*Cognitive Representation of Social Identity of Collectivist and Individualistic Oriented Primary School Students*

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**Abstract**
Collectivistic and individualistic cognitive orientations are considered as a result of the influence of the factors that led to their development on the one hand, and, on the other hand, as a mechanism of their carriers' perception and understanding of the world. The objective of the empirical study was to identify the cognitive representation of identification features of primary school children who have a collectivistic (CO) or individualistic (IO) orientation. The study involved 54 examined Russian children aged 9-10 years, 63.0% of them were identified with a collectivistic orientation, the rest ones – with an IO (individualistic orientation). To assess identification features a content analysis of the narrative "I am a person" was used. IO children use a significantly greater number of words in the narrative. The value is based on a greater frequency of verb forms, indications of desires and preferences. The category of evaluation is used by 90% of the IO group, and 29.4% by the CO group. The data are consistent with the studies on emphasizing differences in individualistic cultures and on smoothing contradictions in collectivistic ones. The use of components of social identity in the narratives – family, age, friends, territory – occurs approximately at the same rate in both groups (64.7% of CO, 60% of IO). Significant differences were noted in the "I am a person" identity (63.6%, 36.4%). Such level of in-group requires a shaped ability to generalize in social space and can be considered as a sign of a higher level of social identity development.


Keywords: Identity, Collectivistic, Individualistic Orientation, In-Group, Primary School Children, Social Identity

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## 1. Introduction

Ideas about the structure of identity are based on the distinction between a psychological sense of continuity (synonyms: "I", selfity, ego-identity), a set of individual personality traits (personal or personal identity) and a set of social roles that a person learns when becoming a member of certain social groups (social identity).

With the development of cognitive psychology, identity begins to be seen as a result of self-reflection, as a cognitive representation of self-categorization (Tajfel et al., 1971). Self-categorization is understood through the perception of one's own belonging to a significant category of the social world. The content structure of social identity is formed as a result of categorization as the cognitive grouping of oneself with a certain class of identical objects and allows people to navigate in the social world, distinguishing between members of an ingroup and outgroup (Turner, 2010; Twuyver et al., 1995). Social identity is defined as "that part of an individual's self-esteem that results from an individual's awareness of belonging to one (or more) social group, as well as an emotional attitude towards that belonging" (Tajfel et al., 1971).

The tendency of a person to focus on their own interests or the interests of an ingroup is defined by the concepts of "individualism"and " collectivism". In individualism, the level of personal identity dominates; in collectivism, the leading components in the identity configuration are its social components. The criterion of individualism by G. Hofstede (1980), the creator of the typology of cultural dimensions, is included in the list of six main criteria for evaluating cultures along with distancing from power, masculinity, avoidance of uncertainty, strategic thinking, and the assumption of freedom (Hofstede, 1980). Individualism is expressed in the attraction to personal goals, to the protection of private interests, in interpersonal relationships that are almost free from obligations to act together, in the awareness of oneself as a separate subject (Hofstede, 1980). In addition, individualism manifests itself in the fact that rights are valued above duties, life is built with an emphasis on personal autonomy and self-realization, as well as the foundation of one's identity on personal achievements.

Collectivism is opposite to individualistic orientation-on cohesion, on unity, on awareness of group subjectivity, the experience of a sense of "we", on responsibility for maintaining group norms, achieving group goals. Individualistic / collectivistic cognitive orientation is manifested in ways of solving mental, creative and behavioral problems (Markus et al., 1991).

Collectivistic and individualistic cognitive orientations are considered, on the one hand, as a result of the influence of factors caused their development, and on the other hand, as a mechanism for perception and understanding of the world by their owner (Nisbett, 2001). A. P. Fiske, S. Kitayama, H. R. Markus, R. E. Nisbett, and G. Hofstede discover relationships between styles of cognitive processes and features of social categorization in different cultures. Thus, Westerners who live in the "culture of independence" are individualistically oriented (personal identity prevails over social identity). In Asia, with its "culture of interdependence", the inhabitants are collectivistically oriented and have a predominant social identity (Fiske et al., 1998).

In individualistic cultures the selfity is defined as an independent unit that can survive outside the group (Schwartz, 1990).

