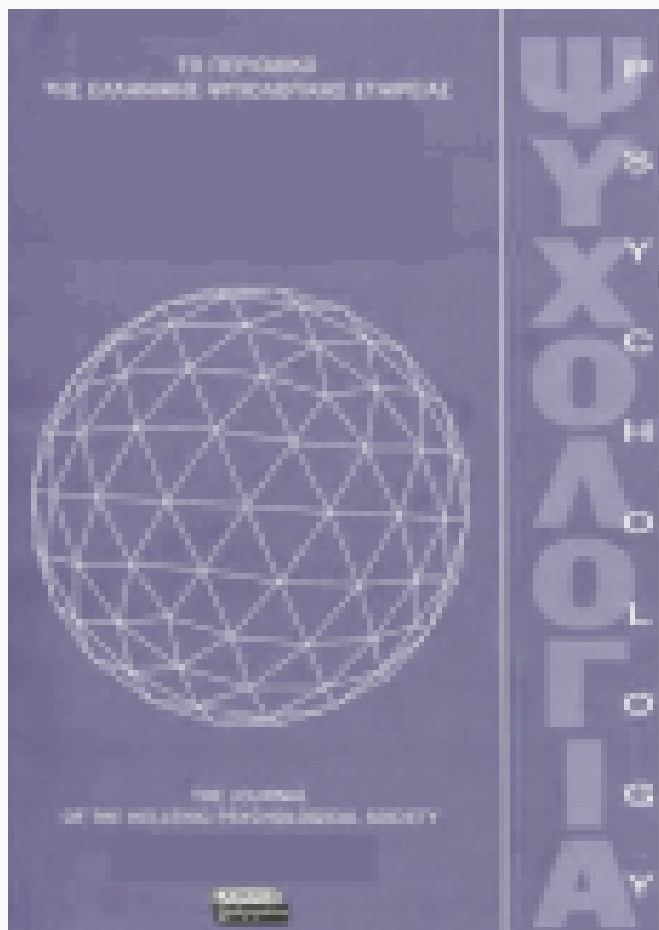


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# Structural and attitudinal approach of social representations of individuality and collectivity in a Greek and a French sample

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the structural and evaluative attitudinal dimension of the social representations of the constructs of individuality and collectivity in two European capitals. The material was collected by the method of free association and analysed through the structural approach proposed by Vergès. The sample was composed of 68 Psychology students from the University of Paris 5 and 109 Psychology students from Panteion University in Athens. Participants filled out a questionnaire collectively. Previous examination of Greek and French culture has shown that the former is classified as less and the latter as more individualistic. From this assumption, it was hypothesised that both the structure of representations and participants' attitudinal evaluations of their own associations to the stimulus words «individuality» and «collectivity» would differ in the two samples. It was expected that the Greek sample would produce a more positive evaluation of the terms associated to collectivity and that the French sample would attribute a more positive evaluation to the terms associated to individuality. The findings tend to confirm this hypothesis.

**Key words:** Social representations, Attitudes, Structural approach, Individuality, Collectivity.

The examination of culture according to the values of individualism versus those of collectivism has been fertile ground in psychological research. A recent meta-analysis of over 83 empirical studies (Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, & Coon 2002) reviews the degree of support that they provide to theoretically derived implications of individualism and collectivism, specifically in what regards self-concept, well-being, attribution style and relationality. The authors argue that, although their analysis corroborates reliable cultural

differences in these terms, the extend of this support is not as large, nor as systematic as would be expected. This meta-analysis sparked off extensive exchange of ideas from authors in the field of cultural psychology. A series of subsequent articles (see Bond, 2002; Fiske, 2002; Kitayama, 2002; Miller, 2002; Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, & Coon 2002) deliberate on the advantages and limitations of the individualism vs. collectivism strategy of examining culture. Beyond the specific theoretical and methodological issues raised in this debate, the

attention that the topic motivated is indicative of the significance conveyed in this conceptualisation, which in fact promotes and facilitates the organisation of discourse on the effects of culture on social thought and practice.

