

The relationships between collectivist attitudes and elementary forms of human relations: Evidence from Estonia

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the extent to which collectivist attitudes predict preference for the basic models of social relations. According to Fiske (1991), all social relations can be reduced to four basic forms – communal sharing (CS), authority ranking (AR), equality matching (EM), and market pricing (MP) – that guide people’s social initiatives and help them to understand and respond appropriately to the social actions of others. The preference for basic forms was studied using a set of questions about everyday hypothetical situations in which the four different models can be alternatively applied. We observed that EM is the dominant principle in distributing (received) benefits: everyone should get equal shares (regardless of their needs or position) and nobody should have an advantage over another. In those situations in which people were asked to contribute, the respondents were inclined to think in terms of cost and benefit, insisting that the contributions should be made according to MP. CS relationships were mostly limited to family-related situations. Although people scoring high on collectivism showed an inclination to use CS and avoid MP relationships more frequently in family situations, the association between the collectivist attitudes and elementary forms of sociality was fairly small. It is concluded that the relationships between the use of the relational models and the collectivist attitudes are modest.

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According to the predominant view, adopted by most of the social sciences, people are fundamentally sociable, and they generally organize their lives in terms of their relations with other people. However, the variety of human relations is enormous, ranging from intimate family bonds, for instance, to formal rules established for legal actors in the courtroom. There have been many attempts in the social sciences to reduce this huge variety of human relations to a relatively small number of basic forms from which all observed relations can be derived.

One of the most prominent accounts from social psychology is Fiske's (1991, 1992) relational models theory. From analysis of the findings of such attempts and his own fieldwork, Fiske (1992) proposed that people create and organize their social life with only four elementary psychological models. According to Fiske (1991, 1992), all social relations can be reduced to four basic models – communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing – that guide people's social initiatives and that help them to understand and respond appropriately to the social actions of others. These models are endogenous products of the human mind, and can be conceptualized as schemata or grammars of mental representations. All facets of social life – interactions, distributions, evaluations, etc. – can be represented as combinations of these four fundamental psychological models (Fiske, 1991, 1992).

In the present study, we examined to what extent the use of the four relational models is related to collectivist attitudes. Collectivism and individualism are the most representative terms that could be used in characterizing main theoretical directions and research interests in social and cross-cultural psychology at the end of the past millennium (see Realo, 2003, for an overview). In addition to being used as a characteristic of a culture, the constructs of individualism and collectivism are also considered to be personality attributes by which an individual differs from the other members of the same cultural group. At the individual-level of analysis, the two constructs are often found to be orthogonal to each other (e.g., Realo, Koido, Ceulemans, & Allik, 2002; Rhee, Uleman, & Lee, 1996). In this article, we focus only on collectivism, which we treat as a personal-level multidimensional construct. Collectivism comes closest to representing the concept of socially oriented values and attitudes, emphasizing the importance of relationship maintenance (Triandis, 1995). We chose to study collectivism as it seems to be more relevant to the study of personal relationship processes than individualism (see Gaines et al., in press). According to the tripartite model used in this study, collectivism consists of at least three distinct yet interrelated subtypes focused on relations with family (*Familism*), peers (*Companionship*), and society (*Patriotism*) (Allik & Realo, 1996; Realo, Allik, & Vadi, 1997). Thus, the main aim of our study was to examine the correspondence between Fiske's relational models and

the three subtypes of collectivism. In the following sections, both the relational models theory and the construct of collectivism are described briefly.

