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An extension of the 'two-baskets' theory to Native Americans

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Abstract

A theory that private and collective self-cognitions are stored in separate locations in memory (Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991; Trafimow, Silverman, Fan, & Law, 1997) was tested with a sample of participants (Native Americans) that differed substantially from those in previous research. Two findings supported the theory. First, participants retrieved more private self-cognitions when the private self rather than the collective self was primed; but retrieved more collective self-cognitions when the collective self rather than the private self was primed. Second, people were more likely to retrieve a private self-cognition following another private self-cognition than following a collective one, but were more likely to retrieve a collective self-cognition following another collective one than following a private one. © 1998 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Several researchers (e.g. Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984; Triandis, 1989) have distinguished between private and collective aspects of the self, and have argued (Triandis, 1989; 1994) that people from individualistic cultures emphasize private aspects of the self while those from collectivistic cultures emphasize collective aspects of the self. Further, much evidence supports this distinction. For example, when individualists and collectivists are asked to complete the Kuhn and McPartland self-attitudes instrument (a series of statements beginning with 'I am'), individualists tend to write down more private self-cognitions (statements about traits, states, behaviors) and fewer collective self-cognitions (statements about group membership or common fate) than do collectivists (Bochner, 1994; Triandis, McCusker & Hui, 1990). However, knowing that culture affects which aspects of the self are emphasized does not, by itself, explain how self-cognitions are organized.

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To answer this question, Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto (1991) suggested two possible ways of accounting for the findings described above. First, self-cognitions could be stored in one location in memory (the 'one-basket' theory), but with culture affecting the relative number of private versus collective self cognitions stored there. Individualists have more private self-cognitions and fewer collective self-cognitions stored in memory than do collectivists, and consequently, this is reflected in the number of private and collective responses they make to the 'I am' instrument.

Second, private self-cognitions could be organized around a more general private self-concept and collective self-cognitions around a more general collective self-concept (the 'two-baskets' theory). However, culture affects the relative accessibility of these self-concepts. Thus, for individualists, the private self-concept, and hence, the private self-cognitions associated with that self-concept, are more accessible than for collectivists. The reverse is true regarding the collective self-concept and the collective self-cognitions associated with it.

Trafimow et al. (1991) distinguished between these two theories in two ways. First, they pointed out that according to the two-baskets theory, it should be possible to prime the private self, and facilitate the retrieval of private self-cognitions; or to prime the collective self, and facilitate the retrieval of collective self-cognitions. According to the one-basket theory, there is only one 'self', and so attempting to prime different 'selves' should result in a failure. Second, Trafimow et al. suggested that according to the two-baskets theory, the order in which people write down self-cognitions should be a function of the self-structures from which they are retrieved. If a private self-cognition is retrieved, then the private self-concept is presumably accessible, and the next item retrieved should be another private self-cognition. Similarly, if a collective self-cognition is retrieved, then this indicates that the collective self is relatively accessible, and the next item retrieved should be another collective-self cognition. According to the one basket theory, there is no reason to make this prediction. Both of the predictions made by the two-baskets theory were confirmed, and these findings were later replicated by Trafimow, Silverman, Fan, and Law (1997).

Despite a variety of findings that have supported the theory (see Trafimow, 1997 for a review), one weakness is that the majority of the research was performed with student samples obtained from the United States (but see Trafimow et al., 1997 for a student sample obtained from Hong Kong). Given that Amir & Sharon (1987) found that most findings fail to generalize across cultures, this is a serious limitation for a supposedly 'general' theory. Consequently, our goal was to test the generality of the theory by using a sample of participants from a population that is rarely studied in general, and has never (to our knowledge) been studied by researchers who have investigated the cognitive structure of self-cognitions.

**EXPERIMENT**

**Participants**

Twenty-eight male and 34 female Native Americans volunteered to participate in the experiment (they were contacted through university clubs, government agencies, and a visit to a reservation), and were randomly assigned to the conditions described.
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below. Unlike previous samples, the present one tended to be a little older (Md = 24), and over 41% of this sample was over 30 years of age. Further, 93% reported having spent a significant portion of their life on a reservation. It is also of interest that everyone in the present sample had received a high school diploma, and 92% had at least some experience in college.

Procedure

The procedure was similar to that used by Trafimow et al. (1991, Experiment 2). Subjects read a story about an ancient Assyrian named Sostoras who had to send troops to help Sargon I in conquering Mesopotamia. Sostoras also had to assign someone to lead the troops. The priming manipulation was embedded in this story. Participants learned that Sostoras had assigned Tiglath who was a ‘member of his family’ (collective self-prime) or a ‘talented general’ (private self-prime). In addition, and in contrast to Trafimow et al. (1991), there were also control participants who were not primed. Later on, as part of an ostensibly separate experiment, they were given 5 minutes to complete the Kuhn and McPartland (1954) self-attitudes (20 ‘I am’ items) instrument.

