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## Culture and Group Processes

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# Culture and Group Processes

## Abstract

Contrary to traditional views of North Americans as strongly individualistic, accumulating evidence indicates that they are actually also highly collectivistic, or group-oriented, when compared to people in other parts of the world. Review of previous findings suggest an alternative view; cultural differences in group-behavior and psychology does not reside in the levels of collectivism, or the strength and amount of identity and loyalty to the group, but rather in the type of psychological processes that bring about those phenomena: specifically, an orientation towards intergroup differentiation and comparisons in North American cultures versus an orientation towards intragroup relationships in East Asian cultures. In addition, we offer a possible account for why such a difference could exist based on a socio-ecological perspective, focusing specifically on the role of relational mobility.

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## Introduction

If you closely look into everyday life of people in North America, groups are ubiquitous. People are involved with a wide array of groups including political parties, sports teams, companies, and even whether they prefer Macs or PCs. They can be deeply devoted to such groups, bragging about their successes, excusing their defeats, and even fighting with members of rival groups. However, this does not accord with the impression you might get in classical introductory psychology textbooks. Instead, many textbooks reference the well-known cross-cultural distinction between “individualist” and “collectivist” cultures by presenting North America as the prototypical land of individualists who have little interest in social groups, at least as compared with people in other parts of the world. But this portrayal is clearly contradicted by the prominence and importance ascribed to social groups in daily life in North American societies. We are thus left with a paradoxical situation wherein North Americans – individualistic people living within a highly individualistic culture – appear to be interested in and involved with a wide variety of social groups.

The purpose of this article is to help resolve this mystery. To state our conclusions up front, we first contend that it is misleading to assume that people in individualistic cultures relate to groups to a lesser degree than those in collectivistic cultures. In reality, people from both individualistic and collectivist cultures value group life highly and, more broadly, group-like behaviors are prevalent in all human societies. Second, we argue that despite the universal prevalence for group-based behaviors, there are still notable cross-cultural differences in the *psychological underpinnings* of group behaviors: with people in individualistic and collectivistic cultures differing in how they view groups, see the self within group contexts, and display different patterns of group behaviors. Finally, we suggest that it may be possible to account for these differences by considering them as adaptations to the different social ecological structures that are found in different regions in the world. Additional information on this topic can be found in Yuki (2003), Brewer and Yuki (2007), as well as Yuki and Takemura (2014).

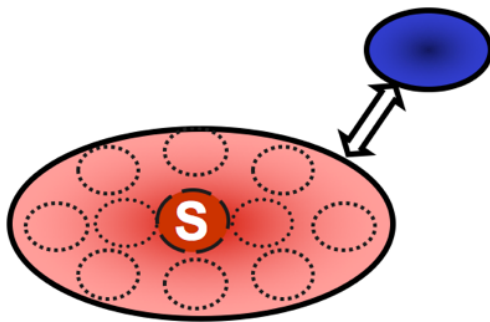
## Individualistic Cultures are not Cultures of Isolation

While there are many definitions relating to individualism and collectivism, the prevalence of the dichotomy has created a widely shared and erroneous assumption that individualism necessarily involves “that individuals are independent of one another” (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002, p. 4). This in turn has led many to believe that some form of alienation and isolation from social connections is characteristic of individualism, and that an opposing all-consuming “concern” with collectives underpins collectivism (Hui & Triandis, 1986). This assumption is false, as reviews have shown that groups are no less important in so-called “individualistic countries/regions” than they are in collectivistic ones

(Fiske, 2002, Oyserman et al., 2002). Indeed, the prevalence of groups in the lives of individualistic North Americans and their commitment to them comes as no real surprise given that humans have been a group-oriented species since deep in our evolutionary past (Dunbar, 2009; Lieberman, 2013). Whether groups are small-scale and relational, such as the family unit, or larger scale collective groups, such as countries, all human societies rely on their existence in one way or another (Dunbar, 2003; Hogg-Olesen, 2009; McElreath & Henrich, 2006; Tomasello, 2014).

