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UKRAINIAN AND U.S. AMERICAN FEMALES Differences in Individualism/Collectivism and Gender Attitudes

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Individualism/collectivism, gender attitudes, and the relationship between these constructs were measured among Ukrainian and U.S. American women. Contrary to expectation, Ukrainians were more individualistic than U.S. Americans. As predicted, Ukrainians held more traditional gender attitudes than U.S. Americans. Although correlations between individualism/collectivism and gender attitudes were not statistically significant, there was a tendency for individualism to be associated with liberal gender attitudes among U.S. women. Findings were discussed in light of sociopolitical and economic changes in Ukraine.

Keywords: gender attitudes; individualism/collectivism; cross-cultural comparison; Ukrainian and U.S. females

Research on post-Soviet cultures remains scarce in the psychological literature despite the fact that the collapse of the Soviet Union occurred more than a decade ago. It is likely that the vast economic, political, and social changes that have taken place in the region render early studies and stereotypes of Soviet peoples meaningless. Because individual values are thought to be strongly influenced by sociopolitical systems (e.g., Schwartz, 1992), the present study sought to examine beliefs and attitudes of young adults in one post-Soviet culture, Ukraine. Specifically, this investigation examined Ukrainian women's perceptions of individualism, collectivism, and gender role attitudes. As a point of reference, findings were compared with those obtained in a frequently studied culture, the United States.

Even though Ukraine is the second largest of the Soviet states and occupies an important position between the rest of Europe and Russia, it has rarely been the focus of psychological research, before or after the Soviet collapse. This neglect may be due to scholars' concentration on studying the "success" stories of Eastern Europe or their interest in the supposedly more important case of Russia (Kubicek, 2000). Yet Ukraine's efforts to promote a new nationalist ideology in the post-Soviet era, despite great regional and ideological differences of its people (e.g., Wanner, 1998) set it apart from other Soviet states and make it an interesting target for study. Are Ukrainian women likely to display attitudes and beliefs more characteristic of traditional Soviet or modern Western cultures, or perhaps a combination of the two?

INDIVIDUALISM/COLLECTIVISM

Individualism/collectivism is an important dimension for comparing cultures. In collectivistic cultures, people define themselves according to group membership (e.g., family, country), and they emphasize group norms, goals, and needs over personal ones. People in individualistic cultures, in contrast, tend to be less interconnected and more independent, focusing on personal rather than group goals and preferences (Triandis, 1995).

The former Soviet Union was assumed to embrace the values of collectivism, given their consistency with a Communist ideology. Surveys conducted in the former Soviet Union in 1985 by Umpleby (cited in Triandis, 1995) indicated a preference for collectivism, whereas U.S. American students in the same studies were more individualistic. Likewise, Kerberly (1983) described people from Slavic cultures (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine) as more collectivistic than U.S. Americans, noting their emphasis on family interdependence, relationships between people, and the in-group over the individual. It is interesting that neither Russian nor Ukrainian languages has a word equivalent to the English word of privacy, an underlying component of individualism (Stephan & Abalakina-Paap, 1996).

Studies conducted after the breakdown of the Soviet Republics indicate that Russians remain more collectivistic than corresponding British (Tower, Kelly, & Richards, 1997) and U.S. American (Realo & Allik, 1999) samples. However, no studies to date have examined Ukrainians. Ukraine and Russia are similar in many ways and can be unified under the Slavic culture (Stephan & Abalakina-Paap, 1996). For example, Ukrainian and Russian languages are linguistically close, derived from the same Slavic language group, and Ukrainians speak both languages. Furthermore, the two cultures share similar values concerning gender roles (Kulik, 1995); child-rearing practices, family relationships, and friends (Maddock, Hogan, Antonov, & Matskovsky, 1994; Stephan & Abalakina-Paap, 1996); religion (Baron & Kollmann, 1997); and political/economic situations (Kubicek, 2000). Finally, there are many mixed Russian-Ukrainian families, which can be taken as evidence that the cultures are compatible. Based on the similarity of Russian and Ukrainian cultures, and on previous data indicating higher collectivism in Russia both before and after the Soviet collapse, Ukrainians were predicted to be more collectivistic than U.S. Americans.

GENDER ROLES

Comparisons of gender attitudes among diverse cultures have been of enduring interest to cross-cultural researchers (e.g., Williams & Best, 1990). To what extent do Ukrainian women hold beliefs about gender roles and male-female interactions that differ from those of U.S. American women?

Previous research focused specifically on Ukrainian women is lacking, although again, studies of Soviet women may be instructive. Although few studies of gender were conducted in the former Soviet Union prior to its collapse, a review by Kerig, Alyoshina, and Volovich (1993) indicates that gender and ideology interacted, then and now, in complex ways. Socialist ideology espoused gender equality, ensured by equal opportunities for men and women in education, professional training, and employment. However, the mirage of equality disappears when family life is considered. Even though the percentage of employed women in the former Soviet Union is approximately equal to that of men, women are primarily responsible for child care and household duties (Kerig et al., 1993). In other words, Soviet ideology changed the patriarchal view of women in work and other social arenas, leaving inequality between women and men in the private sphere. Postcollapse studies have indicated that

Armenian women hold more traditional gender views than U.S. women (Takooshian, 1991), and Russian students in Israel have more traditional gender role attitudes than Israeli students (Kulik, 1995). To the extent that Ukrainian women follow their post-Soviet counterparts, we predicted their attitudes toward male-female relationships to be more traditional than those of U.S. American women.

