



# Independent/Interdependent Self-Construal, Collectivism, & Individualism: What do these Cultural Variables mean for Psychopathology?

By: Cheri A. Levinson & Thomas L. Rodebaugh  
Washington University in St. Louis



## Abstract

**Introduction:** Researchers have found that cultural variables may influence the development of psychopathology (Hong & Woody, 2007).

**Method:** In the current study we examined several indicators of psychopathology (social anxiety, body dissatisfaction, trait anxiety, depression) and their relation with interdependence, independence, individualism, and collectivism.

**Results/Discussion:** Our results suggest that independent self-construal may protect against social anxiety and body image disorders and that individualism may protect against depression and body image disorders.

## Introduction

- Cultural values, such as independent & interdependent self-construal, collectivism, and individualism may influence the development of psychopathology (Chiao & Blizinsky, 2010; Hong & Woody, 2007)
- Self-construal** (Singelis, 1994)
  - Independent = internal attributes and uniqueness of individuals
  - Interdependent = stresses social connectedness
- Horizontal and Vertical Individualism/Collectivism** (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998)
  - Individualism = uniqueness
  - Collectivism = connectedness
  - Individuals with high levels of horizontal patterns assume that people are equal
  - Individuals with high levels of vertical patterns assume that people can be arranged in a meaningful hierarchy.
- We examined how these variables relate to social anxiety, trait anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction

## Hypotheses

- Higher levels of independent self-construal and individualism would predict lower levels of psychological symptoms because these are the dominant values of the USA
- Higher levels of interdependent self-construal and collectivism would predict higher levels of psychological symptoms

## Participants

- Participants were 155 adult students
  - Mostly women ( $n = 102$ ; 66%)
  - Caucasian ( $n = 91$ , 59.1%), Asian/Asian American ( $n = 46$ , 29.9%), African-American ( $n = 10$ , 6.5%), Multi-racial ( $n = 6$ , 0.6%)
  - Median age was 19.82 ( $SD = 1.74$ )
  - Most ( $n = 132$ , 85%) were U.S. citizens
  - Ranged in generational status from first to fifth or more generations
    - Mean generational status of 3.19 generations ( $SD = 1.52$ ).
  - English as the primary language spoken in home ( $n = 121$ , 78%)
    - Chinese ( $n = 15$ , 9.7%), Korean ( $n = 14$ , 9.1%), and other ( $n = 4$ , 2.6%) as the primary language

## Psychopathology Measures

**Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS;** Mattick & Clarke, 1998)

- Describes anxiety-related reactions to a variety of social situations
- Good to excellent reliability, and good construct and convergent validity (Heimberg & Turk, 2002, for a review)
- For analyses, the reverse-scored items are dropped (Rodebaugh, Woods, & Heimberg, 2007)

**Beck Depression Inventory 2 (BDI-II;** Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996)

- 20-item measure of depression
- Validated in psychiatric and non-psychiatric samples (Steer, Ball, Ranieri, & Beck, 1997)

**Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ;** Cash, 2000)

- 69-item measure that assesses body-image attitudes
- Current study used the 7-item appearance evaluation (AE) scale and 9-item body areas satisfaction scale (BS)
- Higher scores suggest satisfaction with physical attractiveness and body image

**State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI;** Beiling et al., 1998)

- 7-item measure of trait anxiety

## Cultural Value Measures

**Revised Self-Construal Scale (SCS;** Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997)

- 30 item measure on a 7 point scale
- Two 15-item subscales: Independent & Interdependent
- Measure has been shown to be adequately reliable and valid (Moscovitch, Hofmann, & Litz, 2005)

**Individualism/Collectivism Scale (ICS;** Triandis & Gelfand, 1998)

- 16 item measure of individualism and collectivism
- 4 subscales: Vertical/Horizontal Individualism, Vertical/Horizontal Collectivism
- Has shown good convergent/discriminant validity

## Results

Table 1. Zero-order correlations: The relationship between cultural values, social anxiety, trait anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction

	Social Anxiety	Depression	Trait Anxiety	Appear Eval	Body Area Sat
Independence	<b>-.46**</b>	-.11	<b>-.25**</b>	<b>.25**</b>	<b>.21*</b>
Interdependence	<b>.22*</b>	.10	.08	-.15	-.15
Horizontal Individualism	.03	<b>.17*</b>	.04	<b>.17*</b>	.15
Vertical Individualism	.10	.09	<b>.18*</b>	-.01	-.10
Horizontal Collectivism	-.14	<b>-.18*</b>	<b>-.22**</b>	.06	.01
Vertical Collectivism	<b>.16*</b>	.02	.01	<b>-.16*</b>	-.10

Note. Appear Eval = Appearance Evaluation; Body Area Sat = Body Area Satisfaction; Items in bold are in support of hypothesis; items in red are against hypothesis; \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .001$

## Results

Multiple Regression Analyses:

- Both independence (part  $r = -.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and interdependence (part  $r = .17$ ,  $p = .043$ ) predicted social interaction anxiety over and above trait anxiety (part  $r = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ )
- Independence (part  $r = .19$ ,  $p = .028$ ) predicted appearance evaluation over and above trait anxiety (part  $r = -.24$ ,  $p = .004$ )
- Horizontal individualism (part  $r = .17$ ,  $p = .045$ ) and vertical collectivism (part  $r = -.19$ ,  $p = .025$ ) predicted appearance evaluation over and above depression (part  $r = -.07$ ,  $p = .417$ ) and trait anxiety (part  $r = -.16$ ,  $p = .058$ )

## Discussion

- Independent self-construal may be important in protecting against psychopathology, such as social anxiety and body image disorders
- Interdependent self-construal and vertical collectivism may contribute to the development of social anxiety and body image disorders
- Results for depression were *against* hypothesis: Higher levels of horizontal individualism was related to higher levels of depression and vice versa for horizontal collectivism
  - Triandis & Gelfand (1998) have suggested that it is *vertical* individualism that is consistent with American culture
- Trait anxiety results were also against hypothesis
  - It may be that depression and trait anxiety operate differently than social anxiety and body image disorders
- Future research should explore why these differences exist
- Additionally, future research should explore how these results change in an interdependent/collectivist culture