

Title: Individualistic and lonely? A cultural-psychological examination in four European countries

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Abstract:

Loneliness seems to be a threat to human health, making the identification of its risk factors essential to ensure physical and mental well-being. According to media reports and blogs, higher individualism should make human beings more likely to feel lonely and, indeed, cultural differences in the way social relationships are organized suggest differences in levels of loneliness. However, the link between culture and loneliness is still poorly understood. The scarce empirical evidence available suggests higher average loneliness in collectivistic than individualistic countries, but whether collectivism puts individuals *within* countries at risk for loneliness has hardly been empirically investigated. We thus distinguished four different facets of individual-level collectivism (versus individualism) to examine its associations with loneliness. We expected that higher individualism would imply the risk of lower embeddedness in social relationships, while higher collectivism would imply the risk of more likely deviations from ideals about such embeddedness. A cross-sectional survey study in four European countries (Italy, Portugal, Sweden, and The Netherlands, N = 860) revealed that individual-level collectivism was related to lower loneliness. Higher individualism implied lower social embeddedness, but, unexpectedly, higher collectivism did not imply higher deviations from ideals. Within this consistent pattern, results varied between IC indices and countries. Notwithstanding, findings suggest that, within different European countries, weak social embeddedness as implied in individualism puts at risk for, while perceiving collectivism in one's social environment buffers from loneliness.