One of the earlier discussions of the term individualism appeared around the time of the French revolution and it reflects the widespread insecurity felt in view of the then rising popularity of the concept of individual rights. Burke (1973) wrote about the negative influence that individualism may have on the welfare of the community, presenting individualism as a conception that is antagonistic to that of the community and collective structure. During the next centuries the focus on identifying societies based on the criterion of collective versus individualistic ideas remained pertinent. Emile Durkheim (1933) used the terms «organic» and «mechanic solidarity» to differentiate the temporary relations interwoven between different individuals (organic solidarity, individualistic focus) and the traditional relationships that exist among similar individuals (mechanic solidarity, of a collectivist focus). Max Weber (1930) juxtaposed Western European Protestant ethic (individual focus), that promotes individual self-determination and the pursuit of individual interests, to Catholicism (collective focus), that promotes stable hierarchical relationships within inherited structures. In a similar way, Tönnies (1957) discussed «*Gemeinschaft*» (that is, the collective relationships that characterise small rural communities) and «*Gesellschaft*» (that is, the associative relationships developed within urban societies).

In the past 20 years the comparison of societies based on the dimensions of individualism versus collectivism has often followed the paradigm proposed by Hofstede (1980). Following extensive field research, Hofstede described organisational values and practices in 39 countries, differentiating them according to four dimensions: (i) individualism versus collectivism, (ii) masculinity versus

femininity, (iii) uncertainty avoidance and (iv) power distance. According to Hofstede, individualism in the workplace is measured by how much employees within a specific culture value personal time and interests, individual decision-making, autonomy, initiative and challenge in the job, over duty, job security, conformity and group decision-making. In his terms, in high individualistic societies involvement with collective structures (such as an organisation, a company) is calculative, whereas in lower individualism countries it is moral. This last point was discussed by Schwartz (1990), who later argued that individualistic societies are based on the concept of contract (that is, the negotiation of social relationships, obligations and objectives among smaller social groups that aim at the acquisition of social status). In addition, Schwartz argued that collectivist societies are communal societies characterized by the distribution of mutual obligations and expectations based on predetermined statuses. These societies are structured around social units with common fate, common goals and common values, and the individual is simply a component of the social, making the (in-)group the key unit of analysis (see also Triandis, 1995). Although sometimes seen as simple opposites, it is probably more accurate to distinguish individualism and collectivism as worldviews laying emphasis on different determining and prominent elements (Kagitcibasi, 1997). Because significant in-groups can include family, clan, ethnic, religious or other groups, Hui (1988) and Triandis (1995), among others, have proposed that collectivism is a more diverse construct, joining together culturally dissimilar centres relative to different kinds and levels of referent groups. In this way, collectivism (that is, the assumption that groups connect and mutually obligate individuals) may denote a wider variety of values, attitudes and behaviours than individualism.

Extending and validating these definitions, further research has claimed that individualism views the construction of a positive self-concept

as the primary objective of human activity (Baumeister, 1998) and that collectivism is consistent with the idea of group membership as a central aspect of identity (Kim, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Abstract characteristics (contrary to concrete, social-structural ones) are more central to the definition of the Self (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998) in individualistic cultures. Personal opinions and attitudes as well as positive personal feeling and achievement are highly valued (Oyserman & Markus, 1993; Triandis 1995). From the collectivist point of view, the individual characteristics that are valued mirror the goals of collectivism, such as sacrifice for the common good and sustaining harmonious, well-balanced social relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman, 1993; Triandis, 1995). Factors predicting individual well-being and personal emotional expression are important sources of life satisfaction in individualistic cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995), while collectivism implies that life satisfaction lies in the fulfilment of social roles and the avoidance of neglecting social obligations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In terms of causal inference, individualism, where the Self is assumed to be a constant causal unit, predicts that attributions are generally oriented toward the person rather than the situation or social context (see Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999). Individualism, therefore, endorses a de-contextualized reasoning strategy, where social information is not predetermined by social context. From the collectivist point of view, social context, situational constraints and social roles have a central influence in causal attribution (Miller, 1984; Morris & Peng, 1994). In regard to social relationships and group membership, individualistic values are faced with a logical contradiction: while individuals need relationships and group membership in order to promote their goals, the safeguarding of social relationships is a costly enterprise (Kagitcibasi, 1997). One assumption deduced from this

perspective is that, in balancing group membership benefits and costs, the individualistic focus is coherent with temporary and vulnerable group alliances (Kim, 1994). From the collectivist perspective, important group membership is predetermined, stable and significant, and delimitations of in-groups and out-groups are relatively resistant to change (Kim, 1994; Triandis, 1995).