Fiske's relational model theory

According to Fiske (1991), *communal sharing* (CS) is a relationship of equivalence in which people are merged so that the boundaries of individual selves are unclear. In this relationship, people identify with the group, they think of themselves not as individuals but as 'we' (e.g., relationships and behaviors among close family members). *Authority ranking* (AR) is a relationship of inequality: people in this relationship construe each other as differing in social importance (e.g., relationships and behaviors among persons who differ in status). *Equality matching* (EM) is an egalitarian relationship among people who are distinct but coequal individuals. This relationship is based on a model of even balance and one-for-one correspondence (e.g., relationships and behaviors among social equals such as good friends). Finally, *market pricing* (MP) relationships are based on a model of proportionality in social relations. In a MP relationship, people value other people's actions and products according to the extent to which they can be exchanged for other commodities (e.g., relationships and behaviors among those in exchange relationships such as buyers-sellers).

These basic models or structures appear in diverse forms and contents. For example, the same basic model describes how a family shares its resources, how tasks are allocated for a group of workers, and according to which principle a fortune is divided between the heirs. Thus, these four models constitute the elementary skeleton out of which individuals construct their social relations. These models can operate simultaneously at different levels. For example, a woman may interact with her son at a construction site as a boss to an employee (AR); play chess or basketball with him according to EM; prepare and eat dinner with him on the CS basis in which cooking is a joint task without paying any attention to how much each person contributes or consumes; make an interest-bearing loan to him (MP); or again using MP rationally calculate the most effective (and the least risky) strategy for getting him to marry his girlfriend (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998).

Although the four elementary social forms conceptually are extremely clear, the application of these ideas to empirical phenomena has been relatively modest so far. In one such attempt, Fiske and his associates looked for demonstrations that the postulated four basic forms are indeed used in various social settings. For example, people sometimes call someone they know by a wrong name, or they incorrectly remember with whom they did something. Although many factors affect the substitutions that people make, there is a strong and consistent tendency in all kinds of errors to confuse two people with whom the subject interacts in the same basic relationship mode (e.g., Fiske, 1993; Fiske, Haslam, & Fiske, 1991). The same result emerged from another study in which intentional substitutions were studied: if people plan to do something with someone and then decide to do it with someone else, they select a substitute with whom they have

the same kind of relationship (Fiske & Haslam, 1997). Again, in both intentional and unintentional substitutions, the type of relationship affects the choice of a substitute far more than do personal attributes (such as age, race, sex, or personality, for instance). Other studies have shown that in people's free classification of their personal relationships, the categories that emerge correspond closely to the four types of relational models (Fiske, 1992; Fiske & Haslam, 1997; Haslam, 1994a, 1994b, 1997; Haslam & Fiske, 1999). If people are simply asked to recall everyone with whom they have interacted over the past month, their recall exhibits runs of associates with whom they have one kind of relationship, and then another (Fiske, 1995). Again, the relational models predict the pattern of recall better than the characteristics of the individuals. There is also evidence that people think about their everyday interactions in terms of four distinct and discrete categories of relationships, and not in terms of continuous variables such as power or solidarity (Fiske et al., 1991; Haslam, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1997; Haslam & Fiske, 1992).

Collectivism

At the surface level, there is an enormous variety of differences among cultures. By culture, in this article, we mean the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from another (Hofstede, 2001). It is difficult to find a norm, custom, habit, or belief that would be exactly the same in all cultures. At a deeper level, however, all these differences are organized around a smaller number of common themes. These are the themes that anthropologists and psychologists have tried to identify as major factors or dimensions of culture that could explain a considerable amount of the variance in cross-cultural differences. So far, several so-called cultural dimensions such as individualism–collectivism, power distance, masculinity–femininity, tightness–looseness, and dependence–independence have been found useful in characterizing intercultural differences (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Triandis, 1995). Among these, the dimensions of individualism and collectivism have certainly been the most productive in terms of explanatory power (see Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002, for a review). According to Triandis (1995), individualism and collectivism are best characterized as cultural syndromes, that is, patterns of attitudes, values, beliefs, self-definitions, and norms that are organized around some theme that can be identified in a society. With respect to individualism, the fundamental theme is the centrality of the autonomous individual. In the case of collectivism, the organizing theme is the centrality of the group.

