Individual differences in collectivism predict city identification and city evaluation in Australian, French, and Turkish cities

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ABSTRACT

Collectivism is a sociocultural variable that predicts how people relate to social groups. Cities are social groups. Hence, collectivism should predict how people relate to cities. To test this prediction, the researchers sampled 1660 residents of four cities in three countries. Participants completed an online survey containing measures of collectivism, city identification, and city evaluation. Results showed that, within each city sample and across the combined samples, a specific measure of collectivism called collective interdependent self-construal was positively related to city evaluation. Furthermore, city identification mediated the relation between collective interdependent self-construal and city evaluation. These results demonstrate that people's general tendency to construe social groups as part of their self predicts their identification with their city, which in turn helps to explain their positive appraisal of their city. These results are discussed from the perspectives of both environmental psychology and social psychology.

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"Maybe it's because I'm a Londoner, That I love London so, Well, maybe it's because I'm a Londoner, That I think of her wherever I go." (Hubert Gregg, 1947; English songwriter).

1. Introduction

Hubert Gregg's (1947) opening verse about London neatly captures the relations between his residency in a city, his evaluation of the city, and the extent to which the city has become a part of him. But are these relations specific to cities or are they part of a wider set of social psychological processes that apply to social groups in general and, if the latter, what broader social psychological constructs predict city identification and city evaluation? The present research addressed these questions by investigating individual differences in collectivism as a potential predictor of city identification and evaluation. We begin with a discussion of city

identification and city evaluation and then move on to consider how collectivism might relate to each of these variables.

1.1. City identification

There has been a wealth of research on place attachment and place identification or place identity (for reviews, see Droseltis & Vignoles, 2010; Lewicka, 2011; Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). In the present research, we focused on identification and attachment to *cities* because, unlike other places such as homes, neighbourhoods, regions, countries, etc., cities represent prototypical "places" (Tuan, 1975), and they contain large and dense groups of interacting people. Consequently, they are ideally suited for the investigation of place identification and attachment.

A common complaint in the area of place identification and attachment is that the vast array of closely-related constructs and definitions make it difficult to see the forest for the trees, and this confusion often leads researchers to become "stuck in definitional questions" (Lewicka, 2011, p. 208). Despite these potential problems, it is important to locate the concept of *city identification* within the literature on place attachment and identification. In this

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context, we define city identification as an ongoing process that combines place identification and place attachment. The place identification aspect relates to "membership of a group of people who are defined by location" (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996, p. 206). More specifically, city identification involves the incorporation of the city as a social group into one's social identity (Bernardo & Palma-Oliveira, 2016; Droseltis & Vignoles, 2010; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). City identification also involves place attachment, which refers to feelings of being bonded to a place and its people (Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010; Zenker & Petersen, 2014). Hence, we conceptualised city identification as involving both identification with, and attachment to, other residents and the city as a whole.

It is important to distinguish city identification from the *personal autobiographical experience* of a city (i.e., "place of mine; " Knez, 2014). City identification refers to the *process* of attachment and affiliation that leads to current feelings of identification. In contrast, personal autobiographical experience about a city refers to the longterm *outcome* of the identification process. This autobiographical outcome is a relatively stable and continuous aspect of the self-concept that is based in memories related to the city (Casey, 2000; Knez, 2014). The current article focuses on the process of city identification rather than on its longterm effect on personal autobiographical experience or identity. In particular, the present article focusses on the effect of city identification on city evaluation.

1.2. The effect of city identification on city evaluation

According to social identity theory, people are motivated by a need for self-esteem to achieve and maintain a positive social identity (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). One means of achieving a positive social identity is to favour one's own social groups, and people who identify highly with their social groups should be most likely to engage in this ingroup favouritism because they have the most to gain in terms of self-esteem (Martiny & Rubin, 2016). Based on this social psychological perspective, there should be a positive relation between city identification and city evaluation: People who identify with their city should be more likely to evaluate that city positively.

