Abstract

Originally published in Contemporary Psychology: APA Review of Books, 1996, Vol 41(6), 540–542. To truly follow cross-cultural psychology one must know how the terms, individualism and collectivism, are used by an ever-growing legion of users. According to the reviewer, no one is better equipped to tell us than Harry Triandis (see record 1995-97797-000). This text, very thorough in coverage, includes reviews of relevant studies by scholars both from the Triandis in-group and beyond, historical accounts of ideas like collectivism and individualism in philosophy and the several social sciences, reinterpretations of social-psychological findings that appeared before collectivism and individualism were available to explain them, solutions to problems of measuring the concepts (neatly gathered in an Appendix), and even a consideration of training techniques meant to smooth over rough spots expected when persons from both individualistic and collectivistic cultures interact. If this were the only book one read about these constructs, one could learn probably all that Triandis knows (and believes) about individualism and collectivism. Unfortunately, virtually ignored in this book are the powerful potential of economic forces, political ideologies, and religious and ethnic fundamentalisms to influence behavior patterns in most societies. Despite this shortcoming, Triandis’s achievement is that he has presented so much information so clearly in this book that we can judge for ourselves, secure in the knowledge that we have been well served by a fine scholar and writer, whose genuine enthusiasm for these concepts is, fortunately, constrained by his long experience as a social scientist. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2006 APA, all rights reserved)
The constructs of individualism and collectivism have been used in the social sciences from the beginning of research. However, the constructs gained popularity in the 1980s, and they continue to draw the attention of social scientists in all disciplines even today. A theoretical framework using the independent and interdependent concepts of selves at its core is presented to explain the differences between these constructs. Because of differences in concepts of selves, people treat their ingroup and outgroup differently; they act differently in the society by following their attitude or confo Collectivism describes ideology (political or otherwise) that favors the collective, like-wise Individualism describes ideology that favors the individual. This is because the terms individualism and collectivism are broad terms with many implications that have a number of different meanings depending on context. This complexity makes sense when you consider the terms are fundamental aspects of political left-right, the government types, and liberalism and conservatism.