In addition to being used as the characteristics of culture, the constructs are also considered to be personality attributes by which an individual differs from the other members of the same cultural group. Many researchers in the field argue that the cultural and individual levels must be separated for both conceptual and empirical purposes (cf. Hofstede, 1994; Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994; Smith & Schwartz, 1997). At the cultural level, according to Triandis and Suh (2002), individualism

is the polar opposite of collectivism (as was also shown by Hofstede), whereas, at the individual level of analysis, the two constructs are often found to be orthogonal to each other (e.g., Realo et al., 2002; Rhee et al., 1996). Because we assume that collectivism is not the opposite of individualism, our theoretical considerations in this article concern only collectivism.

We believe that, at the individual level, collectivism could be best understood as a hierarchical concept: the general notion of collectivism is a superordinate concept with many specific subordinate components (Allik & Realo, 1996; Realo et al., 1997). According to this view, collectivism is a system of attitudes and values that differ from one another by the extent to which individuals are involved in the domain of social relations. The interpersonal relationships appear to be organized on the basis of interpersonal distance from very close relations between members of the nuclear family to remote contact with strangers and impersonal orders, requests, and memos from organizations and institutions. Consequently, at least three subtypes of collectivism could be distinguished, according to the closeness of social relations concerned – family, peers, and society. *Familism* implies dedication of one's life to the family and putting its interests higher than one's personal aspirations. *Companionship* is exemplified by tight relations between an individual and his/her neighbors, friends, or co-workers and by the individual's focus on the needs of his/her in-group. Finally, *Patriotism* means dedication to serve one's nation by surrendering one's personal comforts to the latter (Realo et al., 1997).

The correspondence between the relational models and collectivism

Psychologists working on culture-related topics have of course noted a possible link between Fiske's basic forms of human relations and the cultural dimensions of collectivism and individualism. Although researchers acknowledge that all four basic forms can be used in the same situation, and one specific model on different occasions, they are still inclined to associate one basic form of social relations with one particular cultural syndrome. For example, Triandis (1995, 1996) has argued that his typology of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism matches very closely with Fiske's (1991, 1992) elementary forms of sociality. What Fiske called CS has much in common with collectivism; AR with vertical social relationships; EM with horizontal relationships; and MP with individualism. In other words, vertical collectivism is CS + AR; vertical individualism is MP + AR; horizontal collectivism is CS + EM; and vertical collectivism is CS + AR (Triandis, 1995). Attempts to match elementary forms of sociality with various types of individualism or collectivism have been repeatedly made (Triandis, 1994; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

Unfortunately, there is only one empirical study that we know of that has directly linked collectivism with relational models. The study by Vodosek (2000) investigated to what extent the relational models used by group members when they think about their relationships with fellow group

members and about the outcome of their group's work correlate with the four dimensions of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. The results of the study provided only limited support for the proposed direct correspondence between Fiske's relational models and Triandis' (1995, 1996) dimensions of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. The significant correlations were found between CS and horizontal collectivism ($r = .36, p < .01$) and between EM and horizontal collectivism ($r = .29, p < .05$). At the same time, the expected correlations between MP and horizontal and vertical individualism and between AR and vertical individualism and collectivism were all nonsignificant.

However, a simple one-to-one link between Fiske's elementary forms of sociality and collectivism-individualism can be questioned on a more theoretical basis, as well. Fiske (1992) emphasizes that people can use different models to generate and describe different aspects of the same interaction. This means, in particular, that different models of social relations can describe different aspects or manifestations of collectivism or individualism. For example, relationships among family-oriented collectivists can indeed be described by CS, but only toward their family members. Their preferred model of social relations with people outside their family may be radically different from that which they use inside the family. Fiske and his colleagues (Fiske, 1992; Fiske et al., 1998) explained very clearly why one-to-one relationships between cultural syndromes and elementary constituents of human relations are unrealistic: relational models theory is not a taxonomy of cultures. Instead, the models are abstract and open and their use is determined by cultural implementation rules that determine how and when the models apply, to whom, and to what. In this study, we try to shed some light on this issue in the Estonian cultural context.