In alternative cultures the selfity is defined in terms of group membership, social identity is more important than personal identity (Triandis, 1994). In their empirical study K. K. Dion, K. L. Dion found differences in the manifestations of romantic love and the importance of emotional intimacy in marriage, depending on collectivism / individualism. In individualistic societies (Canada and the USA), romantic love is more often as the basis for marriage, in contrast to countries with collectivist societies (China, India and Japan) (Dion et al., 1993). According to them, in individualistic countries, psychological closeness in marriage is more important for family satisfaction and personal well-being. However, although individualism encourages the appreciation of romantic love, certain aspects of individualism at the psychological level make the development of intimacy problematic (Dion et al., 1993).

The correlation of the number of people with collectivistic / individualistic orientations is a distinctive feature of a particular culture (Norenzayan et al., 2007). For example, for modern Americans being an individualist means being an American (Oyserman et al., 2002).

A meta-analysis of research of the impact of collectivism / individualism on self-esteem, well-being, the nature of cognitive processes, the value of personal independence and a sense of duty to one's group, conducted in 2002 by D. Oyserman, H. M. Coon, and M. Kemmelmeier, allowed them identify several patterns that were sub-damaged by different authors. (Oyserman et al., 2002). As for self-esteem, individualism means that: (a) creating and maintaining a positive self-awareness is a basic human effort; (b) well-being, personal success, and having many unique or distinctive personal views and opinions are valuable (Oyserman, 2002; Triandis, 1994); (c) abstract traits (opposed to social, situational descriptors) are central to self-determination (Fiske et al., 1998).

The basic element of collectivism is the assumption that groups connect and mutually oblige individuals. According to S. H. Schwartz, collectivist societies are characterized by diffuse and mutual obligations and expectations based on attributed statuses (Schwartz, 1990). In these societies, there are social units with a common destiny, shared goals, and shared values; the personal is simply a component of the social (Triandis, 1994). Collectivism as a social way of life is focused on one's own groups, which may include families, clans, ethnic, religious or other groups (Oyserman, 2002). A collectivist society is a diverse structure that unites culturally separate focuses of different types and levels of reference groups (Triandis, 1994). Thus, collectivism can refer to a broader range of values, attitudes and behaviors than individualism. Collectivism as a personal trait implies that (a) group membership is a central aspect of identity (Hofstede, 1980; Markus et al., 1991) and (b) valuable personal qualities reflect the goals of collectivism, such as making sacrifices for the common good and maintaining harmonic relationships with loved people (Markus et al., 1991; Triandis, 1994; Oyserman, 2002). As for well-being and emotional expression, collectivism implies that life satisfaction comes from successfully fulfilling of social roles and obligations and avoiding failure in these areas (Markus et al., 1991). The relations corresponding to collectivism imply that the boundaries between internal and external groups are stable, relatively impenetrable and

important; intra-group exchanges are based on the principles of equality or even generosity (Triandis, 1994).

To what extent are the cognitive orientations of collectivism/individualism represented at the age of 9-10? Are there differences in the identity characteristics of children with different orientation? The aim of the empirical study was to identify the identification features of younger students who make collectivistic or individualistic choices.

## 2. Methodology

### Method

The Definition of cognitive self-esteem by A.V. Zakharov (subtest "Individualization") method was used to identify cognitive collectivistic / individualistic orientation. The subtest allows identify the child's preference to be similar to others (collectivistic orientation, CO) or different from others (to be unique) (individualistic orientation, IO). Diagnostics is performed individually. According to the instructions, in the "Individualization" subtest, the child is asked to consider a drawing with two rows of figures (Fig. 1.).
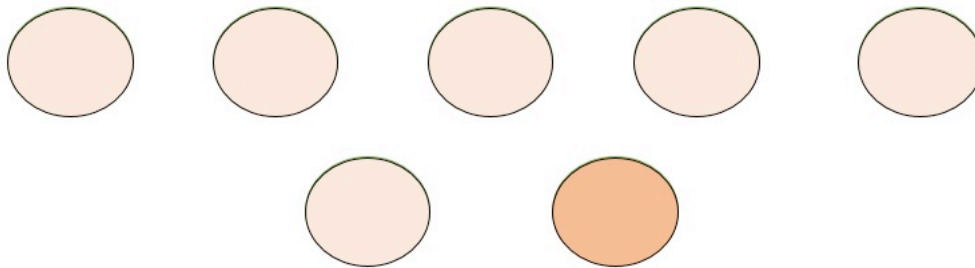
Figure 1: Methodology form

Each child was given a picture of circles. He/she was asked to imagine being one of the lower circles and choose which one he/she was – left or right? The left circle represented an actual desire to be like others (CO). The right circle represented an actual desire to be different from others, unique (IO).