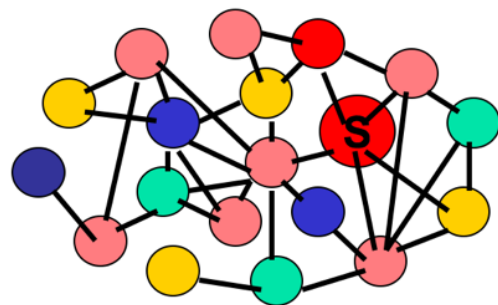
Then, is it more appropriate to simply say that all humans are collectivists, and that the whole attempt to contrast between “individualistic” vs. “collectivistic cultures” was just some unfortunate mistake? Although some scholars have been tempted to argue this (e.g. Takano & Osaka, 1999), we think there is a more appropriate alternative. That is, it is possible that the nature of the psychological processes motivating group behaviors do in fact differ between different cultures, and this is where crucial cross-cultural distinctions lie. In the following section, we will detail the evidence for such distinctions by introducing two distinctive models and examining the types of group behavior that are predominant in the prototypical comparative cultural contexts of North America and East Asia. In doing so, we wish to echo the argument raised by many relatively recent overviews of the individualism/collectivism literature (Oyserman et al., 2002; Schwartz, 1994; Voronov & Singer, 2002), that the individualism/collectivism dichotomies need to be examined more closely as these constructs are over-simplistic, and can conceal significant conceptual variabilities within each of them.

**North American Category-based  
intergroup comparison orientation**



- Ingroup as a depersonalized entity, defined in comparison with outgroups
- Collective self

**East Asian network-based  
intragroup relationship orientation**



- Ingroup as a personal network among members
- Relational self

*Figure 1. Inter- and intra-group affiliation models; derived from Yuki (2003; Figure 1)*

## Intergroup Comparison and Intragroup Relationships: Two Models

Yuki and colleagues (Brewer & Yuki, 2007; Yuki, 2003; Yuki & Takemura, 2014) have proposed that the predominant way in which North American people associate with social groups differs from that found with East Asians. Specifically, two distinct models of group affiliation have been identified: an *intergroup comparison* model and an *intragroup relationship* model (see Figure 1).

### The Intergroup Comparison Model

The pattern and underlying psychological underpinnings of North American people's group behaviors is neatly depicted by the core concepts of the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and its later elaboration in self-categorization theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). This approach is widely accepted in Western social psychology as offering the most comprehensive understanding of an array of both within- and inter-group phenomena.

To illustrate the approach, let us first consider North Americans who tend to see their groups as a collection of people who share some similar attributes, such as physical appearance, personality, values, and goals. Under such a homogenizing group context, individuals tend to perceive themselves as possessing their group's characteristics, which they derive from an idealized prototype of the group. Group members are motivated to judge their group as superior to other groups and strive to achieve positive intergroup distinctiveness.

In the social identity approach, all group behaviors ultimately derive from a phenomenon called the depersonalization of self-representation. This occurs when a cognitive representation of the self is defined in terms of membership in a shared social category, and in effect, there is no subjective distinction between the self and the group as a whole. Consequently, when a social identity is made salient, individuals "come to perceive themselves more as the interchangeable exemplars of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their individual differences from others" (Turner et al., 1987, p. 50).

This form of depersonalization occurs in a comparative context between ingroup and outgroup, meaning that an ingroup cannot be defined without reference to an outgroup (see Figure 2). Then, intergroup comparison both in terms of characteristics and values (or status) is recognized as a crucial component of all groups. As adopting a social identity involves defining the self at the ingroup level, individuals are motivated to evaluate their group positively relative to other groups (positive intergroup discrimination), and promote this view to achieve a satisfactory sense of self-worth.

It should be noted that some later developments to the Social Identity Theory have focused on differences in prototypicality among group members, with the level of similarity to an established group ideal being associated with differential influence within the group

(e.g., Hogg, 2001). But whatever the case, the social identity approach as a whole still fundamentally posits a depersonalized perception of the ingroup, either through the perceiving of group members as interchangeable, or focusing on an idealized prototype and distinguishing group members based on their prototype-derived position in the group.