The aim of the study

The main aim of this study was to examine to what extent the use of the Fiske relational models is related to collectivist attitudes. According to the hierarchical model of collectivism, collectivist attitudes consist of at least three distinct yet interrelated subtypes focused on relations with family (*Familism*), peers (*Companionship*), and society (*Patriotism*) (Allik & Realo, 1996; Realo et al., 1997). First, following the conceptualization of the relational models, we hypothesize that people scoring high in family-related collectivism are more inclined to use CS, especially in their relations with family members. Second, we expect individuals scoring high on companionship to utilize the EM model, especially in the process of distributing resources or collective decision-making. At the same time, due to a small radius of trust (Fukuyama, 1995) we propose that individuals with higher general collectivism scores tend to use AR to organize and describe their relations with the members of outgroups. As it was stressed by the relational theory, people use different models in different domains. Also, the relative frequency of employment of the models in different domains may be quite different (Fiske, 1992).

In general, however, we expect that individuals scoring high on collectivism will use the whole range of elementary forms of sociality to organize their different relationships, or even the different aspects of the same relationship. We believe that there is not necessarily a one-to-one association between the major cultural dimensions and the elementary models of social relations.

Method

Participants

The sample for this study consisted of 202 Estonians (163 women and 39 men) whose ages ranged from 14 to 73 years, with a mean age of 37.3 ($SD = 13.7$). About 60% of the participants ($n = 120$) lived in towns, and the remaining 40% ($n = 82$) in the countryside. Thirty-six percent of the respondents had higher education, 55% had secondary education, and 9% elementary or basic education. The participants differed greatly in terms of their profession and occupation.

Procedure

Data were collected in seven locations in three Estonian counties: Põlva (town of Põlva and Ahja village), Viljandi (town of Viljandi, Kolga-Jaani and Olustvere rural communities), and Lääne-Viru (town of Rakvere and Viru-Nigula village). Tests were distributed to the respondents in their living- or workplaces on a voluntary basis; the respondents received no financial compensation for their participation. Participants were instructed to complete the tests individually. Tests were collected three to four hours after distribution. There was the option of returning the completed tests by mail (stamps and envelopes were provided upon request). All in all, the response rate for the survey was 66.2%. Data were collected in June and July, 2001.

Measures

The participants were asked to complete a set of different measures from which only two are relevant for this study.

The Relational Models Measure. In order to study Fiske's four models of social relations, 23 items were developed that provided four alternative solutions to various everyday situations. Among the 23 items, eight dealt with some kind of distribution of resources (e.g., money, food, property); seven were about decision making processes; three items were concerned with contribution; three about motivation, social identity, and moral judgment; and two items about work (see Fiske, 1992, Table 1 as the basis for this classification). Thematically, items were divided into four major categories: family, friends, organization, and society.

Participants were asked to read each item carefully and to consider to what extent they agreed with each of the four ways of conduct in the given situation. The answers were given on a 6-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). A sample item #7 of the Relational Models Measure is as follows: 'When paying the bill in a restaurant with one's friends . . .' (a) The one who earns the most pays for everyone; (b) Everybody pays as much as they

can afford at the moment; (c) Everybody pays an equal part irrespective of how much they spent; (d) Everybody pays separately for one's bill. The ipsative nature of our data (see Results section for further details) did not allow us to calculate traditional indices of internal consistency reliability.

Collectivist attitudes. The ESTCOL Scale (Realo et al., 1997) was used to measure collectivist attitudes. The ESTCOL Scale consists of three 8-item subscales, each of which assesses a specific aspect of collectivism focused on relations with *family* (e.g., 'In life, family interests are most important'); *peers* (e.g., 'A person can only feel good in the company of others'); and *society* (e.g., 'The interests of state outweigh the individual interests of its members'). These three types share a common core that is superordinate to these particular forms of collectivism. The respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the items on a 5-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (0) to *strongly agree* (4). The Cronbach alphas of the three subscales were .75, .68, and .82 for *Familism*, *Companionship*, and *Patriotism*, respectively. The general index of collectivism (COL) was computed as the sum score of the three subscales.