To diagnose identification features, the content analysis of the narrative story "*I am a human*" was used. (2) The child is asked to think and write what the expression "I am human" means to him. The time and volume of the text are not limited. The task was completed in groups of 5-7 people. More than 60 categories were developed for content analysis, and combined into 14 types.

Category type examples:
• *activity* (actions, interests, abilities, etc.)
• *uniqueness* (personal, communicative and intellectual qualities, behavioral characteristics, knowledge, individuality)
• *social identity* (group membership) membership in different groups - close and wide

In addition, a large number of words in the essay indicates the proximity of the topic for the author and its thoughtfulness (Turusheva, 2014).

**Sample**

The study involved 54 students of the 3d grade of a secondary school. They are – 32 boys and 22 girls. The average age is MX = 9.3±0.54.

**3. Results**

Almost two-thirds (62.9%) of the surveyed students preferred a figure similar to the rest, which indicates a focus on inclusion in the group, collectivistic orientation (CO). 37.1% of third – graders preferred a shaded figure that differs from the rest-individualistic orientation (IO). The same trend is observed in gender subgroups. Figure 2 presents data on the preferences of boys and girls.
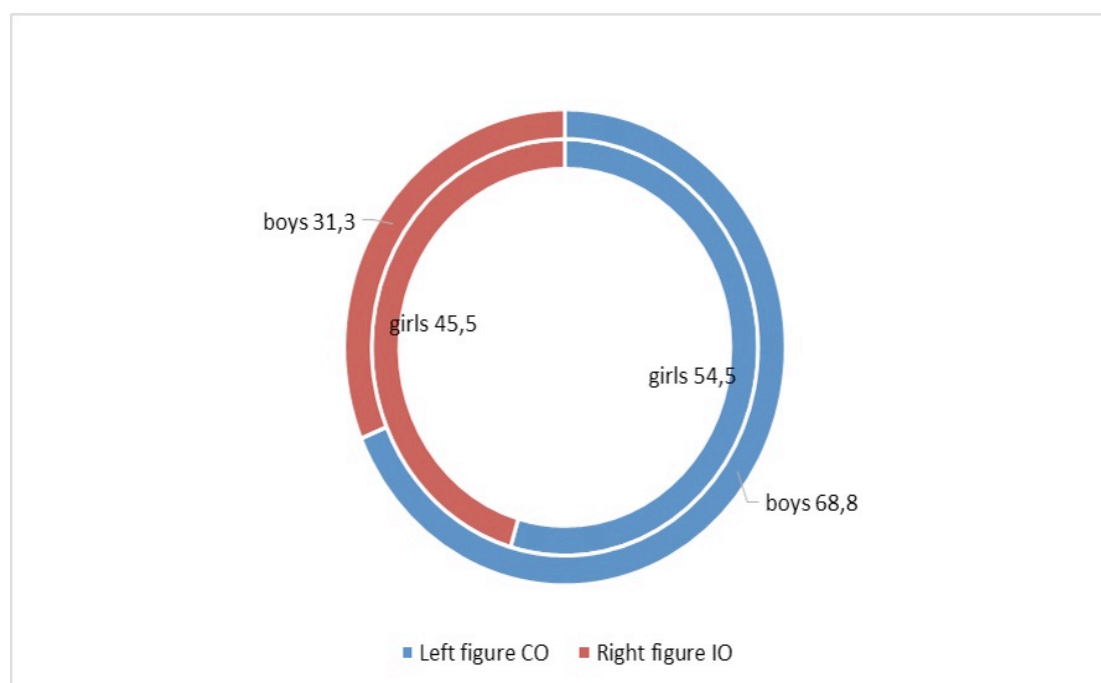


Figure 2: Effect of gender on preference of the shape

Both girls and boys in most cases prefer the left figure, symbolizing the current desire to be similar to the group. Boys are more collectivist oriented (more than 14.3%) than girls.

The average volume of narrative texts was MX = 30.1±16.9 words. The volume consists of a greater frequency of verb forms of words that reflect the "Active Self" in personal identity (I will go to the English lesson today), desires (I want a cat), preferences (I really like to go in for gymnastics). The predominance of verbs in speech in stories about yourself, mentioning specific actions and desires is more typical for children aged 6-8 years. Along with growing up, they are replaced by more generalized characteristics (I go to school) (Burns, 1982).