*Figure 2.* Intergroup dynamics and homogenous team uniforms at an American football game. Image taken by Masaki Yuki.

## The Intragroup Relationship model

While there is strong evidence that the intergroup comparison model is important for understanding group processes in general, Yuki and colleagues have proposed that it does not adequately account for the predominant characteristics of group cognition and behaviors amongst people in some of the largest “collectivistic” cultures, particularly those found in East Asia. They have argued that, contrary to the dominant intergroup comparison model, group behaviors in certain collectivistic cultures are primarily an *intragroup* phenomenon (Brewer & Yuki, 2007; Yuki, 2003, 2011; Yuki & Takemura, 2014). The intergroup and intragroup models carry broad implications that entail a wide variety of differences in psychological and behavioral processes between North Americans and East Asians. Below we provide a summary of impacts for four important areas.

### **Self-concept: Collective versus relational**

A core aspect that differs between the *intergroup*-focused and *intragroup*-focused models is how the self is represented cognitively in the minds of individuals who are placed in a group context. Since the early days of research on the self, theorists have hypothesized that the self involves multiple components (Breckler & Greenwald, 1986; Cooley, 1902; Deaux, 1993; Loevinger, 1976; Mead, 1934). However, the most relevant distinction is that proposed by Brewer and Gardner (1996) between the *collective* and *relational* selves (see also Kashima & Hardie, 2000; Kashima et al., 1995). The *collective* self is the self defined in terms of prototypical properties that are shared among depersonalized members of a common ingroup as depicted in Social Identity Theory. The *relational* self on the other hand is the self defined in terms of connections and role relationships with significant others (Cross & Madson, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; McGuire & McGuire, 1982).

Although the term *collectivism* is sometimes used as if it were equivalent to the concept of the collective self, other scholars employing indigenous theoretical perspectives have defined the self in East Asian cultures primarily in terms of its relational aspects (e.g. Choi, Kim, & Choi, 1993; Hamaguchi, 1977; Lebra, 1976; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Markus and Kitayama (1991) termed this concept the *interdependent* self and argued that in Asian cultures, "the self is made meaningful primarily in reference to those social relations of which the self is a participating part" (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997, p. 1247; see Brewer & Chen, 2007, for a more extensive argument on the confusion between relational and collective selves in the traditional individualism-collectivism literature). A crucial clarification offered by Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, and Nisbett (1998) explained that "living interdependently does not mean the loss of self, the fusion of self with other, or the absence of self-interests. What it does mean is that attention, cognition, affect, and motivation are organized with respect to relationship and norms" (p. 925). Hence, an "interdependent" self is not only different from self-representation at the category level (Turner et al., 1987), but also from the phenomenon known as "self-extension" (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) or "identity fusion" (Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012); processes that involve including significant others as part of the self.

### **Ingroup view: Homogenous/monolithic versus relational/network**

Turning to cognitive representations of the ingroup, the prevalence of the relational self does not imply that the ingroup is not a meaningful social unit (Gudykunst, 1988; Smith & Bond, 1999). Instead, the critical difference is that those in collectivistic cultures do not perceive their ingroups as depersonalized monolithic entities, but rather as complex networks of interrelated individual members (Choi et al., 1993; Hamaguchi, 1977; Ho, 1993; Kim, 1994; Lebra, 1976; Nakane, 1970). In a direct test of cultural differences in the meaning of the ingroup in social identification processes, Yuki (2003) compared predictors of the strength of ingroup identity and loyalty between Japanese and American participants. The study asked American and Japanese university students to report how

they perceived two kinds of ingroups of different sizes—their country and a small social group (such as sports team or hobby group) – and included measures which pertained to features of the ingroup as a social category (i.e., ingroup homogeneity and status relative to outgroups), and measures to address perceived relational connections with the ingroup (i.e., understanding and feeling interpersonal connections between ingroup members). The results indicated that for the American participants, ingroup identification and loyalty were associated with both relational and categorical measures. Alternatively, for Japanese participants, ingroup identification and loyalty were determined solely by relational measures, with no correlation observed for the categorical measures.