Results

Descriptive statistics of the Relational Models Measure

First, the data obtained with the Relational Models Measure were converted into ipsatized scores. This means that for each of the 23 items, the relative preference of CS, AR, EM, or MP models was calculated within respondents. More specifically, for each item, the sum scores of the four relational models were found from which the relative percentage of every one of the four models was calculated. In this manner, the profiles of the four relational models in every one of the 23 items were obtained for all participants. The means of the ipsative scores for CS, AR, EM, and MP across 23 situations are shown in Table 1. For 11 items (48%), EM received highest support from the respondents, CS was a dominating answer in 7 items (30%), and MP in 5 items (22%), whereas AR was never the most popular answer among the four variants. When the use of the four relational models across the 23 items was broken down by county and urban versus rural settlement, few differences were observed. A one-way ANOVA revealed that in all three counties people living in the countryside preferred the CS model more than people living in towns, $F(1,200) = 6.02$, $p = .015$. All other differences were statistically nonsignificant. Although the content of these three dominating answers is not very transparent, some underlying principles can be detected. In many of the everyday situations in which EM is preferred over other models of social relations, the principles of how to distribute the property or money among workmates and friends are discussed. However, MP is used more than the other models in those situations that deal with contribution or decision-making processes. As expected, the CS model is more often used in home and family-related situations. In two items, somewhat surprisingly, the answers emphasizing altruistic motivation (coded as CS) proved to be the most common among the respondents.

Relational models and collectivist attitudes

Our next goal was to look at whether individuals who score high or low on the ESTCOL subscales are inclined to use the relational models in a different

TABLE 1
Mean scores of CS, AR, EM and MP in 23 situations (ipsative scores)

Item	AR		CS		EM		MP	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
#1	.21	.11	.32	.14	.22	.08	.25	.12
#2	.27	.09	.24	.10	.31	.09	.18	.09
#3	.20	.08	.28	.10	.27	.08	.25	.09
#4	.23	.06	.19	.07	.36	.09	.21	.07
#5	.27	.09	.22	.11	.21	.11	.30	.10
#6	.20	.09	.28	.10	.25	.08	.27	.10
#7	.15	.07	.23	.11	.20	.08	.42	.12
#8	.27	.07	.34	.08	.17	.07	.22	.07
#9	.13	.05	.25	.07	.35	.07	.27	.07
#10	.12	.04	.20	.08	.43	.12	.25	.10
#11	.23	.06	.29	.06	.22	.06	.26	.06
#12	.19	.06	.28	.06	.26	.06	.27	.06
#13	.28	.10	.14	.06	.25	.14	.33	.12
#14	.22	.09	.22	.09	.39	.12	.17	.07
#15	.13	.05	.28	.09	.35	.11	.24	.10
#16	.16	.07	.24	.11	.36	.10	.24	.10
#17	.20	.07	.28	.10	.25	.07	.27	.07
#18	.17	.06	.17	.06	.34	.07	.21	.07
#19	.17	.08	.27	.07	.30	.08	.25	.08
#20	.16	.06	.26	.05	.26	.05	.31	.06
#21	.30	.07	.30	.07	.21	.07	.36	.06
#22	.19	.06	.28	.06	.31	.07	.22	.08
#23	.18	.07	.20	.07	.36	.13	.26	.10
Total	.20	.07	.25	.08	.29	.09	.26	.09

Note. *N* = 202. Dominating relational models in every situation are shown in bold type. AR = Authority Ranking; CS = Communal Sharing; EM = Equality Matching; MP = Market Pricing.

manner. Correlations between the mean frequencies of the four relational models (sum scores of the ipsative scores for each thematic group of items) and collectivist attitudes are shown in Table 2.

