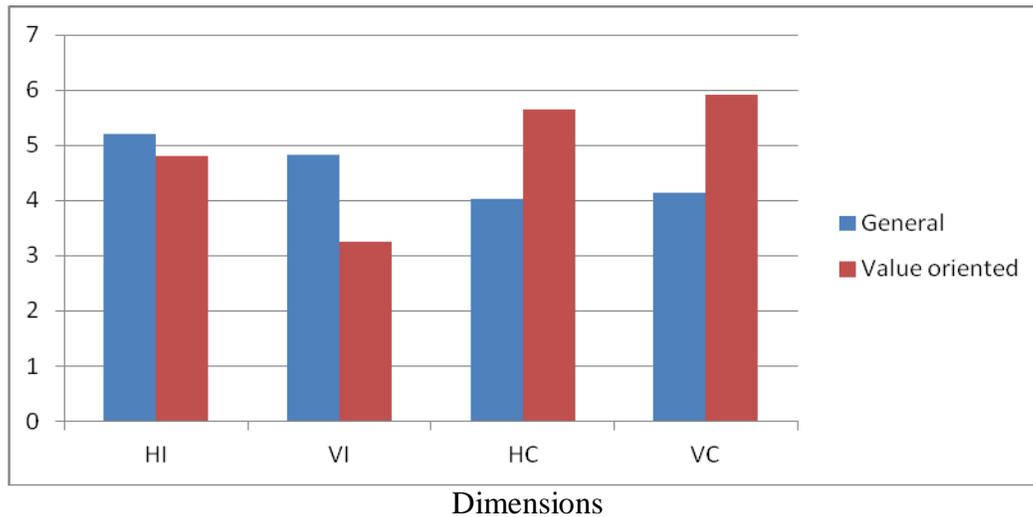
Note: ** $p < .01$

HI = Horizontal Individualism VI = Vertical Individualism
HC = Horizontal Collectivism VC = Vertical Collectivism

The results reported in Table 3 indicate that there is a significant positive relationship between achievement value and horizontal and vertical aspects of individualism for general groups of students. This shows individualism leads one to accomplish challenging tasks and to achieve higher goals that are related to one's further self-development or vice versa. On the contrary, for value-oriented group of students a significant negative relationship of horizontal and vertical aspects of collectivism was observed with achievement value. This indicates that in the value oriented group, the more the collectivist orientation, the less the achievement value for upward striving or vice versa. In case of general stream students also, a significant negative relationship was observed for horizontal and vertical aspects of collectivism with achievement value. This shows that in general stream students the existence of both trends are present.

Analysis of some of the items from four different aspects of individualism- collectivism shows that there is variation in the responses of the two different groups. This is evident from the Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Mean Response Pattern of four different items of HI, VI, HC, & VC



In one item of vertical individualism, for example, “**Winning is everything**”, the mean response of the general stream students was much higher than the value oriented group of students. For one HI item for example, “**I often do my own thing**” the difference between the two groups was not so much, which the content of the item itself explains. The value oriented group scored higher in HC item for example, “**If a coworker gets a prize, I would feel proud**”, and also in one VC item for example, “**It is my duty to take care of my family, even when I have to sacrifice what I want**”. These response patterns indicate that collectivism is much more prevalent in value oriented groups of students while individualism is more prevalent in general groups of students.

Discussion

Diverse individualist and collectivist orientations and achievement value are observed in the students studied in the present investigation. There is coexistence of both individualist and collectivist orientations among general stream students, but their dominant orientation is towards vertical individualism. This indicates that they try to acquire status and want to become distinguished from others but at the same time believe in family integrity and see themselves as an aspect of the in-group. The findings corroborate with the findings of Sinha & Tripathi (1994) and Ghosh (2004) who observed that although individualist and collectivist elements often conflict with each other, Indians try to incorporate both orientations in their preferred modes of behavior. Sinha & Verma (1994) have also observed in their study that master’s level students express more idiocentric than allocentric orientations, due to western influence, immediate life concerns and exposure to mass media. In Hindu philosophy and ethics also, similar juxtaposition of contradictory elements are to be found where *dharma* (morality or duty) and *moksha* (salvation) coexist with the pursuit of *artha* (wealth) and *kama* (sensuous pleasure). In general, the achievement orientation for upward striving is also high for these students. This could be explained as an impact of the urban metropolitan atmosphere where students are continuously exposed to Western modern influences and mass media.

On the contrary students who were studying a value orientation course, were found to be predominantly horizontal collectivist. That is they emphasize equality, interdependence and share common goals with others. This may be due to the impact of value orientation courses, whereby emphasis on self-development is based on Indian ethics, values and heritage. Apart from this, it may be that these students have inherited certain collectivist values from their childhood due to the process of socialization. Furthermore, they were not so achievement oriented for upward striving. It may be that *sattva* aspect of *guna* is predominant among this group students. This may be one of the reasons for opting for this value orientation course even living in an urban atmosphere and exposed to Western education and modern amenities of life.

In summing up, it can be said that achievement value of students vary with respect to their individualistic-collectivist orientations. Values as defined in Hindu culture and their manifestations are expressed by students in different degrees in any action under different settings due to socialization practices and the impact of the course curriculum.

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