There is a substantial body of evidence supporting the prediction of a positive relation between place identification and place evaluation (for a review, see Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2015). For example, Rollero and De Piccoli (2010) found that residents of Turin in Italy who had high levels of place attachment described their city using more positive words than participants who had low levels of attachment. Similarly, Ramkissoon and Mavondo (2015) found a positive relation between place identification and satisfaction among visitors to the Dandenong Ranges National Park in Australia. Most recently, Bernardo and Palma-Oliveira (2016) found a positive relation between neighbourhood identification and satisfaction among residents of a neighbourhood in Lisbon, Portugal.

In summary, place identification and evaluation are positively related, and this relation is consistent with social psychological theories of group processes. However, researchers are less clear about social psychological predictors of city identification and evaluation, and it is to this issue that we now turn.

1.3. Collectivism as a predictor of city identification and city evaluation

Prior research has identified the demographic variables of gender, age, education level, and especially length of residency as predictors of place identification and attachment. Specifically, women, older people, less educated people, and people with longer residencies show higher levels of place attachment or identification (Fleury-Bahi, Félonneau, & Marchand, 2008; Rollero & De Piccoli,

2010; for a review, see; Lewicka, 2011). However, only three studies have considered *social psychological* predictors of place identification and attachment (Droseltis & Vignoles, 2010; Knez, 2005; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). This research has been limited to a consideration of needs and motives. It has found that place identification and/or attachment are predicted by self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness, efficacy, belonging, meaning, security, control, and aesthetic pleasure. Droseltis and Vignoles (2010) also found that several social anthropological variables operate as predictors (e.g., narrative, spiritual significance, and genealogical links). However, no prior research has considered *sociocultural* variables as predictors of place identification and attachment. Unlike more basic social psychological variables, sociocultural variables are inextricably embedded in culture and, consequently, tend to vary as a function of culture. The consideration of sociocultural predictors may be useful in the context of place identification and attachment because places and their inhabitants often differ in their sociocultural characteristics.

One of the most well-studied sociocultural variables is *collectivism* (e.g., Green, Deschamps, & Paez, 2005; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Collectivism and its counterpart *individualism* are sociocultural orientations towards construing the self and others as group members or as individuals. People from non-Western (nonEnglish-speaking) cultures tend to be more collectivist and less individualistic than people from Western cultures (for a review, see Oyserman et al., 2002). Nonetheless, there are also large individual differences in individualism and collectivism within cultures (e.g., Kashima et al., 1995; Realo, Koido, Ceulemans, & Allik, 2002).

In the present article, we focus on collectivism, rather than individualism, as a predictor of city identification and evaluation for two reasons: First, the theoretical relation between collectivism and city identification is clearer than that between individualism and city identification. Unlike individualism, collectivism refers to thinking and behaving in relation to *social groups* (Roccas, Sagiv, Schwartz, Halevy, & Eidelson, 2008). Consequently, people who are more collectivist in their outlook should have a higher propensity to identify with their social groups, including the cities in which they live. Second, although we included measures of individualism in our research, our preliminary analyses showed that they did not yield reliable relations with city identification. Hence, for the sake of brevity, we do not focus on these results here. However, full details about the individualism results are available from the first author on request.

To our knowledge, no prior research has investigated the relation between collectivism and any form of place identification or attachment. However, one study has considered the relation between collectivism and city evaluation. Rubin and Morrison (2014) asked 148 Australian undergraduate students to take a virtual walk through one of four 17th and 19th century utopian cities (e.g., Campanella's, 1968/1602, City of the Sun). Specifically, participants watched a 2.5-min narrated slideshow of a walk through an uninhabited city from a first-person perspective. Participants then completed several measures of individualism, collectivism, and city evaluation. The results showed that collectivism was positively and significantly related to participants' perceived environmental quality of the virtual city they had seen. However, Rubin and Morrison did not consider city identification as a potential mediator of the relation between collectivism and city evaluation. Given that collectivism shapes how people identify with social groups (Roccas et al., 2008), and cities are social groups (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996), it is possible that collectivism predicts people's evaluations of their cities by determining the extent to which they identify with their cities. In other words, city identification may mediate (statistically explain) the relation between collectivism and city evaluation.