INDIVIDUALISM/COLLECTIVISM AND GENDER ROLES

To what extent might these two variables, individualism/collectivism and gender role attitudes, be related? Because individualism is characterized by a desire for independence and self-sufficiency, we expected that such qualities in women would tend to be associated with more liberal attitudes about gender roles. Stated another way, we assumed that a more interdependent sense of self would be related to more conventional male-female relations, with an emphasis on traditional conceptions of men as "masculine" (i.e., strong, in charge) and women as "feminine" (i.e., passive, dependent). Support for this hypothesis is provided by Williams and Best (1990), who found in their study of 14 countries more liberal gender role attitudes, or sex-role ideology, in countries that emphasized individualism and de-emphasized authoritarian power structures. Additionally, liberal gender role attitudes were positively associated with countries' levels of economic-social development, and individualism is likewise known to be positively associated with economic-social development (e.g., Triandis, 1995). Therefore, individualism and traditional gender attitudes were predicted to be negatively related in Ukraine and the United States.

In sum, three hypotheses were proposed. First, Ukrainian women were predicted to be more collectivistic and less individualistic than U.S. women. Second, Ukrainian women were predicted to hold more traditional gender role attitudes than U.S. women. Finally, a negative relationship between individualism and traditional gender attitudes was predicted within both samples.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 55 female students in advanced psychology classes at a public university in the southeastern United States and 50 female students majoring in psychology and English at an urban university in Ukraine. Most participants were single (92.7%, U.S. sample; 80%, Ukrainian sample) and White (U.S. sample, 94.5% White, 3.6% Black, 1.8% other; Ukrainian sample, 100% White). U.S. participants ranged from 18 to 24 years of age ($M = 20.6$), and Ukrainian participants from 18 to 25 years of age ($M = 20.5$).

PROCEDURE

Participants from both cultural groups were administered the questionnaire in a group setting. Although some previous investigators examined individualism and collectivism using a single dimension (e.g., Tower et al., 1997), there is a growing bulk of research showing that individualism and collectivism are each associated with different attributes (e.g., Hui & Villareal, 1989), suggesting that they should more appropriately be assessed with two or

more distinct dimensions (e.g., Rhee, Uleman, & Lee, 1996; Singelis, 1994; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Hence, in the present study individualism/collectivism were measured as two independent dimensions via a 14-item survey (Triandis, 1994)¹ containing seven items assessing individualism (e.g., "What happens to me is my own doing") and seven items measuring collectivism (e.g., "What I look for in a job is a friendly group of coworkers"). Items were rated on 9-point Likert-type scales (1 = *disagree/false*; 9 = *agree/true*), summed together to provide separate individualism and collectivism scores for each participant. Scores ranged from 7 to 63, with higher scores corresponding to higher levels of individualism or collectivism.

Gender role attitudes were measured by the 16-item Male-Female Relations questionnaire (Spence, Helmreich, & Sawin, 1980), which assesses role expectations and preferences especially in social relationships between men and women (e.g., "When I am with a man I want to impress, I try to act very feminine"). Items were rated on 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = *false*; 5 = *true*) and scores ranged from 5 to 60, with higher scores indicating more traditional gender role attitudes.

All scales were administered in English to both samples. The bilingual (Ukrainian-English) experimenter examined questionnaire items for meaningfulness in the Ukrainian context. Because the Ukrainians were English majors and advanced students, exposed to 3 hours of daily English classes at the college level for more than 3 years, they were assumed to be proficient enough with English to understand the questionnaires. Additionally, students were instructed to consult their English professor if they had any questions, but none did.

RESULTS

RELIABILITIES

Cronbach's alphas for all scales were calculated separately for both cultures. Internal consistencies for the individualism scale was higher for the U.S. American sample, $\alpha = .67$, than for the Ukrainian sample, $\alpha = .47$. The collectivism scale had similar internal consistencies in both samples: $\alpha_{us} = .54$ and $\alpha_{ukr} = .57$. The Male-Female Relations scale's internal consistency was $\alpha_{us} = .78$ and $\alpha_{ukr} = .64$.

HYPOTHESES TESTING

The means shown in Table 1 indicate that Ukrainian women were significantly more individualistic than U.S. women, $t(103) = -4.80, p < .01$. Ukrainian women were also somewhat less collectivistic than U.S. women, with the difference between the samples marginally significant, $t(103) = 1.90, p < .06$. Both of these findings were contrary to expectations. As predicted, Ukrainian women had far more traditional gender role attitudes than U.S. women, $t(103) = -12.45, p < .01$.