The East Asian tendency to perceive the ingroup as a network can also be described in more theoretical terms, congruent with an alternative form of perceived group *entitativity*. Entitativity refers to the degree to which a social collective is viewed as a single unit (Campbell, 1958). One common foundation for entitativity is the perception of homogeneity: that group members are seen as similar to each other. However, there are alternative sources of entitativity, including the differentiation of roles among members (Hamilton, Sherman, & Lickel, 1998; Lickel, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2001). An emphasis on differences might seem counterproductive for promoting a sense of unity, however, this can be effective at generating the perception that each individual has a specialized role to play as part of a greater unit. Consider as an analogy the different positions and roles for players (and even support staff/coaches) that together make up an American football team.

This contrast between the depersonalized and the network view of ingroups is consistent with the distinction between *common-identity* and *common-bond* groups (Prentice, Miller, & Lightdale, 1994). In common-identity groups, members are attached more strongly to the group than to fellow group members. In common-bond groups, members are attached to individual members of the group. Evidence suggests that attachment to and identification with the ingroup as a whole and to ingroup members are empirically independent from each other (Hogg, 1993; Karasawa, 1991; Prentice et al., 1994).

Building on such theoretical models, it can be predicted that the predominant basis of group entitativity will differ between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, and there is indeed some empirical evidence in support of this. For instance, Kurebayashi, Hoffman, Ryan, and Murayama (2012) compared determinants of “group entitativity” between Americans and Japanese participants and found that trait similarity among group members predicted entitativity perceptions among Americans, whereas for Japanese participants, entitativity was more strongly associated with perceptions of shared goals and dynamic properties. Similarly, Takemura, Yuki, and Ohtsubo (2010) conducted a study using scenarios to provide participants with a variety of inter- and intragroup details and then tested recall to compare spontaneous attention to intergroup status differences and intragroup relationships between American and Japanese participants. They found that American participants tended to remember intergroup status difference information better than intragroup relationship information, whereas for Japanese participants intergroup and



intragroup details were equally well remembered (see Haslam, Holland, & Karasawa, 2014 for a more detailed review concerning culture and perceptions of group entitativity).

### **Bases of trust: Shared group membership versus relational ties**

The difference in intergroup versus intragroup focus impacts what bases on which people trust others. Trust can be defined as an expectation of beneficial treatment from others in situations where support is not guaranteed (Foddy, Platow, & Yamagishi, 2009). Thus, trust reflects the degree of confidence that other people will act in a way that will benefit (or not harm) oneself *before* there is any definitive evidence that this is the case (Dasgupta, 1988). The traditional view of cultural differences tends to assume that people in collectivistic cultures are more trusting of their ingroups than those in individualistic cultures. Such expectations, however, have proven to be too simplistic, as research indicates that differences in trusting behavior derive from a variety of contextual factors.

First, in contrast to widespread expectations, people from individualist cultures tend to display a greater ingroup bias in trusting behavior than people from collectivistic cultures. For instance, Buchan, Johnson, and Croson (2006) found that in an investment game involving an indirect exchange situation, American participants displayed greater levels of trust in unknown others when an arbitrary shared identity with the target person was made salient, whereas Chinese participants did not exhibit such a tendency.

Such counterintuitive findings can be best understood when we recognize that there are two distinct bases for placing trust in an unknown member of our ingroup. The first is belonging to a shared social category which generates *depersonalized* trust (Brewer, 1981), and the second is when individuals trust others that they recognize they could be directly or indirectly connected to through interpersonal ties (Coleman, 1990), which can extend *personalized* trust to unknown others.