In his original work Hofstede (1980) had summarised a number of factors that may be viewed as the origins of a high national individualism index, such as economic development, social mobility, less traditional agriculture and more modern industrialisation. He further associated extended family structures and smaller particular organisations with the origins of low individualism scores. In addition, he proposed consequences of low individualism in society, such as unbalanced power political systems, appeal of worker self-management, more united labour union, less occupational mobility and policies and practices that vary according to specific social relationships rather than to universal principles. His original classification of 39 countries on the individualism dimension yielded a country average of 51, ranging from 95 (USA) to 12 (Venezuela). France was ranked 11th, with a score of 71 (high individualism), and Greece was ranked 27th, with a score of 35 (low individualism). Triandis (1995) argues that, although in the French culture one may find a mixture of individualistic attributes (mobility, fear of taxation, resistance to authority, political individualism, small entrepreneurs) together with collectivistic attributes (centralisation of decision-making in Paris, economic planning etc.), individualistic elements are more prevalent than collectivistic ones. In the Greek culture, and particularly in the traditional Greek culture, collectivist elements are dominant, including showing concern and self-sacrifice for the in-group, more intimacy in vertical than horizontal relationships, close relation with the extended family, less importance attributed to the

concept of Self, submission to in-group authorities and defiance of out-group authorities (Triandis & Vassiliou, 1972).

This study attempts to explore the structure of the social representations of the constructs «individuality» and «collectivity» in a Greek and a French sample. Social representations (SR) consist in a specific, socially elaborated way of thinking which aims at the understanding, interpretation and signification of social reality (see Moscovici, 1961, 1982, 1998). This commonly elaborated social thought permits members of social groups to form attitudes, opinions, points of view, as well as make decisions and guide behaviours. Social representations are closely related to social practice (Abric, 1994) and, according to several authors (e.g., Beauvois & Joule, 1981), they play a defining role in the processes through which these practices are rationalised and legitimised. As a sub-system of the wider system that is ideology, SR bear the marks of and at the same time define other sub-systems, such as attitudes and opinions (Rouquette & Rateau, 1998).

The present investigation is inscribed in the framework of the structural approach of SR, which regards the latter as cognitive organisations produced by experience and social debate that are to a certain extent structured (see Abric, 1994; Flament, 1994; Abric & Tafani, 1995). The approach postulates that representations are made up of identifying elements, which are organised in a central nucleus (that is, concepts that are widely shared as definitive of the social object), and peripheral elements, which may be seen as more particular to specific social groups or individuals, or indicative of evolution trends in social thought. Peripheral elements are, therefore, more variable and represent individual notions that may change relatively easily (see Vergès, 1994). The main cognitive processes that are important for SR to attain their particular structure are selection and similarity (see Vergès & Bastounis, 2001). The coherence of the nucleus-periphery struc-

ture is based on similarity. Firstly, there is a process of selection that determines which elements belong to the SR and which elements do not. Secondly, a schematization is operated, which results in an arrangement of the content of the representation in a network, where the significance of an element depends on all the other elements to which it is linked. Research in this field aims at a systematic identification of these elements and the relationships that link them.

One of the earliest and most frequently employed techniques for the identification of the structure of a social representation is the evocation task (Vergès, 1992; Vergès & Bastounis, 2001). Also discussed by De Rosa (1995), who refers to it as the associative network method, this type of task relies on the argument that significant information may be obtained from research participants when they describe their system of meanings freely, in their own vocabulary, rather than respond to or evaluate concepts that exist primarily in the discourse and thought of researchers (see also Wagner, Valencia, & Elejabarrieta, 1996). The evocation task, therefore, aims to collect the meanings spontaneously attributed to social objects through free association to a stimulus word. The analysis of such a corpus of information (words) attempts to identify what is referred to as the central nucleus and the peripheral elements of the representation by calculating the relative frequency and relative rank for each association within the corpus. The rank of the association denotes if it was produced later in the association process or if it came to mind immediately: a higher rank (of 5 or 6) indicates that the association was produced later on, while a rank of 1 means that it is the one which came to the respondents' mind first. Using all this data, the nucleus and the peripheral substructures of the verbal material evoked by the key-word are tabulated. Associations with a low rank and a high frequency of occurrence comprise the stable and characteristic nucleus of a SR, while

other associations with either higher rank or lower frequencies are peripheral notions. This technique has been widely popular and highly effective in the study of SR (see also Le Bouedec, 1994); popular because the collected data is not excessively large in size, effective because the nature of responses is natural and inventive.

