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Abstract

This study was designed to determine whether individualistic and collectivistic values have an effect on mate preferences. It was hypothesized that (i) Asians will be more collectivistic and Caucasians will be more individualistic, (ii) participants that are classified as more individualistic will have a greater preference for potential mates who are socially exciting and have professional status, and (iii) participants who are classified as more collectivistic will have greater preference for potential mates who are kind, considerate, domesticated and have a liking for children. The individualist and collectivist values were measured using the Individualistic and Collectivistic Scale, while the mate preference dimensions (kind, socially exciting, domestic, professional status and “likes-children”) were measured using the Marital Preference Questionnaire. A total of 50 female participants completed the questionnaires. The results supported the first hypothesis as a significant correlation was found between race and individualistic and collectivistic attitudes. The second and third hypothesis was partially supported, as no significant relationship was found between individualism and professional status, or collectivism and kind. However, there was significant relationship found between individualism-socially exciting, collectivism-domestic and collectivism-“likes-children”.

In the study of contemporary cross-cultural psychology, the two fundamental values that clearly differentiate between Eastern and Western cultures are individualism and collectivism. Individualism is a cultural product of the West while collectivism is considered to be more representative of the non-Western societies (Ghorbani, Bing, Watson, Davison & LeBreton, 2003); West is referred to countries such as Western Europe, North America, and Australia whereas non-Western societies refer to Asia, South America, and Africa. Both the individualism and collectivism constructs concern the relation between the individual and the group and can be reflected across many domains of social functioning including mate preferences (Hofstede, 1984; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

Individualism is the belief in the importance of the individual and in the virtues of self-reliance and personal independence thus, showing less concern for other people's needs and interests (Hui & Triandis, 1986). It focuses on the rights of the individual and the importance of individual goals such that the emphasis is on promoting one's self-interest (Lalonde et al., 2004). These individuals often regard relationships as competing with personal needs and regard group pressures as interfering with personal goals (Fiske et al., 2002). In addition, individualists tend to have a more stable and autonomous view of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Collectivism is the theoretical or practical emphasis on the group's goals, as opposed to the individual goals (Hui & Triandis, 1986). It is the attitudes and behaviors based on the belief that the basic unit of survival lies within a group, not the individual

(Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1994). Collectivism is related to family integrity and family unity therefore, goals cannot be considered without thinking of the implications for others (Gibbons et al., 1996; Lalonde et al., 2004). This is associated with a sense of duty toward one's own group, interdependence with others, a desire for social harmony and conformity with group norms (Ghorbani et al., 2003; Green et al., 2005).

It is commonly acknowledged that individualist and collectivist attitudes are not mutually exclusive (Bontempo, 1993, as cited in Green et al., 2005). Individuals may be characterized by specific combination of individualist-collectivist attitudes; some people may be high on individualist and low on collectivist or vice versa, while others can be high or low on both (Green et al., 2005). Thus, this study will regard the individualist and collectivist attitudes as two distinct components in which Asian Chinese will represent the collectivistic culture while Western Caucasian will represent individualistic culture.

Mate preferences

The influence of cultural values on attitudes and behaviour has also become an important topic in mate selection (Buss, 1998). It seems likely that cultural dimensions, such as individualism and collectivism, could account for the differences in potential mate preferences. Buss and associates (1990) studied the qualities believed to be important in a potential mate among late adolescents and young adults of 37 different societies. Differences in preferential mate attributes were found between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Furthermore, the study revealed that young people from collectivist cultures regard chastity and good housekeeping as important qualities in an ideal mate whilst exciting personality was regarded as more important for individualistic cultures. As family integrity appeared to be an essential aspect of collectivism, the collectivistic