Based on this insight, Yuki, Maddux, Brewer, and Takemura (2005) conducted two cross-cultural experiments to examine if American participants' trust in a stranger would more strongly relate to categorical distinctions between in- and outgroups than Japanese participants, who were conversely expected to be more influenced by whether they were likely to share an indirect personal relationship with the individual, regardless of category boundaries. The first experiment used a questionnaire to present various scenarios manipulating the relationship of the respondent to the group and probed their level of trust. The second was a laboratory experiment in which participants who believed they were playing with various partners chose between a guaranteed reward or a payoff decided by their respective partners that was potentially higher or lower. The results from the two experiments supported the original hypothesis that Americans displayed more trust towards a stranger from their ingroup than a stranger from an outgroup and, crucially, that the presence of an acquaintance in the outgroup had no impact on levels of trust towards an unknown member from the outgroup. In contrast, for Japanese participants, their level of trust was influenced by the perceived likelihood that they had direct or indirect relationship links, and this influence even extended to the trust displayed towards strangers from an outgroup. In other words, the Japanese participants displayed greater

trust of outgroup members when they had an indirect relational connection, whereas this made no difference to the levels of trust of outgroup members for the American participants.

### **Intergroup discrimination: Competition versus interdependence**

Traditional perspectives on individualism and collectivism suggest that people in collectivistic cultures will be more inclined to favor their ingroup members over outgroup members, and will hence more actively discriminate against outgroups (Triandis, 1995). However, based on the alternative model of differing group processes between cultures, our alternative hypothesis is that intergroup discrimination in collectivistic cultures does not derive primarily from making comparisons between groups but instead as a consequence of the desire to maintain harmonious and reciprocal relationships within the ingroup. This may seem like a subtle distinction but it can have important implications.

In particular, research indicates that evaluative ingroup bias is higher in individualistic than in collectivistic cultures, particularly when the targets of evaluation are category-based groups. For instance, Heine and Lehman (1997) found that Japanese students rated their own universities *less* positively than students from rival universities, a pattern not found amongst a comparison group of Canadian students. Moreover, Snibbe, Kitayama, Markus, and Suzuki (2003) found significantly less ingroup favoritism amongst Japanese football fans than their American counterparts, even though the two groups did not differ in levels of ingroup identification (see also, Bond & Hewstone, 1988).

The same finding has also been observed in experimental settings using a *minimal group paradigm* (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). A minimal group is a purely arbitrary categorical group created in a laboratory, established through mechanisms such as preferences in abstract paintings or supposed performance in estimation tasks. A core point with this methodology is that the groups created have no prior history and involve no significant interdependence among members. As expected from Yuki and colleagues' theory, the magnitude of ingroup bias in the minimal group paradigm tends to be greater among North Americans than among East Asians (Falk, Heine, & Takemura, 2014; Wetherell, 1982).

Moreover, evidence suggests that intergroup discrimination among collectivists is primarily a function of interdependence within a group, with ingroup bias appearing only when groups are defined in terms of relational connections. This pattern of limited intergroup discrimination was demonstrated in a series of studies by Yamagishi and colleagues conducted in Japan (Jin, Yamagishi, & Kiyonari, 1996; Karp, Jin, Yamagishi, & Shinotsuka, 1993). Using a minimal group paradigm, they demonstrated that whether a shared "bounded generalized reciprocity" system was perceived among ingroup members strongly affected whether Japanese participants displayed ingroup bias. Alternatively, in North America and Australian samples, intergroup discrimination was found even when the potential for reciprocal interdependence was eliminated (e.g., Perreault & Bourhis, 1998; Platow, McClintock, & Liebrand, 1990; see also Yamagishi, Mifune, Liu, & Pauling, 2008).

## Why so Different? A Social-Ecological Account

The evidence reviewed thus far supports the claim that there are cross-cultural differences in the *kinds*, but not the *levels*, of predominant group orientations (Brewer & Yuki, 2007; Yuki, 2003, 2011). But even if this view is accepted, it still leaves us with the crucial question: from where do these differences originate? We have thus far critiqued the limitations of relying on the individualism/collectivism dichotomy, but for any critique to be useful, it needs to also offer a better alternative. Thus, we will conclude this paper by exploring the possibilities offered by a socio-ecological perspective to examine the origins and mechanisms that generate an intergroup or intragroup focus for group processes.

The main goal of the *socio-ecological approach* is to delineate how the mind and behavior of individuals are related to aspects of the natural and social habitats that surround them (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Oishi & Graham, 2010; Yuki & Schug, 2012). This means that social environmental factors, such as kinship systems, political structures, and societal reward systems, are considered as important as features of the physical environment. Such an approach has a long history in psychology (e.g., Barker, 1968; Berry, 1979), but it has recently been experiencing resurgence across a variety of fields in the social and cultural sciences (Henrich et al., 2005; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Uskul, Kitayama, & Nisbett, 2008; see Oishi & Graham, 2010, for an extensive review of this approach).