Early on Moscovici (1961) argued that any object of a SR may be considered as an attitudinal object. In this light, numerous authors have argued that that SR serve an evaluative function which allows to place all the elements of a representation along an evaluative attitudinal dimension with a positive and a negative pole (Moliner, 1994; De Rosa, 1993; Abric & Tafani, 1995). More recently Moliner and Tafani (1997) argued that, because of overlapping content attitudes interrelated with SR, whereas social representations objectify group cognitive constructs of a certain notion, an attitude is an individual evaluation of it. The authors also confirmed that the attitude towards an object of a SR is derived from the evaluative components of its representation. One can assume that the evaluative information contained in SR is the underlying structure which individuals use to express their attitudes.

The evocation task, in particular, also aims at the evaluation of the more or less positive attitudes towards the object of SR, which is inferred from participants' evaluations of their own free associations to the stimulus words. Specifically, after completing an evocation task, participants are asked to rate the associations they produced according to whether they personally think the term is of positive, neutral or negative value. This procedure attempts to measure participants' evaluative and affective position toward the evocations they have just produced, and refers to the attitudinal component of their representation (see also Rouquette & Rateau, 1998).

To sum up, the aim of this study was to investigate the content, structure and internal evaluative logic of the representations of

the constructs «individuality» and «collectivity» in two samples (Greek and French) that should theoretically produce differentiated representations of the specific constructs. Student samples were interrogated in both cases. While aware of the shortcomings of research conducted on student samples in terms of generalisation of the findings, we considered that responses would be reliable indicators of SR and, most importantly, comparable, as both samples were students in the same field and year of study.

Given the above theoretical background, it was hypothesized that both the structure of representations and participants' attitudinal evaluation of their own associations to the terms «individuality» and «collectivity» would describe a tendency for a more positive evaluation of collectivity in the Greek sample and a more positive evaluation of individuality in the French sample.

## Method

### Sample

One hundred and nine Greek and sixty-eight French under-graduate students in Psychology were interrogated in the Panteion University of Athens and in the University of Paris 5. Participants filled out a short questionnaire individually and data collection took place during course instruction.

### Material

The data regarding the social representations of collectivity and individuality were gathered using the method of free association. Participants were asked to fill out two evocation tasks in their native language, introduced by the instruction to «write the words that come to mind when you think of...». In the first task, the stimulus word «collectivity» (in French «*collectivité*», in Greek «*συλλογικότητα*») was used. The term

«individuality» was used in the second task (in French «*individualité*», in Greek «*ατομικότητα*»). The term «collectivity» was preferred to the term «collectivism», and the term «individuality» to the term «individualism», for reasons relative to the ideological weight that marks them. The term «collectivism», for instance, refers to specific politic, social and economic paradigms or systems and not to the theoretical significance that the construct has in social sciences – and this both in French and in Greek. On the contrary, the retained terms «collectivity» and «individuality» come across as more neutral and do not carry direct ideological and political implications.

Participants were asked to associate a maximum of three words to each stimulus word in Greece and a maximum of five words in France. After completion of the free association task, participants were asked to mark each word that they individually produced during the free association with a sign, so as to indicate if they attribute a positive (+), negative (–) or neutral (=) value, emotion or experience to the produced association.