The correlations between the four models of social relations and different subforms of collectivist attitudes, although modest, were in the expected direction. In general, individuals with collectivist attitudes tended to use the MP model less frequently. There was no overall tendency for collectivists to use the CS model in all possible situations. Only familists had a greater propensity to use CS principles, but only in home and family situations. At the same time, familists stressed that MP should not be used if dealing with family matters. It is interesting that AR was not associated with collectivist attitudes, except for the situations involving friends or fellows. In these situations, companionship-oriented and patriotically minded individuals were more inclined to use the AR model. They seemed to think, for example, that among friends it is a good idea if a group leader makes a decision about how to distribute common resources

TABLE 2
Correlations between the mean frequencies of relational models (ipsative scores) and collectivist attitudes in different situations

Type of situation	Relational models	Collectivist attitudes			
		Familism	Companionship	Patriotism	COL
Family #1, #12, #14, #15, #21	AR	.05	.06	.11	.10
	CS	.22	.05	-.06	.09
	EM	-.10	-.04	-.06	-.09
	MP	-.18	-.06	.03	-.10
Friends, fellows #2, #3, #7, #10, #16, #18	AR	.06	.18	.14	.17
	CS	.11	.09	.02	.10
	EM	.00	-.10	-.07	-.08
	MP	-.15	-.14	-.07	-.16
Organization #5, #9, #11, #20, #22, #23	AR	-.04	.04	.09	.04
	CS	.02	.03	.05	.05
	EM	-.01	.01	-.07	-.03
	MP	.03	-.08	-.06	-.05
Society #4, #6, #8, #13, #17, #19	AR	.01	.07	-.10	-.02
	CS	.11	.06	.12	.14
	EM	.05	.08	.07	.09
	MP	-.16	-.20	-.09	-.21

Note. AR = Authority Ranking; CS = Communal Sharing; EM = Equality Matching; MP = Market Pricing; COL = General Index of Collectivism. Significant ($p < .05$) correlations are shown in bold type.

(item 2). Contrary to our expectations, EM was not utilized more frequently by those scoring high on companionship.

Although the relationships between the relational models and the collectivist attitudes were situation- or domain-specific, they were nevertheless far from being strictly functional, nor did they establish a rigid one-to-one relationship between the models of social relationships and the construct of collectivism even within one type of situation. Thus, we looked next for the best set of indicators among the relational models that could predict the preferences of people scoring high on collectivism.

With this purpose in mind, we performed a general regression analysis (forward stepwise) and looked for the sets of answers across 23 situations that were the best predictors of the general index of collectivism (COL). The obtained *R*-value (.59) indicates that approximately 35% of the variance in the general collectivism index could be explained by the responses reflecting models of social relations. Among the 92 answers (23 situations × 4 relational models) of the Relational Models Measure, there were 10 that were significantly related to the general collectivism index. Four of them were CS items (e.g., decisions made by committees should be based on a consensus of all committee members, or unexploited land of a community should remain in the communal use), three were MP items with negative correlations (e.g., the use of money in the family should *not* be proportional to the contribution of each member, or the conviction that the main motivational force of human conduct

is *not* to do more or to be better than the others), and one answer represented both EM and AR models. The fourth MP item dealt with the question of how children should share a piece of land that they inherited from their parents. Initially, the answer that said that every child should receive a piece of land depending on how much he or she provided care for his or her parents was classified as an example of thinking in terms of MP. In fact, the correlation between this item and the general index of collectivism was positive, not negative. Participants obviously did not regard the amount of care children provided for their parents as an example of cost-and-benefit calculations, but they viewed it as a moral obligation.