emphasis on conformity may have led to a decreased emphasis on individual traits such as appearance (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987); thus, individuals who are more collectivistic might not have ranked socially exciting as an important characteristic needed in a mate. Similarly, Gibbons et al. (1996) found that collectivistic adolescents prefer their mate to be kind, domestic and have a liking for children while individualistic adolescents ranked appearance as more important. In summary, qualities such as being socially exciting and having professional status were more important in a potential mate for young people from individualistic cultures; qualities such as being kind, domesticated and “likes-children” were important for young people from collectivistic cultures. Gibbons, Richter, Wiley & Stiles (1996) study also found that these five characteristics highlighted the differential mate preferences between the individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Differences were also found in mate preference of men and women in the traits desired of a mate (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995; Toromorn & Sprecher, 2003). Men are inclined to prefer mates with traits such as attractiveness and good housekeeping while women prefer a mate with good earning capacity and resources (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995). Therefore, in order to emphasize the effect of cross-cultural preferences in mate selection, female participants will only be used as participants, so as to eliminate gender differences.

The aim of this study was to investigate if individualistic and collectivistic values have an effect on mate preferences. The Individualistic and Collectivistic Scale (ICS) will be used to determine the extent to which Asian and Caucasian participants are individualistic and collectivistic. The Marital Preference Questionnaire (MPQ) will be used to identify the traits participants most desire in a potential mate. It was hypothesized that (i)

Asians will be more collectivistic and Caucasians will be more individualistic (Ghorbani et al., 2003), (ii) participants that are classified as more individualistic will have a greater preference for potential mates who are socially exciting and have professional status, and (iii) participants who are classified as more collectivistic will have greater preference for potential mates who are kind, domesticated and “likes-children” (Gibbons et al., 1996).

Method

Design

The study was carried out as a questionnaire study and was a within-subject design. The independent variables were the degree of individualistic traits and collectivistic traits. The dependent variable was the preference rating for the particular traits of a potential long-term mate as defined by the five subscales in the MPQ: kind, socially exciting, domestic, professional status and “likes-children”.

Participants

In total, 50 participants completed this study. All participants were the family and friends of researchers who volunteered to take part in the study and had to be aged at least 18 years. Age ranged from 18 to 25 years, with a mean of 20.78 years and a standard deviation of 1.36. The participants comprised of 25 Asian Chinese and 25 Western Caucasian females who are not married.

Materials

The materials used in the study consisted of the ICS and MPQ. Demographics were also recorded and these included the age, race, religion and cultural identity of the participants. The demographics were recorded as a control mechanism, in order to explain any main effects that, for example, age and race may have had on the data.

The Marital Preference Questionnaire (MPQ) is a 22 item questionnaire which measures the five dimensions of mate selection that is kind, socially exciting, domestic, professional status and “likes-children”. The items were selected from the original 76-item MPQ by Gough (1973) for his study of family planning and population psychology. The items were selected to represent a broad array of traits that may be desired in a potential mate. The items were answered on a scale of 0 “very undesirable” to 4 “very desirable”. The scores were separated to the five respective dimensions and the overall scores ranged from 0 to 20 for all the dimensions, except the likes-children dimension which ranged from 0 to 8.

The Individualistic and Collectivistic Scale (ICS) is a 32 item questionnaire designed to measure the extent to which the participants are individualistic and collectivistic. Each item was rated in terms of a five-point frequency scale, ranging from 1 “never” to 5 “always”. The individualistic and collectivistic scores were separately calculated; thus the scores range from 0 to 75 for individualistic and 0 to 85 for collectivistic.

Procedure

The study was conducted only after the ethics were approved. Prior to giving out the questionnaires, the participants were provided with an information sheet containing the

details of what they will experience during the course of their participation (refer to Appendix A). The participants also had to fill out a consent form to confirm their agreement to participate and that it is purely voluntary (refer to Appendix B). They were also assured that they can withdraw from the study, at any time without prejudice. In addition, the experimenter also emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and that they were to give honest answers. The participants were also told not to put their names on the questionnaire in order to preserve anonymity. The questionnaires were given out in a package consisting of the ICS, MPQ and demographics in this particular order (refer to Appendix C). The experimenter was present during the administering of the questionnaires to ensure that the content was not discussed with the rest of the participants. Once the questionnaires were completed, they were sealed in an unmarked envelope to protect their confidentiality. The questionnaires took approximately 25 minutes to complete. Upon completion of the questionnaires, the participants were debriefed concerning the purpose of the study.