### Data analysis techniques

The method applied toward the analysis of the structural characteristics of the social representations under investigation is proposed by Vergès (1994). The technique relies on the juxtaposition of two criteria that allow for the distinction between elements of the representation that are at the same time important and salient from those who are not or who are less. These two criteria refer to: (i) the quantitative weight or frequency of occurrence of each word, which allows for the distinction between major and minor terms, and (ii) the qualitative and more individualistic criterion of the order or rank of appearance of the word, a criterion that indicates the less or more important relationship drawn in individuals' minds between the specific associated word and the social

representation of the stimulus. It is assumed that the lower the order of appearance (e.g., 1st association) the higher the significance of the element in the definition of the social representation. The juxtaposition of these two criteria concludes with the tabulation of the elements composing the representation in a four-cell matrix, which usually presents the high frequency and low rank elements (frequent elements appearing in the 1st position) in the top left cell. This cell, therefore, tabulates the most important and most salient elements of the representation and identifies the central nucleus of the representation. The bottom right cell includes rare elements that are also ranked high (that is, they occur in the 3rd or 5th position and not in the 1st) – in other words, the peripheral elements of the representation. Finally, in the two remaining cells the criteria do not have a consistent relationship, since one of the two is high and the other not. These data describe a peripheral zone of the representation, which is near to the central nucleus, of a dynamic, flexible character and relative to the transformation of representations through time.

Vergès does not specify the criterion that allows the researcher to separate the high from the low frequencies. We distinguished between high or low frequency and high or low ranking order according to the highest or lowest value of each frequency or rank, in relation to the mean total frequency or mean total rank of the total number of occurrences (see also Sakalaki, 2001).

The data gathered from the Greek sample were analysed with a thematic content analysis by the authors and words were categorised in coherent homogenous and mutually exclusive categories before analysis in terms of rank and frequency. The data collected in France were analysed with the program EVOC (Vergès, Scano, & Junique, 2002), without prior categorisation, and words that occurred less than 5 times were eliminated from the analysis and regrouped in a category we call «Other».

Therefore, the category «Other» is richer in the French sample than in the Greek one. Several categorisations were conducted in the French sample following analysis, in order for data to be comparable across samples. For instance, the terms «individual», «subject», «me» were classified in one category, and so were the terms «solitude», «solitary», «isolation» and terms referring to social entities, such as «society», «teams», «groups» etc. Again, this categorisation was carried out by the authors.

The analysis of the evaluation of the terms produced during the free association by the participants themselves aimed at revealing the degree to which the words that were produced during free association regarding individuality and collectivity have a positive, negative or neutral signification for the two samples under investigation. This interrogation is focused not on the individual but rather on the group, and the frequency of positive, neutral and negative evaluations were, therefore, summed up on the ensemble of the responses.

## **Results**

### **Structure of the representation of collectivity**

Data analysis indicated initially that the one element of the central nucleus of the representation of collectivity is common between the two samples. This is a neutral evaluative and rather descriptive category, which refers to the larger or smaller social groupings, including words such as «communities», «society», «team», «social group» etc. However, the central nucleus differs in the Greek sample, in that a second category is added to this descriptive one, which is more frequent overall and refers to the themes of «collaboration», «cooperation», «labour» or «social coordination» (see Tables 1 & 2). This distinction regarding the central nucleus modifies the structure of Greek social representations and appears to a degree related to the much more

positive evaluation of collectivity in the Greek sample. The representation of the Greek sample is defined by the centrality of a category that implies values of social utility (cooperation and coordination), coupled with peripheral elements which are almost all related to social and communicative associations (that is, notions relative to the ones comprising the central nucleus). This finding indicates initially that the notion of collectivity in the Greek sample refers to the notions of social relationship, social bond, communication and collaboration. In the French sample (see Tables 1 & 2) the central nucleus is composed of the neutrally evaluated term «social groups», and the peripheral elements refer to either social relationships («mutual help», «friendship», «respect») or to trade («co-operative», «sharing», «exchange»).

### **Structure of the representation of individuality**

While several elements of the representation of individuality are common to the two samples («egoism», «solitude», «uniqueness»), and despite the fact that most of the elements composing this representation are negatively evaluated overall, the structure of the representation is marked by important differences in the two samples. In particular, the main element of the central nucleus in the Greek sample is «egoism» and the second is «uniqueness», while in the French sample the most important element is «solitude», followed by «egoism» and the term «private». It is important to note that in both samples associations that evoke more positive aspects of individualism, like autonomy, freedom, individual rights, success, self-development etc., are left in the periphery (see Tables 3 & 4).