Discussion

The results of our study showed that the situation-specific demands for implementing elementary relational models were rather uniform. The respondents' collectivist attitudes showed only a modest moderating effect. First, there was a relatively limited number of situations that were reliably related to collectivist attitudes. Only familists in family situations were inclined to use the CS and avoid the MP relational models. Second, the total amount of variance in collectivism that could be explained on the basis of the use of relational models in various situations was not very high – around one-third of the total variance. Although people scoring high on collectivism showed an inclination to avoid MP relationships, the association between the two areas (cultural dimensions and elementary forms of sociality) was rather modest. Thus, the relationships between the use of the relational models and the collectivist attitudes were far from strict one-to-one associations. It is quite clear that people scoring low on collectivism do not always use MP and not in all situations; neither are 'collectivists' rigidly fastened to the use of CS, not even in their family relations. In most of the hypothetical situations, both people scoring low and high on collectivism tended to use all four models as dictated by general cultural norms, the logic of the situation, and their personal history. This finding was further supported by the results of the multiple regression analyses that showed that the examples of all four relational models served as best predictors of the general index of collectivism.

Cultural and situational implementation rules of relational models

According to Fiske and colleagues (1998), there are obvious cultural differences in the prevalence of the relational models: AR, for instance, is prominent in much of East Asia and nearly absent in some hunting and gathering societies. For example, in studies of immigrants in the U.S., people from Liberia and Sierra Leone reported many AR interpersonal relationships and very few MP relationships in the same domain. When we examined the four elementary forms of sociality in a variety of situations related to people's everyday behavior in Estonia, the results showed that, as a rule, our respondents seemed to be oriented toward EM and CS relationships – the two models were favored in 48% and 30% of

the 23 hypothetical situations, respectively. In the remaining set of five items, MP was chiefly used by our respondents, whereas the AR mode was never chosen as the most likely way of conduct in any of the 23 hypothetical situations.

Without a direct cross-cultural comparison, it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions on the basis of these findings. Nevertheless, the overwhelming preference for equal and reciprocal social exchange (EM) as well as for consensual and communal relationships (CS), and, most specifically, the avoidance of hierarchical and authoritative relations (AR) are the indicators of prevailing egalitarian attitudes among our participants. There are indeed some previous findings suggesting that Estonia can be classified among relatively egalitarian cultures. In his worldwide analysis of values in more than 38 nations, Schwartz (1994) found that Estonian teacher samples scored nearly the lowest on Hierarchy (exemplary values such as social power and authority) and received medium scores on the Egalitarian Commitment (e.g., equality, social justice, responsibility) value type. Thus, on the basis of previous and our own findings, we argue that there appears to be a preference for equal, rather than hierarchical, treatment of people and distribution of resources.

This notion is further supported by Hofstede's pioneering research (1980, 2001) and subsequent work in the area of cultural dimensions that has shown that there are considerable differences between cultures in terms of power distance. According to Hofstede (2001), power distance implies the degree to which inequality in social institutions and practices is accepted. Power distance is high in several East Asian cultures and low in Western Europe and other English-speaking countries. As Hofstede (2001) argues, 'With a little fantasy, one could relate forms 2 [authority ranking] and 3 [equality matching] to, respectively, large and small power distance' (p. 31). Hofstede's view is supported by Fiske and colleagues (1998, p. 951) who argue that 'certainly a culture high in power distance is likely to be one in which people value and commonly utilize AR, but cultures low in power distance may emphasize EM, CS, or MP.' In Hofstede's (2001) most recent book, new data are presented for a number of countries (including Estonia) that did not participate in his initial study of work-related values (Hofstede, 1980). According to these data, Estonia scores very low on power distance, sharing the position 61–63 (among 78 cultures) on the power distance dimension with the U.S. and Luxembourg. Therefore, it is quite expected that our participants did not report many AR relationships and utilize EM, CS, and MP models instead. It is also interesting to note that the Relational Models Measure revealed a significant difference between the two communities: residents of rural areas were inclined to prefer the CS model more than people living in towns.