Correlations between individualism/collectivism and the Male-Female Relations questionnaire were calculated, but none was significant. For U.S. women, though, there was a trend in the predicted direction with a low negative correlation between individualism and traditional gender attitudes ($r = -.18, p = .23$). However, for Ukrainian women this correlation was positive ($r = .12, p = .45$). Whereas the third hypothesis was not supported in either sample, in the U.S. sample the obtained correlation was in the predicted direction.

TABLE 1
Means for the Individualism and Collectivism Scores for U.S. and Ukrainian Women

	<i>United States (n = 55)</i>		<i>Ukraine (n = 50)</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD
Individualism	33.82**	9.07	41.36**	6.74
Collectivism	43.38*	6.89	40.84*	7.02
Gender roles	17.02**	8.21	35.86**	7.19

* $p < .06$. ** $p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to examine individualism/collectivism, gender role attitudes, and their relationships in two distinct cultures: Ukraine and the United States. Ukrainian women were revealed to be more individualistic and less collectivistic than U.S. American women, especially surprising given that the United States is consistently ranked as one of the most individualistic countries in the world (Triandis, 1995).

Many explanations for this finding are possible. Given Ukraine's relatively recent independence and subsequent move toward capitalism, it is tempting to speculate that the individualistic orientation revealed here is linked to national political and economic transitions. In fact, more Westernized political and economic systems, with their emphasis on individual freedoms and achievements, are typically associated with higher levels of individualism. The idea that Ukrainians are moving away from a more collectivistic orientation is supported by a recent study indicating that younger generations in Russia view independence as more important than older people (Watkins, Mortazavi, & Trofimova, 2000). Likewise, at a pragmatic level, perhaps the changes that have taken place in the lives of young Ukrainian women during this extremely difficult economic period (e.g., increased job competition, decreased benefits) require greater autonomy and self-reliance. In fact, item analysis revealed that the largest discrepancies in individualism between the Ukrainian and U.S. samples were associated with items assessing the desire to make independent decisions, the need to show higher autonomy, and self-reliance. Additionally, these same items had higher correlations with the overall individualism score in the Ukrainian sample than did other test items measuring this construct. Of course, because the data on levels of individualism/collectivism in the former Soviet Union were not based specifically on Ukrainians (although arguably Soviet Russians and Ukrainians were similar), we do not know for certain that the present findings represent change at all.

Another explanation for the unexpected findings relates to possible errors in long-held assumptions about levels of individualism/collectivism in different countries. For example, although Japan has long been presumed to be strongly collectivistic, and the United States, as already noted, strongly individualistic, in a review of the empirical literature comparing Japan and the United States, Takano and Osaka (1999) found 14 of 15 studies did not support this perception. Perhaps, then, the Soviet Union was never as collectivistic or the United States as individualistic as once believed. Furthermore, previous studies may have emphasized men more than women, and because this study focused only on women, they may not have been directly relevant.

Finally, it should be noted that Ukraine is a diverse country that may encompass multiple cultural groups with differing value systems. Likewise, among any one culture, it is possible that simple classification along the individualism/collectivism continuum is difficult. Sinha and Tripathi (1994) argue that some cultures (e.g., India) are not easily classified as collectivistic or individualistic; rather, they experience a coexistence of even contradicting values. Hence, Westernized views characterized by individualism that came into the public sphere of Ukrainian culture in the last decade may not necessarily oppose traditional views. While learning new technology, business, and political ideology, Ukrainians may still preserve old traditions, particularly the structure of their social system, with its emphasis on relationships with family and friends. Although more individualistic than the U.S. sample, Ukrainians were not significantly more individualistic than collectivistic, suggesting that new individualistic ways of thought and behavior do not replace, but live along with, old collectivistic traditions.

Interestingly, striving for independence does not preclude Ukrainian women from holding traditional views of relationships, that is, they may let men dominate and relate to men from a more stereotypically feminine perspective. The U.S. women, on the other hand, tended to reject traditional views of relationships, preferring their partners to be equals.

Even though there were no significant within-country relationships between individualism and gender attitudes, interesting patterns occurred. Among U.S. women, traditional gender role attitudes were somewhat related to lower individualism, supporting our hypothesis. However, among Ukrainian women these constructs were positively correlated. It would be interesting to delve into this issue more thoroughly, possibly through qualitative methodology, in the effort to better understand whether there is a logical relationship between these variables.

There are notable limitations to this study that may have affected the findings. The sample size was small and limited to university students in both cultures; self-report measures may be interpreted and completed differently across cultures; Ukrainian students completed the questionnaire in a non-native language; and the internal reliabilities for the individualism and collectivism scales were relatively low, especially with regard to individualism in the Ukrainian sample. Finally, because of the evolving nature of the individualism/collectivism scales, direct scale comparisons with other research on these constructs was not possible. Nonetheless, it is believed that the findings, however preliminary, have merit, providing information about a rarely studied culture and adding to our understanding of the complex construct of individualism/collectivism.

NOTE

1. These scales have since been modified by Triandis and others, based on evolving operationalizations of individualism and collectivism as well as varying research purposes. We selected this more basic version because of its parsimony and ease of comprehension.

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