Finally, the higher rate of missing responses in the Greek sample might be interpreted as a deficiency in the specific population to produce spontaneous associations to individuality. We might question whether these findings indicate a possible discomfort, or awkwardness, or even



**Table 1**  
**Representations of collectivity in the Greek sample (N = 109)**

		<i>Rank</i>	
		Low < 2.08	High ≥ 2.08
<i>Frequency</i>	≥ 47.1	Collaboration, cooperation, coordination Social groups	88 (1.9) 82 (1.2)
	< 47.1		Goal achievement, success 35 (2.6) Mutual help, solidarity 26 (2.2) Communication 22 (2.6) Relationships 21 (2.0)

Mean frequency of 6 categories: 47.1

Mean rank of 6 categories: 2.08

Other: 26

No response: 27

Total: 327

disinterest, in dealing with this concept that would be currently experienced by this population.

#### **Evaluative dimension of the associative production**

Evaluations of the elements associated to the stimulus words were provided when, after completion of the free association tasks, participants were asked to mark a symbol next to each word they had written during the association task, to indicate whether the

**Table 2**  
**Representations of collectivity in the French sample (N = 68)**

		<i>Rank</i>	
		Low < 2.08	High ≥ 2.08
<i>Frequency</i>	≥ 19	Social groups	115 (2.2)
	< 19	Mutual help, solidarity Sharing Many	11 (2.8) 14 (2.7) 7 (2.4)
			Friendship 6 (3.6) Cooperative 7 (3.1) Respect 5 (3.0) Exchange 6 (3.6)

Mean frequency of 8 categories: 19

Mean rank of 8 categories: 2.08

Other: 169

No response: 0

Total occurrences: 340

**Table 3**  
**Representations of individuality in the Greek sample (N = 109)**

		<i>Rank</i>	
		Low < 1.5	High > 1.5
<i>Frequency</i>	> 32.8	Egoism 85 (1.1) Uniqueness 39 (1.4)	Solitude 43 (1.9)
	< 32.8		Individual rights 12 (1.7) Self development 10 (1.7) Individual ambition & success 8 (1.7)

Mean frequency: 32.8

Mean rank: 1.5

Others: 36

No response: 94

Total: 327

produced word has a positive, neutral or negative value, or meaning, for them. Greek participants evaluated more positively the associations that they produced to the stimulus word «collectivity» (82.27% of the free associations of

the Greek sample versus 61.23% of the French associations were marked by the positive symbol). These percentages reflect the total number of associated terms for which the participants provided evaluation symbols. None

**Table 4**  
**Representations of individuality in the French sample (N = 68)**

		<i>Rank</i>	
		Low < 2.5	High > 2.5
<i>Frequency</i>	> 18	Solitude 55 (1.9) Egoism 32 (2.3) Private 19 (2.3)	Autonomy 29 (3.0) Individual, man, subject 18 (2.6)
	< 18	Terms related to the Self 7 (2.1)	Personality 13 (3.6) Uniqueness 9 (2.8) Freedom 7 (3.0) Character 5 (3.8) Calm 5 (3.2)