RESULTS

The results were analyzed as a 3 × 2 mixed factorial with Prime (private self-prime versus collective self-prime versus no prime) as the between-participants factor and Item type (private self-cognition or collective self-cognition) as the within-participants factor. A few of the items were also coded as ‘allocentric’, but were not included in the subsequent analyses (see Triandis, 1989; Trafimow et al., 1991).

There was a significant within-subjects main effect for response type, $F(1,58) = 80.33, p < 0.001$. Consistent with other findings (e.g. Trafimow et al., 1991; 1997), there was a greater proportion of private self-cognitions than collective self-cognitions retrieved ($M = 0.69$ and $M = 0.26$, because a few items were allocentric, these do not sum to 1). Further, the proportion of collective self-cognitions was greater than that obtained from the US college student sample used by Trafimow et al. (1991, Experiments 1 and 2) ($M = 0.26$ versus $M = 0.13$ and $M = 0.15, p < 0.05$ in both cases), and similar to the student sample obtained by Trafimow et al. (1997) from Hong Kong ($M = 0.26$ versus $M = 0.26$), thereby suggesting, along with Bahr, Chadwick, and Day (1972), that Native Americans are more collectivist than US students. More importantly, however, the Item type main effect was moderated by a Prime × Item type interaction, $F(3,58) = 3.45, p < 0.05$. Participants who received the collective self-prime or no prime retrieved more collective self-cognitions than did those who received the private-self prime ($M = 0.29$ and $M = 0.32$ versus $M = 0.18$), and participants who received the private self-prime retrieved more private self-cognitions than did participants who received the collective self-prime or no prime ($M = 0.77$ versus $M = 0.64$ and $M = 0.65$). Cell comparisons confirmed that the collective self-prime resulted in findings that were similar to the no prime condition with regard to both private and collective self-cognitions ($p > 0.1$ in all cases), and

that the private self-prime resulted in findings that were different ($p < 0.05$ in all cases). Finally, to ensure that the no prime control group was not responsible for the Prime × Item type interaction, this group was dropped and a new analyses was conducted. Consistent with the two-baskets theory this analysis also resulted in a significant interaction, $F(1,39) = 5.26, p < 0.05$.

Conditional probabilities were also analyzed. The probability of retrieving a collective self-cognition was greater following the retrieval of another collective self-cognition than following the retrieval of a private self-cognition ($M = 0.35$ versus $M = 0.19$), $p < 0.05$; and the probability of retrieving a private self-cognition was greater following the retrieval of another private self-cognition than following the retrieval of a collective self-cognition ($M = 0.76$ versus $M = 0.60$), $p < 0.05$. Thus, like the previous analyses, the conditional probabilities are consistent with the two-baskets theory.

**DISCUSSION**

The data strongly supported the generality of the two-baskets theory to a Native American population. The data are particularly impressive given research by Amir and Sharon (1987) who found that most experimental manipulations fail to generalize across cultures. Further, the experiment was consistent with a viewpoint expressed by Pepitone and Triandis (1987) that '. . . the more exotic the cultural sample, the more general the original hypothesis that predicted the results' (p. 472). However, there was one unexpected aspect of the data. Trafimow et al. (1997) had included a 'no prime' control group in their study using participants from Hong Kong, and found that the private self-prime resulted in findings similar to the no prime control group while the collective self-prime resulted different ones. Here the reverse was true—it was the collective self-prime that resulted in findings similar to the no prime group and the private self-prime that differed. These results suggest that although the implications of the two-baskets theory generalize across diverse cultures, findings not specifically predicted by the theory (e.g. which prime should be most different from a no prime control group) may not. More generally, the present article demonstrates the importance of cross-cultural comparisons for testing theories.

**REFERENCES**


1. In response to comments from an anonymous reviewer, we performed additional analyses taking age into account. First, we divided participants into a 'student' age group and an older group, and included this as an additional factor in the ANOVAs that were originally performed. However, age failed to interact significantly with any other factor or combination of factors in any of the ANOVAs ($p < 0.1$ in all cases). Second, we used age as a covariate to see if controlling for it eliminated any of the significant effects obtained from the original analyses. Consistent with the two-baskets theory, using age as a covariate failed to affect the results.