As suggested by Fiske (1992), the four universal relational models can be realized only in some culture-specific and situation-specific manners. The models cannot be operationalized without specifying certain application rules determining when and to whom, and with what regard they apply, and without setting some parameters about how they are to be put

into practice. This study provided some information about how people select each of the four models in different everyday contexts. In particular, we observed that the dominant principle in distributing (received) benefits is EM, especially when these benefits or resources are distributed among friends or co-workers. For our respondents, it appears to be of primary value to support equality and reciprocity in social distribution: everyone should get equal shares (regardless of their needs or position) and nobody should have an advantage over another. On the contrary, in those situations in which people were asked to contribute, the respondents were inclined to think in terms of cost and benefit, insisting that the contributions should be made according to a quota or percentage proportionate with some standard (e.g., income, time).

Strengths and limitations of the present study

Of course, the weak relationships between collectivist attitudes and the use of relational models can be due to many factors, such as imperfect measures or relatively low reliabilities of the measurement, for instance. It is not clear how well 23 imaginary situations constructed for this study measure the four basic forms of social relations. The relational models were assumed, not directly demonstrated in this study. Our collectivism scale, however, which is designed to measure three subtypes of collectivism (according to the closeness of social relations concerned), could be considered a strength of our research. As it is emphasized by the relational theory, people use different relational models in different domains. Consequently, in our research we were able to examine familist attitudes in relation to family situations and companionship attitudes in relation to friendship/companionship situations, for instance.

Would other methods of measurement have produced stronger relationships? Quite obviously, we cannot answer this question on the basis of the findings of our own study. The results of Vodosek's (2000) study also provided only limited support for the proposed relations between the Fiske models and horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. Thus, although one can hardly generalize from the findings of two studies, we are inclined to believe that the modest relationships between the Fiske models of social relations and collectivist attitudes in our study are not due to our methods of measurement.

Another strength of our study is certainly the sample that included Estonian adults with diverse educational and professional backgrounds from three different Estonian regions. That gives more credibility to our findings than the use of college students as is frequently done in cross-cultural psychological studies.

Directions for future research

Further research should establish to what extent our findings are generalizable to other cultures. As previous research has shown, the relations between two constructs established in one culture are not always generalizable to other cultures (e.g., Grimm, Church, Katigbak, & Reynes, 1999).

For instance, if in the U.S. the 'we-values' (i.e., collectivism, familism, romanticism, and spiritualism) were positively and significantly related to accommodation, the 'me-value' of individualism showed neither positive nor significant correlation with accommodation (Gaines et al., in press). In Jamaica, however, individualism was a negative and significant predictor of accommodation, whereas the 'we-values' were not related to accommodation (Gaines, Ramkissoon, & Matthies, 2003). Gaines and colleagues (2003) proposed that the difference between the results in the U.S. versus in Jamaica reflected the difference in the salience of cultural values in two cultures. Thus, it is possible that the weak relationships between collectivist attitudes and the use of relational models are specific to our Estonian sample. Because Estonia can be considered a moderately individualist culture (Realo, 2003), future studies should determine whether stronger relationships emerge in predominantly collectivist cultures in which the person is fundamentally and inherently connected to others, stressing belongingness, reciprocity, loyalty, and kinship (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Conclusions

Taken together, it seems that the largest proportion of variance in the choice of relational models is attributable to the measurement error and individual differences that are not necessarily related to stable personality traits. In fact, the four relational models – CS, EM, HR, and MP – comprise a naive theory of social relations that guide individuals in their social relations and help them to understand and respond appropriately to the social actions of others. They are generalized statements about which kind of relationships could exist between different actors and subjects of the social interaction. In this particular respect, the relational models are like other cognitive models people use when they try to understand and categorize the situations that they encounter. Our data indicate that the choice of a model depends primarily on the characteristics of the situation – the distribution of social benefits, for instance, predisposes towards EM, and situations that deal with contribution incline towards MP – and individual characteristics. Much less appears to be determined by a shared cultural environment or collectivist attitudes.

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