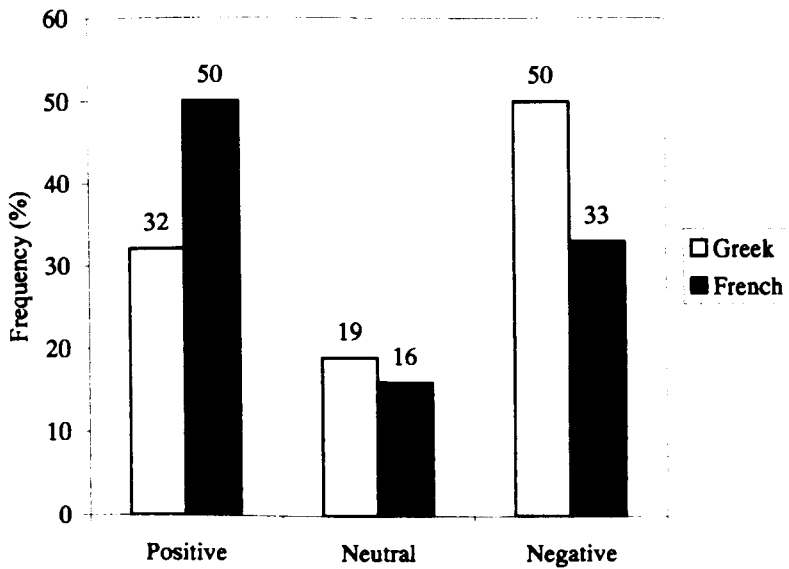
Mean frequency: 18

Mean rank: 2.5

Other: 128

No response: 13

Total: 340

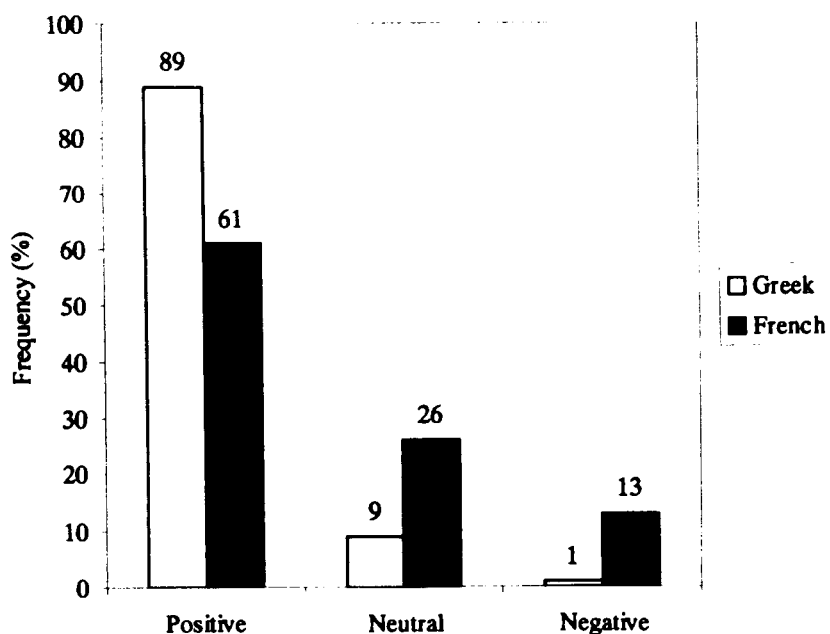


**Figure 1**  
**Evaluation of individuality**

of the French participants omitted these evaluation symbols, while in the Greek sample 177 symbols were written down for collectivity associations and 139 for individuality associations. The more positive attitude of the Greek respondents to the notion of collectivity is confirmed by the smaller percentage of neutral and negative symbols (see Figure 1).

In regard to the evaluation of the associations produced by individuality, the contrary effect is observed: The Greek participants marked less positive symbols than the French did (31.6% and 50.4% respectively) to evaluate their associations. On the contrary, the Greek participants used more negative symbols to evaluate their own associations to individuality than did the French (49.64% and 33% respectively; see Figure 2).

The differences observed in the way participants evaluate their own product of free associations from the stimulus word «collectivity» in the French and in the Greek sample were statistically significant [ $\chi^2(2) = 42.88, p < .001$ ]. In order for differences to be statistically significant, the adjusted residual corresponding to each of the cells (see Tables 5 and 6) must be smaller than -2 and larger than 2. Therefore, the findings illustrated in Table 5 confirm that the differences described above are all statistically significant: The percentage of Greek participants who evaluate their associations of collectivity negatively is significantly smaller than the corresponding French percentage. Table 6 confirms statistically significant differences between the French and Greek samples in the way they evaluate their associations of



**Figure 2**  
**Evaluation of collectivity**

individuality [ $\chi^2(2) = 14.84, p < .01$ ]. However, the two samples do not differ significantly in terms of the percentage of neutrally evaluated associations to the word «individuality».

### Discussion

The present investigation was inspired from the large body of literature describing differences between cultures defined by higher or lower individualism and collectivism in terms of social values and practices. We, therefore, aimed to examine the social representation of lay terms referring to these dimensions («individuality» and «collectivity») in view of an initial structural description of the social representation, further informed by the analysis of the positive, neutral or negative value that people attribute to

concepts that they associate to them. Based on the description of French culture as more individualistic than the Greek culture, it was first hypothesised that the analysis of free associations to the concepts «individuality» and «collectivity» would be different in Greece and in France. In addition, it was hypothesised that the terms associated to each stimulus word would reflect a more positive evaluation of collectivity and a less positive evaluation of individuality in a low individualistic (Greece) compared to a high individualistic national context (France).