Further analysis of the results is carried out in a comparative way. We considered the identification features of collectivistic and individualistic oriented schoolchildren

(table 1-2). In the IO group, narrative stories have a significantly larger volume (student's t-test). Individualistically oriented people talk about themselves more fully and verbally.

Certain categories are used by children from different experimental groups in approximately the same way. For example, verb forms that reflect the "Active Self" in identity (IO 6,1, CO 4,8); personal identity reflected in desires and preferences (IO 0,8, CO 0,5).

| Parameter, average number | Collectivistically Oriented | | Individualistically Oriented | | P-value Student's t-test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M$x$ | σ | M$x$ | σ | |
| Words in the text: | 25,5 | 10,1 | 37,7 | 14,4 | 0,017 |
| - Verbal forms | 4,8 | 2,9 | 6,1 | 2,5 | 0,187 |
| - Desires and preferences | 0,5 | 0,8 | 0,8 | 1,1 | 0,555 |
| - Assessment of others | 0,3 | 0,4 | 1,6 | 0,8 | 0,000 |

Table 1. The parameters of narrative stories in IO and CO groups

The "Assessment of others" parameter differs significantly in groups. Individualistically oriented students give ratings to others (people, phenomena) more often than 5 times than collectivistically oriented students. The evaluation category was used by 90% of IO children.

Third of 90% of IO children used the assessment category (*I play football well. The Emirates is a very beautiful country.*) Only 29,4% of CO schoolchildren use the rating category. These data are consistent with research by R. E. Nisbett, K. Ping, I. Choi, and A. Norenzayan on emphasizing differences in individualistic cultures and smoothing out contradictions in collectivistic ones (2001).

We also consider the features of social identity in a comparative way (see Table 2). The category Social identity was mentioned almost equally in both subgroups (64.7% CO, 60% IO). Spontaneously named components of social identity in essays - family, age group, circle of friends, territorial group. The presence of a large number of identity groups can be a criterion for successful socialization (Martsinkovskaya, 2012).

| Parameter, average number | Collectivistically Oriented | Individualistically Oriented | P-value χ2 test, |
|---|---|---|---|
| Social identity | 64,7 | 60,0 | 0,466 |
| Human identity | 63,6 | 36,4 | < 0,001 |
| Other people, a person in general | 82,4 | 40,0 | < 0,001 |
| Educational sphere | 23,5 | 30,0 | 0,263 |

Table 2. Percentage of people using social identity categories in IO and CO groups

Significant differences were noted in self-identification with the "I am a person" community (63.6% KO, 36.4% IO). This level of the group requires a developed ability to generalize in the social space, which is a sign of a higher development of social identity. According to J. C. Turner, the level of universal identity is the highest, along with the group components of identity and personal identity (Turner, 1985).

Experimental groups differ significantly in the number of people who mentioned other people in their narrative stories, such as teachers, classmates, friends or people "in general". The data obtained coincide with studies conducted on adults by D. Oyserman, H. M. Coon, and M. Kemmelmeier. Self-image in collectivist cultures includes more group-related elements and an emphasis on values that promote well-being within the group. Individualistic cultures emphasize values that promote personal goals, uniqueness and personal control. (Oyserman et al., 2002).

**4. Conclusion**

CO and IO of children aged 9-10 is related to their identification characteristics. CO and IO have their own advantages and limitations in the development of children's personality.

Psychological and pedagogical assistance in the socialization of children should include two directions: actualization of the desire to have something similar to other representatives of their in-groups; actualization of the desire to appreciate their own uniqueness, to develop personal identity. The social identity "I am a human " includes these two directions.

The connection of collectivistic and individualistic cognitive orientations with the peculiarities of social and personal identity in childhood, at the age of 9-10 years is revealed.

The diagnostic technique of choosing the same or different figure based on an implicit desire for similarity or difference from others reflects some identification features in primary school age.

Social identity and the category "person" is relevant for the cognitive representation of the world around collectivistically oriented children.

Children's age allows set tasks for planning psychological and pedagogical assistance for children's social development. Collectivistic and individualistic orientations have their own advantages and limitations in the development of the child's personality.

Psychological and pedagogical assistance to the socialization of children should include two directions: actualization of the desire to pay attention to the similarity with other representatives of their group; actualization of the desire to appreciate their own uniqueness, to develop the uniqueness of the individual. The universal identity "I am a person" includes these two directions and can become a leading direction in the socialization of children.

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