

How individualism and collectivism shape us philosophy essay



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One thing that has not changed significantly over the decades, even centuries, has been individualism and collectivism and how they shape who we are as humans. Our natural instincts to survive as individuals and within groups have existed for all of time. This writing will define individualism and collectivism, as they currently exist in our cultures today. It will also include more specific characteristics of collectivism and how it exists across the many vast cultures of our ever-changing, and shrinking, world.

Discussion

Individualism and collectivism are conflicting views with the nature of humans, society, and the relationship between them. Individualism as defined by Donelson R Forsyth (2006), in his book *Group Dynamics*, “ is a tradition, ideology, or personal outlook that emphasizes the primacy of the individual and his or her rights, independence, and relationships with other individuals” (p. 77). In essence, he is stating the somewhat obvious, that individualism determines that the individual is the primary unit of reality and the ultimate standard of value. This view does not deny that societies exist or that people benefit from living in them, but it sees society as a collection of individuals, not something over and above them.

Forsyth (2006) defines Collectivism as “ a tradition, ideology, or personal orientation that emphasizes the primacy of the group or community rather than each individual person” (p. 77). Here, he alludes to the fact that the group, the nation, the community, the proletariat, the race, etc., is the primary unit of reality and the ultimate standard of value. This view does not deny the reality of the individual. Ultimately, collectivism determines that

the group one interacts with shapes their identity, and that this identity is composed essentially of relationships with others.

Individualists see people dealing primarily with reality; other people are just one aspect of reality. Collectivists see people dealing primarily with other people; reality is dealt with through the mediator of the group; the group, not the individual, is what directly confronts reality.

Individualism holds that every person is an end in oneself and that no person should be sacrificed for the sake of another. Collectivism holds that the needs and goals of the individual are subordinate to those of the larger group and should be sacrificed when the collective good so requires.

Individualism holds that the individual is the unit of success. While not denying that one person can build on the achievements of others, individualism points out that achievement goes beyond what has already been done; it is something new that is created by the individual.

Collectivism, on the other hand, holds that achievement is a product of society. In this view, an individual is a temporary spokesperson for the underlying, collective process of progress. So then, what characteristics, or attributes, define collectivism?

Forsyth (2006), focused on the following as common attributes of collectivism: relationships, memberships, as associations; norms, roles, and actions; motives and goals; and self-conceptions (p. 78). While all these attributes can be directed towards individuals as well, it is how these individuals actually utilize them and interact as a collective whole that

signifies the main difference. This difference is what forms the cultural
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differences of collectivism that exist today. When one thinks of how collectivism shapes who we are culturally, it is easy to say, " Just look across the vast difference between the Western and Eastern cultures". Collectivism, in itself, is a form of socialism, where individuals work together as a collective for the betterment of the group, nation, and country, etc., as a whole.

This is significantly different from what we see in the American, or Western, cultures where the capitalistic view focuses more on the individual and their successes, thus shaping the success of the whole. These differences between the cultures alone may have contributed to the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001. The love-hate relationship between our Western culture and the ideology of the collective has driven a wedge further between our concepts of each. Michael Kohut and Bruce Stokes (2006), allude to this fact in their book, *America Against the World*, when they discuss, how the American attitudes and values differ from those of other publics, and the way those differences affect the world's view of the United States (p. 19).

So one can see that the differences between individualism and collectivism are what drive our cultures, morally, ethically and politically. Although collectivism is in itself formed of individuals, it is the differences between how the individual members of the groups or cultures think and react that differ. This fact in itself has profound effects how the group interacts on a global perspective.

Ethics refers to the moral values that govern the appropriate conduct of an individual or group. Ethics speaks to how we ought to live, that is, and how we ought to treat others and how we ought to run or manage our own lives. It helps people differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, between just and unjust. Ethics is normative in nature, that is, it focuses on what ought to be the case rather than what is the case. People learn ethical norms at home, school, in social settings as they grow up. However each individual has a different interpretation of these norms as they are affected by the individual's life experiences. Philosophers have tried to define ethics in a number of ways. Socrates defines ethics as deciding " How one should lead his life". Aristotle refers to ethical system as being " self-realizationism". To sum up ethics can be defined as rules for distinguishing between what is morally right and wrong, what is responsible and irresponsible, and what is good or bad in general.

If ethics are rules or value to live life by, good ethics are rules which lead to good outcomes and bad ethics are rules which lead to bad outcomes. Now these could either be outcomes for the individual or for society. For the individual, a good or effective set of ethics is one which leads to his or her happiness and well being. If everyone, or most people, follow such ethics, it will lead to a relatively harmonious life for everyone. A good set of ethics should also be based on sound reasoning or logic so that it works in almost every situation we are likely to be faced with.

CounselingHYPERLINK " http://changingminds.org/articles/articles/group_counseling.htm" is a process whereby the

relationship and communication provided allows development of
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understanding of one's self, explore possibilities, and initiate change. It is motivated by care and concern for the well-being of the recipient, and aim at bringing about behavioral change, problem-solving, personal growth and development when properly implemented.

Advantages of Individual Counseling

The advantages of an individual counseling as opposed to group counseling are multiple:

First, it allows the counselor to work in isolated issues.

Second, the counselor caters only to one client.

Third, the information gathered is easier for the counselor to figure out and to be able to apply which treatment approach is most useful to the client and target behavior that needs improvement.

The client's thoughts and behaviors may not be distorted compared with group counseling as several pattern of thoughts and behaviors from other group members in making choices and decision making.

The client has the power to change his life for the better based on the choices he make.

In addition to this, he can control his behavior and that the level of commitment and how hard he is willing to work will dictate how successful he will be in developing new behaviors that clearly communicate his needs in accordance with William Glasser's Reality Therapy.

Disadvantages of Individual Therapy

The disadvantages of an individual therapy include the client's choice is solely from him.

The client may not be able to generate ideas from other members' pattern of thoughts and behaviors just like in a group setting especially if others have similar issues and experiences which could help him make better choices and decision making.

Group counseling is more in consonance with the Control Theory, later named Choice Theory, forwarded by William Glasser. This theory states that a person's behavior is inspired by what that person wants or needs at that particular time, not on an outside stimulus.

That all living creatures control their behavior to fulfill their need for satisfaction in one or more of these five areas: survival, to belong and be loved by others, to have power and importance, freedom and independence, and to have fun. The most important need among the five is love and belongingness. Group counseling promotes this kind of feeling. Being connected to others is encouraged in group counseling.

Ethical issues involved in group Counseling are:

Informed consent: The leader has to demonstrate to all the members honesty and respect and also provide information about the group in the initial session. The information includes a clear statement regarding the purpose of the group, ground rules, the group leader's introduction,

information concerning fees, issue of confidentiality, rights and responsibilities of group members etc.

It also involves stressing on the responsibilities of the group members which are regularity, punctuality, being willing to openly talk about oneself, providing feedback to others, maintaining confidentiality.

While a member wants to leave a group, he should provide a valid reason to the group leader for opting out and not just leave without prior notice and explanation.

Confidentiality is one of the key norms of behavior in a group. It should be clearly explained in the initial session by the group leader to all the members and also the situation when confidentiality can likely be broken in certain cases.