The data collected confirm these hypotheses and show that the structure of the representations of collectivity and individuality are different in the French and in the Greek sample. In particular, Greeks' representations of collectivity focus almost exclusively on elements referring to social relationships and social bonds.

**Table 5**  
**Evaluation of associations to collectivity in the Greek & French samples**

Evaluation of collectivity		Greek	French	Total
Negative	Frequency	3	34	37
	Frequency %	1.7%	12.6%	8.3%
	Adjusted residual	-4.1	4.1	
Neutral	Frequency	16	70	86
	Frequency %	9%	26%	19.3%
	Adjusted residual	-4.4	4.4	
Positive	Frequency	158	165	323
	Frequency %	89.3%	61.3%	72.4%
	Adjusted residual	6.5	-6.5	
Total	Frequency	177	269	466
	Frequency %	100%	100%	100

Note:  $\chi^2(2) = 14.84, p < .01$

Terms referring to cooperation are the main element in the central core of the representation in the Greek sample, while the main and unique element of the central core in the French sample is the neutral and descriptive, rather than normative, notion of «social groupings». Finally, French participants evaluate their free asso-

ciations to the word «collectivity» more negatively than do Greek ones.

The main element of the central core of the representation of individuality for Greek participants is egoism (that is, a personal attribution which is rather negatively evaluated in most societies, considered to have poor or zero

**Table 6**  
**Evaluation of associations to individuality in the Greek & French samples**

Evaluation of individuality		Greek	French	Total
Negative	Frequency	69	109	178
	Frequency %	49.6%	33.3%	38.2%
	Adjusted residual	3.3	-3.3	
Neutral	Frequency	26	53	79
	Frequency %	18.7%	16.2%	17%
	Adjusted residual	.7	.7	
Positive	Frequency	44	165	209
	Frequency %	31.7%	50.5%	44.8%
	Adjusted residual	-3.7	3.7	
Total	Frequency	139	327	466
	Frequency %	100%	100%	100

Note:  $\chi^2(2) = 14.84, p < .01$

social utility and to procure mainly individualistic advantages) (Beauvois, Dubois, & Peeters, 1999). The high rate of non-responses to the stimulus word «individuality», may be interpreted as an indication of a certain difficulty for the Greek participants to produce associations, a difficulty that is, in any case, greater than what the French participants may have experienced. This finding suggests that Greeks may be less concerned, or more uncomfortable, when dealing with notions related to individualism. Solitude, which is an experience or a condition often associated to individualism in modern cultures, constitutes the main element of the central core in the French sample's representation of individuality. Thus, the representations of individuality have a more ambivalent –not say, negative– character for both samples. Nevertheless, the peripheral zone of the French representation refers to a larger spectrum of positive aspects of individuality, including elements such as liberty, autonomy, character, calm. Moreover, French participants produce a more positive evaluation of their own associations to the stimulus word «individuality» than Greek participants do.

Although the samples under investigation can not be regarded as representative, the present results tend to corroborate the predictions of the relative theoretical arguments, and in particular the assumption that Southern European cultures remain ideologically more collectivist-oriented than Northern European cultures. Future research taking into account a wider spectrum of cultures and with larger samples may verify the latter claim and define the extent to which these exploratory findings may be generalised. Moreover, given the acknowledged limitations of using student populations for such investigations, an investigation addressing a variety of social categories would be most informative. In addition to these general considerations, it would be most interesting, in a longitudinal perspective, to follow up the evolution of representations in the

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In conclusion, the present research highlights the heuristic value of social representation research and the methods that it involves. In particular, in what regards the investigation of lay thought that is socially constructed, as is the case here, the concept of social representation advocates an approach which, while making the economy of heavy methodological tools, produces a rather fine analysis of the content and the structure of this social thought. In this case it allowed a direct examination of the content and structure of products of social thought which objectify theoretically loaded and complex notions, such as «individuality» and «collectivity». The present findings complete and enrich our view of the extensive field of work on the oppositional system individualism vs. collectivism, by attaching it to the field of social representation theory.

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