Here we focus on just one such socioecological factor – *relational mobility*, which we argue is crucial to understanding the different processes in group behavior and psychology we have described. Relational mobility is defined as the extent

“to which there is an availability of options in a given society or social context regarding interpersonal relationships, such as opportunities to acquire new, maintain current, and sever old relationships” (Sato & Yuki, 2014, p. 2).

Societies low in relational mobility tend to be those in which people collectively create and maintain long-enduring relationships and groups. Maintaining long-enduring relationship with specific others offers the benefits of reducing social uncertainty and decreasing the risks of being cheated on by other individuals (Yamagishi, Jin, & Kiyonari, 1999). Alternatively, societies high in relational mobility provide people with an abundance of opportunities to meet new people and establish new relationships (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). Studies have found that relational mobility is useful in explaining a number of differences in psychological and behavioral tendencies among people who live in different societies, such as in the level of trust in strangers (Yuki et al., 2007), self-enhancement (Falk, Heine, Yuki, & Takemura, 2009), self-disclosure (Schug, Yuki, & Maddux, 2010), determinants of happiness (Sato & Yuki, 2014; Yuki, Sato, Takemura, & Oishi, 2013), reward and punishment of cooperators and defectors (Wang & Leung, 2010), and proneness to shame (Sznycer et al., 2012).

For instance, traditional theories could not easily explain why it has been found that people in "individualistic" cultures often show greater intimacy and more active behaviors in interpersonal relationships than do those in "collectivistic" cultures. However, from a socio-ecological and adaptationist point of view, emphasizing the role of relational mobility, this behavior can be understood as an adaptive strategy that people in high mobility societies use to achieve and retain valuable social relationships, which otherwise are easily lost (see Kito, Yuki, & Thomson, 2017, for a detailed review and discussion).

In terms of the influence on group processes, in societies with low relational mobility, groups are taken for granted. Individuals are admitted to specific groups with little choice and must remain in them for a long time, regardless of any personal desires to leave. This results in greater longevity for groups and social relationships, which reduces social uncertainty and establishes a foundation for effective routinized social exchange and cooperation. Moreover, in low relational mobility environments, social groups are typically constructed so that members can monitor each other's behavior, enabling a constant sense of social surveillance that reduces the need for developing generalized trust (Miller & Kanazawa, 2000; Yamagishi, Jin, & Miller, 1998). As a result of the low relational mobility environment, where there are few options for alternative relationships, individuals need to improve their *circumstances* in relation to given others. Strategies employed to achieve this include making efforts to mitigate the consequences of bad relationships and avoiding risks that could jeopardize hard to replace relationships (Yamagishi, Hashimoto, & Schug, 2008)

This theory accords with traditional findings in cross-cultural psychology that East Asians are primarily focused on maintaining harmony and reciprocal relationships in their intragroup relationships, exemplified by such tendencies as their preference for equality over equity in reward allocation within the ingroup (e.g., Leung & Bond, 1982; Mann, Radford, & Kanagawa, 1985) and prioritization of animosity reduction in conflict resolution (e.g., Kirkbride, Tang, & Westwood, 1991; Leung, 1987; Leung, Au, Fernandez-Dols & Iwawaki, 1992, Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994).

In contrast to this, in societies with high relational mobility, individuals have greater freedom to opportunistically select groups to join (or create) in order to achieve their personal goals. This means that individuals in high relational mobility societies tend to more actively monitor intergroup status differences and demonstrate a greater willingness to switch groups depending on their relative success and failure. The higher levels of choice afforded by high relational mobility environments also results in individuals forming groups that are based on similarities and common interests (cf. Schug, Yuki, Horikawa, & Takemura, 2009).

