



The Relationship Between Display Rules in Relational Contexts and Collectivistic Values

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Abstract

Previous research by Safdar and colleagues (2009) found that Japanese participants differentiated their display rules more between relational contexts than Canadian or American participants. A possible explanation for these differences is collectivism. Because collectivism emphasizes relational harmony, individuals who endorse collectivistic values may view expressions of powerful emotions toward distant others as potentially disruptive to relational harmony. However, the link between collectivism and differentiation of display rules has not been empirically established. The purpose of the current study was to provide empirical evidence that collectivistic values would predict differentiations in display rules of powerful emotions (anger, contempt, disgust) toward different emotion targets (acquaintances versus parents). The results found that the endorsement of collectivistic values predicted differences in display rules between a parent and an acquaintance for contempt and disgust, but not for anger.

Research Question and Variables

To test whether collectivistic cultural values predict greater differentiation in display rules among relational contexts for powerful emotions (anger, contempt, and disgust).

- Collectivism: a cultural value that emphasizes relational harmony
- Display rules: cultural norms about how individuals should express their emotions in different social contexts

Cultural Values and Display Rules

- Safdar et al (2009) found that, compared to Canadian and American participants, Japanese participants made greater differentiations in their display rules about how appropriate it would be to show powerful emotions (anger, contempt, and disgust) toward medium close others (acquaintances), versus close others (parents).
- Collectivism emphasizes the importance of relational harmony. Powerful emotions may be seen as disruptive when expressed to others outside of one's close relationships. Therefore, individuals who endorse collectivistic values may judge the expression of powerful emotions toward distant others as much less appropriate than the expression of those emotions toward close others.

Limitations of Previous Research

- Safdar et al. (2009) did not measure collectivistic values. Therefore, collectivistic values could not be empirically justified as an explanation for differences in display rules.
- It is important to empirically test linkage variables to connect observed differences between cultures to the expected cultural sources of those differences (Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006).
- The present study addressed this limitation by empirically measuring individuals' endorsement of collectivistic values.

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: Collectivistic values will positively predict differentiations in display rules between a parent and an acquaintance for powerful emotions (anger, contempt, disgust).

Rationale: Collectivism will be related to greater differentiations in the judged appropriateness of showing powerful emotions to an acquaintance versus a parent because powerful emotions may be seen as disruptive when expressed toward distant others, and one who endorses collectivistic values will be concerned with maintaining relational harmony.

Methods

Participants: n = 167 (107 males, 58 females) US born and raised, (Mean age = 37.84)

Participants completed online surveys assessing their endorsement of individualistic and collectivistic values, as well as their display rules toward parents, acquaintances, and bosses.

- Individualism and Collectivism Scale** (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), $\alpha = .70$
 - Scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)
 - "If a coworker gets a prize, I would feel proud."
 - "My personal identity, independent of others, is very important to me."
- Display Rules Assessment Index** (Matsumoto, Yoo, Fontaine, et al., 2008). $\alpha = .92$
 - Possible responses: Show more than you feel it, Express it as you feel it, Show less than you feel it, Show it but with another expression, Hide your feelings by showing nothing, Hide your feelings by showing something else
 - "What should you do if you are with a parent in a room by yourselves and you feel the following emotion toward them: anger?"
 - "What should you do if you are with an acquaintance in a room by yourselves and you feel the following emotion toward them: contempt?"
 - The DRAI was scored using the Homogeneity Analysis via Alternating Least Squares (HOMALS) technique. The response options on the DRAI correspond to the following values:
 - Amplify -> .5651, Express -> .3842, Qualify -> .1218, Deamplify -> .1545, Masque -> -.3828, Neutralize -> -.5338
 - Difference scores were computed by subtracting display rule toward an acquaintance from display rule toward a parent for each emotion (i.e., Parent – Acquaintance).
 - A positive difference score means participant would show more of that emotion to a parent than an acquaintance.

Descriptive statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD
Collectivism	5.08	0.96
Diff_DR_Anger	0.0539	0.4049
Diff_DR_Contempt	0.0403	0.3592
Diff_DR_Disgust	0.0433	0.3630

Note: Differences in display rules for each emotion are between a parent and an acquaintance

Regression Analysis

Table 2. Regression Analysis

	Collectivism	Individualism
Diff_DR_Anger	$b^* = .05, p = .50$	$b^* = -.10, p = .21$
Diff_DR_Contempt	$b^* = .16, p = .04$	$b^* = -.13, p = .09$
Diff_DR_Disgust	$b^* = .15, p = .06$	$b^* = -.12, p = .12$

Note: Differences in display rules for each emotion are between a parent and an acquaintance

Discussion

- Collectivism positively predicted greater differentiations in display rules between a parent and an acquaintance for contempt, $b^* = .16, p = .04$, and marginally for disgust, $b^* = .15, p = .06$. Individualism was marginally a negative predictor of differentiations in display rules for contempt, $b^* = -.13, p = .09$.
- These results provide partial empirical support for the theory from Safdar et al. (2009) that differences in display rules among relational contexts are related to collectivism, suggesting that when one endorses collectivistic values, one expresses less powerful emotions toward distant others as compared to close others to avoid disrupting relational harmony.
- No support was found for a relationship between display rules concerning anger and collectivism. This could mean that the reason for expressing less anger toward an acquaintance than a parent is not related to maintaining relational harmony.
- Furthermore, the coefficients for contempt and disgust in the regression model were significant but small. This indicates that it may be worth looking into other factors that could potentially explain larger differentiations in display rules among relational contexts.

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