International Journal of Intercultural Relations 34 (2010) 429–435

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Intercultural Relations

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel

Individuality in Japan and the United States: A cross-cultural priming experiment

David Dalsky

Center for the Promotion of Excellence in Higher Education, Kyoto University, Yoshida Nihonmatsu-cho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-8501, Japan

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Accepted 31 May 2010

Keywords:
Individuality
Japanese
Idiocentrism
Allocentrism
Intercultural training

ABSTRACT

Japan may be faced with a cultural shift in values as a new generation replaces the aging baby boomer generation that is now leading the society. To demonstrate a temporary shift in values on an individual level, this paper reports on a study that uses a priming technique to shift the allocentrism of Japanese (and the idiocentrism of Americans for comparison). As a test of the hypotheses that idiocentrism (allocentrism) could be primed for those with a chronic allocentric (idiocentric) tendency, undergraduate participants were randomly assigned to one of two priming conditions in an experiment: uniqueness or similarity, or to the control condition (the weather). The manipulation was confirmed with the Twenty Statements Test (TST) and the outcome measure was a scenario measure of Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism (HVIC). Results revealed a significant Culture × Prime interaction effect for changes in vertical idiocentrism on the HVIC; implications are that younger generation Japanese will assert their individuality at appropriate times and in fact may not be more allocentric than Americans on measures that are not confounded by the so-called reference group effect. Implications for intercultural training are also discussed.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

"Individuality" makes you shine. This slogan for a recent Japanese cell phone advertisement (i.e., *au* by KDDI) may not be surprising considering socio-cultural evidence from studies that cast doubt on preconceived notions of collectivism as the characterizing feature of the Japanese relative to westerners (see, for example, Matsumoto, 1999, 2002; Takano & Osaka, 1999; Takano & Sogon, 2008). Indeed, a second look at the slogan might have you wondering how "individuality" makes one shine in a country where the proverbial "nail that stands out is pounded down." This observation presents a challenge not only for intercultural practitioners and teachers who must be in tune with changing cultural trends, but also for intercultural researchers who cannot afford to ignore changing cultural values and belief systems.

One possible approach to intercultural research is to define culture as a dynamic system of implicit theories. According to the dynamic constructivist approach, for example, culture involves an open system of cognitive constructs (i.e., implicit theories) that are context dependent and domain-specific. A cognitive priming technique can be used to activate these implicit theories (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000).

In an early cognitive psychology laboratory demonstration of the priming technique, participants in an experiment who were initially exposed to a set of personality trait constructs were more likely to use those specific constructs than equally applicable alternatives when they were later asked to categorize a target person (Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977). These trait constructs can be thought of as pieces of implicit knowledge that became temporarily activated and more likely to be used as

E-mail address: david.dalsky@gmail.com.

0147-1767/$ – see front matter © 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.05.008

a result of priming. Frequent priming or activation increases the duration of a construct's accessibility and varying degrees of chronic accessibility exist for certain knowledge structures (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982). As a person gains more exposure to certain pieces of knowledge, this information becomes more chronically accessible.

In the socio-cultural cognitive psychology literature there are numerous priming studies that involve the accessibility and activation of implicit cultural values. In these experimental studies, culture is typically manipulated as an independent variable through cultural self or cultural knowledge priming (for a review see Oyserman & Lee, 2008). One of the first of these studies demonstrated that private and collective self-cognitions are located in different places in memory (Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). In this particular study, participants were exposed to the following prime to activate private self-cognitions: "For the next 2 min, you will not need to write anything. Please think of what makes you different from your family and friends. What do you expect yourself to do?" In the collective self-priming condition, participants read: "For the next 2 min, you will not need to write anything. Please think of what you have in common with your family and friends. What do they expect you to do?" The present cross-cultural study adopts this priming technique and extends it by using a control condition and an outcome measure that has not been used in previous studies.

1.1. Individualism and collectivism as implicit cultural theories

In the social science literature, cultures are commonly compared on the dimension of individualism or collectivism (for a review see Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). This distinction – not thought of as implicit per se – was initially popularized by a study of IBM employees' responses to a values survey completed in 40 countries (Hofstede, 1980). The cultural tendencies of Individualism/Collectivism have been defined along the following four dimensions: (1) personal or collective aspects of the self's definition, (2) personal goals versus group goals, (3) exchange or communal relationships, and (4) the influence of attitudes and norms on behavior (Triandis, 1995).

Furthermore, types of individualism and collectivism can be characterized as vertical and horizontal; that is, the degree to which cultures value differences and similarities (Triandis, 1995). For example, middle and upper class citizens of the United States show vertical individualist tendencies through competition: they strive to be the best. Sweden may be a culture where similarity is valued over being different while still maintaining individualism (horizontal individualism). The Israel kibbutz would be an example of a horizontal collectivist culture where community is valued highly. East Asian cultures such as Japan show vertical collectivism through respect and obedience to seniors in a strict social hierarchy (Triandis, 1995).

On the individual level, these cultural syndromes have been labeled as idiocentrism, which corresponds to individualism, and allocentrism, which corresponds to collectivism. The importance of group goals versus individual goals, extending the self to include the ingroup, and having and ingroup identity are the characterizing features of idiocentrism and allocentrism (Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clack, 1985). Following Triandis, Chan, Bhawuk, Iwao, and Sinha (1995), the present study conceptualizes idocentrism and allocentrism as tendencies that are more or less available to individuals, depending on situations; therefore, the present study is concerned with manipulating individual tendencies rather than cultural syndromes.

1.2. Cultural comparisons and the reference group effect

Indeed, although Japanese culture is usually perceived as collectivist, reviews of the empirical evidence of comparative studies cast doubt on this view (e.g., Matsumoto, 1999; Takano & Osaka, 1999; Takano & Sogon, 2008; see also Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Despite this, some researchers suggest that the lack of expected cultural differences in these studies is due to problems with Likert-type scales. One of these problems, known as the *reference group effect*, involves a bias inherent in Likert-type attitudinal measures that occurs when respondents may be mentally referring to others in their social group while completing scales (Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002).

For an example of the reference group effect in a survey study, a Japanese may respond to the item, *I consider myself to be a unique individual*, with a *six* (on a scale from *one = very little* to *seven = very much*) because she is comparing herself to Japanese friends that she perceives to be very similar. An American, by contrast, may respond to the same statement with a *two* because she is comparing herself to American friends whom she perceives to be very different. In this case, the Japanese would score higher on individualism than the American when in fact common sense would suggest otherwise. To avoid the reference group effect, measures with multiple choice options, rather than Likert-type scales, are recommended (Heine et al., 2002). One such instrument is the Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism scale (HVIC; Triandis, Chen, & Chan, 1998). The HVIC is a forced-choice scenario measure that is less influenced by the reference group effect because respondents are focused on choosing one option among many—while not referring to their peers.

1.3. Purpose and overview of the present study

Considering the above, the primary purpose of this study is to identify the cultural source of individual differences in values between Japan and the USA using a priming manipulation and measures that will avoid the reference group effect; for these reasons, the HVIC was used as an outcome measure. Specifically, the present study aims to focus on changes in idiocentrism (and allocentrism) of Japanese and Americans by testing the following hypotheses:

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/947286

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/947286

Daneshyari.com