This is where a central anomaly raised in the comprehensive review of collectivism and individualism by Oyserman et al. (2002) can be resolved: namely, why North Americans score highly on both individualist and collectivist dimensions. The answer we propose is that the North American intergroup comparison model is a *collectivism of individualists*, available and socially adaptive to those inhabiting social environments with greater freedom of choice. The intragroup relationship orientation prevalent in East Asian

is conversely a *collectivism of collectivists*, which develops partly from inhabiting social environments with limited choices concerning ingroup membership.

Readers should note here two key points: first, that while the summary we supply above focuses on cross-cultural differences, this in no way suggests that there cannot be significant intra-cultural variation in group cognition processes, or for that matter, relational mobility between different regions and social environments (e.g. rural vs. urban communities) (see for instance, Schug et al., 2010). Second, we do not argue that these are the only two models of group processes to be found throughout the world, but rather that they are the most prevalent in the regions that have traditionally been thought of as “individualistic” and “collectivistic” – North America and East Asia. There is no space here to deal with other varieties of group processes, but as groups represent a universal “tool” which humans as a social species use to adapt to their environments, there is potential for diversity in the specific forms that groups take and how individuals relate to them according to the socio-ecological structure of the societies in which they are found.

## **Conclusion: Toward the Science of Human Sociality across Societies**

In this article, based on a review of the existing research literature, we have explored how the predominant group processes – especially perceptions of the self within a group context, group cognition, and group behaviors, differ between North Americans and East Asians, and posited potential reasons for why such differences exist from a socio-ecological perspective.

Here are the take home messages: first, North Americans *are* individualists but this does not mean that they are not deeply interested and involved with groups. Rather, they are happy to be a part of groups, but prefer to select those that are high status and match their preferences. Second, this pattern of group cognition is fundamentally different from what so-called collectivists in East Asia focus on in group contexts. The main theme of their group perception and behavior is on the inter-connectedness of members and maintaining harmony within their stable relational network.

And, finally, considering relevant social ecological factors is important, as the characteristics of social environment determines what kind of psychological and behavioral strategies will be possible and prove more effective. Adopting such an approach thus offers the opportunity to develop novel insight into why, even though groups remain an essential feature of all societies, perceptions towards and the patterns of behavior within groups can differ dramatically between societies.

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## Online Resources

Summary article on *in mind* magazine: <http://www.in-mind.org/article/how-to-win-and-lose-friendships-across-cultures-why-relational-mobility-matters>

Publications and new relational mobility website highlighted at Masaki Yuki's *Social Ecology & Psychology Lab* Website: <https://lynx.let.hokudai.ac.jp/~myuki/research/>

## Discussion Questions

1. Find daily examples of strong group identification and loyalty for people from a North American cultural background. What kinds of groups do they particularly value, and why do they do so? Discuss the typical characteristics of those groups, and if and how those behaviors are consistent, or are not, with the intergroup comparison orientation model that is described in the current article.
2. Find daily examples of strong group identification and loyalty for people from an East Asian cultural background. What kinds of groups do they particularly value, and why do they do so? Discuss the typical characteristics of those groups, and if and how those behaviors are consistent, or are not, with the intragroup relationships orientation model that is described in the current article.
3. If you have a cultural background that is neither North America or East Asia, what type of group process, or perhaps an alternative pattern, do you think is predominant in your culture, and why do you think that might be the case?

4. Given the evident fact that people in North America do care about groups so much, why do you think there has been such misconceptions, both among academics and the general public, that North Americans have less group identity and loyalty than people in other parts of the world?
5. Do you feel deeply connected with the groups you are a member of? If yes, what is the source of this feeling, and is it consistent with either of the two models described in the current paper? Conversely, if you do not feel a strong connection, is it your personal choice to stay involved with this group? Or, are there cultural and/or socio-ecological factors that prevent you from leaving?
6. Are there variations in the predominant types of group processes within the country where you live, such as between different regions, social classes, and generations? If so, how and why do you think that might be the case?
7. As for cultural change, do you think it is possible that an individual, or collectives (including small groups or larger societies), can change their mode of group orientation? For instance, can an individual or a society that is primarily intra-group orientated become more inter-group comparison orientated? If so, what do you think makes the change possible?

## About the Authors

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