Collectivism

Collectivism is a value that is characterized by emphasis on cohesiveness among individuals and prioritization of the group over the self. Individuals or groups that subscribe to a collectivist worldview tend to find common values and goals as particularly salient[1] and demonstrate greater orientation toward in-group than toward out-group.[2] The term "in-group" is thought to be more diffusely defined for collectivist individuals to include societal units ranging from the nuclear family to a religious or racial/ethnic group.[3][4]

Contents

Origins and historical perspectives

The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies described an early model of collectivism and individualism using the terms *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society).[5] *Gemeinschaft* relationships, in which communalism is prioritized, were thought to be characteristic of small, rural village communities. An anthropologist, Redfield (1941) echoed this notion in work contrasting folk society with urban society.[6]

Max Weber (1930) contrasted collectivism and individualism through the lens of religion, believing that Protestants were more individualistic and self-reliant compared to Catholics, who endorsed hierarchical, interdependent relationships among people.[7] Geert Hofstede (1980) was highly influential in ushering in an era of cross-cultural research making comparisons along the dimension of collectivism versus individualism. Hofstede conceptualized collectivism and individualism as part of a single continuum, with each cultural construct representing an opposite pole. The author characterized individuals that endorsed a high degree of collectivism as being embedded in their social contexts and prioritizing communal goals over individual goals.[8]

Marxism–Leninism

Collectivism was an important part of Marxist–Leninist ideology in the Soviet Union, where it played a key part in forming the New Soviet man, willingly sacrificing his or her life for the good of the collective. Terms such as "collective" and "the masses" were frequently used in the official language and praised in agitprop literature, for example by Vladimir Mayakovsky (*Who needs a "1"*) and Bertolt Brecht (The Decision, Man Equals Man).[9][10]

Anarcho-collectivism

Anarcho-collectivism deals with collectivism in a decentralized anarchistic system, in which people are paid off their surplus labor. Collectivist anarchism is contrasted with anarcho-communism, where wages would be abolished and where individuals would take freely from a storehouse of goods "to each according to his need". It is most commonly associated with Mikhail Bakunin, the anti-authoritarian sections of the International Workingmen's Association and the early Spanish anarchist movement.[11][12][13][14][15]

Terminology and measurement

The construct of collectivism is represented in empirical literature under several different names. Most commonly, the term interdependent self-construal is used.[16] Other phrases used to describe the concept of collectivism-individualism include allocentrism-idiocentrism,[17] collective-private self,[18] as well as subtypes of collectivism-individualism (meaning, vertical and horizontal subtypes).[19] Inconsistent terminology is thought to account for some of the difficulty in effectively synthesizing the empirical literature on collectivism.[20]

Theoretical models

In one critical model of collectivism, Markus and Kitayama[21] describe the interdependent (i.e., collectivistic) self as fundamentally connected to the social context. As such, one's sense of self depends on and is defined in part by those around them and is primarily manifested in public, overt behavior. As such, the organization of the self is guided by using others as a reference. That is, an interdependent individual uses the unexpressed thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of another person with whom they have a relationship, as well as the other person's behaviors, to make decisions about their own internal attributes and actions.

Markus and Kitayama also contributed to the literature by challenging Hofstede's unidimensional model of collectivism-individualism.[21] The authors conceptualized these two constructs bidimensionally, such that both collectivism and individualism can be endorsed independently and potentially to the same degree. This notion has been echoed by other prominent theorists in the field.[2][22][23]

Some researchers have expanded the collectivism-individualism framework to include a more comprehensive view. Specifically, Triandis and colleagues introduced a theoretical model that incorporates the notion of relational contexts.[4][24] The authors argue that the domains of collectivism and individualism can be further described by horizontal and vertical relationships. Horizontal relationships are believed to be status-equal whereas vertical relationships are characterized as hierarchical and status-unequal. As such, horizontal collectivism is manifested as an orientation in which group harmony is highly valued and in-group members are perceived to experience equal standing. Vertical collectivism involves the prioritization of group goals over individual goals, implying a hierarchical positioning of the self in relation to the overarching in-group. The horizontal-vertical individualism-collectivism model has received empirical support and has been used to explore patterns within cultures.[25][26] Subsequent work by other researchers suggests that as many as seven dimensions might be necessary to describe independent vs. interdependent models of selfhood.[27]

Originated by W. E. B. DuBois,[28] some researchers have adopted a historical perspective on the emergence of collectivism among some cultural groups. DuBois and others argued that oppressed minority groups contend with internal division, meaning that the development of self-identity for individuals from these groups involves the integration of one's own perceptions of their group as well as typically negative, societal views of their group.[29] This division is thought to impact goal formation such that people from marginalized groups tend to emphasize collectivistic over individualistic values.[30][31][32][33]

Some organizational research has found different variations of collectivism. These include institutional collectivism and in-group collectivism. Institutional collectivism is the idea that a work environment creates a sense of collectivist nature due to similar statuses and similar rewards, such as earning the same salary. In-group collectivism is the idea that an individual's chosen group of people, such as family or friend groups, create a sense of collectivist nature.[34] In-group collectivism can be referred to as family collectivism.[35]

Macro-level effects

Cultural views are believed to have a reciprocal relationship with macro-level processes such as economics, social change, and politics.[36][37] Societal changes in the People's Republic of China exemplifies this well. Beginning in the early 1980s, China experienced dramatic expansion of economic and social structures, resulting in greater income inequality between families, less involvement of the government in social welfare programs, and increased competition for employment.[38] Corresponding with these changes was a shift in ideology among Chinese citizens, especially among those who were younger, away from collectivism (the prevailing cultural ideology) toward individualism.[39][40] China also saw this shift reflected in educational policies, such that teachers were encouraged to promote the development of their students' individual opinions and self-efficacy, which prior to the aforementioned economic changes, was not emphasized in Chinese culture.[41][42]

An example of the impact of cultural beliefs on macro-level economic, political, legal and social constructs are the Maghrebi, eleventh-century Jewish traders who emerged from the Muslim world. The Maghrebis' collectivist cultural beliefs created a societal organisation premised on the group's ability to sanction 'deviants' economically and socially. This system created efficient intragroup relations without need for formal justice institutions such as courts, but it restricted intergroup economic efficiency.[43]

Attempts to study the association of collectivism and political views and behaviors has largely occurred at the aggregate national level. However, more isolated political movements have also adopted a collectivistic framework. For example, collectivist anarchism is a revolutionary[44] anarchist doctrine that advocates the abolition of both the state and private ownership of the means of production. It instead envisions the means of production being owned collectively and controlled and managed by the producers themselves.[44]

See also

- Collective guilt
- Collective identity
- Collective leadership
- Collective narcissism
- Collective responsibility
- Communitarianism
- Corporatism
- Cultural conservatism
- Enclosure
- Interdependence
- Individualism
- Nationalism
- Social solidarity

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