



A Comparison Study of Self Esteem among Arab and Malaysian University Students in International Islamic University Malaysia

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Abstract

This research examined the difference of self esteem between two collectivist cultures, that is, Malay and Arab, among undergraduate students of the International Islamic University Malaysia. The 10-Item Rosenberg self esteem scale was used to collect the data from 102 Undergraduate students in the International Islamic University Malaysia, (Malay, n=54, M=15.3, SD=1.9, & Arab, n=48, M=15.5, SD=2.9. All the participants comprised of Male students. Data Obtained were analysed with the use of Independent t-test and ANOVA statistics. Results revealed as hypothesised which showed no significant differences between Malay and Arab undergraduate students. However, the mean results showed that both samples expressed a high self esteem.

Key words; Self esteem; Individualism; Collectivism; Global personal self esteem; Ethnic self esteem.

Introduction

According to Rosenberg (1965), self-esteem is defined as the individual's positive or negative attitude toward the self. Nathaniel Branden in 1969 briefly defined self-esteem as "...the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness". This two-factor approach, as some have also called it, provides a balanced definition that seems to be capable of dealing with limits of defining self-esteem primarily in terms of competence or worth alone. Branden' (1969) description of self-esteem includes the following primary properties: 1 Self-esteem as a basic human need, i.e., "...it makes an essential contribution to the life process", "...is indispensable to normal and healthy self-development, and has a value for survival." 2. Self-esteem as an automatic and inevitable consequence of the sum of individuals' choices in using their consciousness 3. Something experienced as a part of, or background to, all of the individual's thoughts, feelings and actions. Consequently, this study will evaluate students self esteem in line with Rosenberg's view.

Self esteem can be positive or negative. Positive self esteem is closely linked to high self esteem, and negative self esteem on the other hand, is linked to low self esteem and self doubt. It is a point of note that there is a difference between global self esteem and ethnical self esteem. The concept of self-esteem can be linked to the overall evaluation of oneself as a person, or how one feels about oneself in a comprehensive sense, and also to the evaluation of specific aspects of the self, such as ethnic identity: global self-esteem, and ethnic self-esteem. Harter (1982) revealed that children as young as eight years make judgements of global self-esteem that can be distinguished from evaluation attached to specific characteristics of the self. So, global personal self-esteem can be clearly differentiated from ethnic self-esteem. The way a person feels about himself in general is markedly different from the way another individual feels about being a member of a specific ethnic group (Wylie, 1979).

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The study of self-esteem had always been an attention focus for psychologists especially when the discussion is about the concept of self and how it affects personality. However, the concept of the personality itself is a Western, Euro-American invention (Draguns, 1979). Therefore, much of the concepts of personality are biased towards the individualistic culture of the West (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994). A cross-cultural study by Markus and Kitayama (1991) showed us how the self is viewed differently in America and Asia. The Americans taught their children of how they should view themselves as special individuals, and how they should stand up for themselves. The Asians, on the other hand, usually learn to define themselves within the groups they belong to, their harmonious relationship with others, as well as their pride in group achievement (Weiten, 1998). It was based on these two bases that different definition of self-esteem was built within these two variant cultures. Generally, the concept of self in collectivist cultures has been described as enmeshed, ensembled, and interdependent. By contrast, the self in individualist cultures has been described as self-contained, isolated, and independent.

In addition to suppositions of reflected appraisal and social comparison, the assumption that self-esteem is a basic human need is problematic. Flynn (2003) asserts that in cultures that tend to be more individualistic, for example the United States, the discourse surrounding self-esteem is that all individuals possess a self, and therefore, self-esteem. In nations with individuated cultural values, "the individual has a right and responsibility, in fact a moral obligation, to become separate, autonomous, efficacious, and in control" (Heine 1999). In contrast to individualist societies, collectivist cultures, such as Japan for example, honour the interdependent self. The interdependent self is most complete when the individual is seen as functioning smoothly within a larger, more encompassing and collective framework (Heine, 1999).

However, with the emergence of cross-cultural psychology, there are some studies linking Arab and Asian collectivism. It was found out in collectivist cultures such as India and Iran that, higher scores on measures of self-esteem are related to other aspects of well-being such as low level of depression (Rudy & Grusec, 2006). Also, Verkuyten (2001), in a study of self esteem between Turkish and Dutch adolescents in Holland, it was found out that Turkish youths indicated more positive ethnic self-esteem than the Dutch and they more strongly embraced family integrity as an individual tendency towards collectivism. Recently, there is the trace and empirical evidence revealing that parental approval is a key component in determining the self-esteem of children. Parental approval, support, and acceptance, as well as family harmony are major predictive factors for global self-esteem in adolescence. The importance of parental nurturance and family harmony for self-esteem is found in both Western and Eastern countries (Scott, Scott, & McCabe, 1991). Early upbringing practices in childhood leads to the development of an ideal and enhanced self esteem (Barnes, 1980). In cross-cultural psychology, it is interesting to see self-esteem passing through cultural influences and how it affects its acquisition and maintenance. Ip and Bond (1995), in a comparison study on students from the US, Japan and Hong Kong, found out that US participants had higher levels of self-esteem. Do all Asians share the very same cultural factors in perceiving self-esteem across all Asian countries, or various cultures in various regions should be differentiated? Wood and Wood (2002) suggested that self-esteem is a highly variable state. If so, does Arab or Malay cultures has a vital role for an individual in perceiving the level of his/her own self-esteem? This research work is comparing self-esteem



between Malays and Arabs student, thus furthering the study of self-esteem in the very context of Asian culture.

Statement of Problem

With the advancement in psychology through the immense contributions of cross-cultural psychology and some fruitful cross-cultural research works in recent past, it has been a trend that the Individualistic cultural societies of the West is different from the Collectivist cultural societies of the East. Research results in recent past reveals that Western people has high self-image that is significantly more than East Asians, and that the former shows a clear tendency for self-enhancement, whereas East Asians do not. Taking the false uniqueness effect for example, where people see themselves as uniquely talented shows clear support with Americans and not with Japanese people (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Yang, 1986). Besides, where American students tend to evaluate themselves more positively than they are evaluated by others, Japanese students view themselves significantly less positively than they are viewed by others (Heine & Renshaw, 2002)

In addition, the socialisation process of collectivist parenting is a factor to be considered for the position of the self image of the child brought up in these cultures. In a study carried out by Paul, et. al. (2000) on the parental values and practises relevant to young children's social development in Taiwan and the United States, it was found out that parents of Chinese culture (both Taiwan Chinese and Chinese American) valued traditional Chinese values and collectivist traits, and exerted control over their child's environment with less room to develop self-independent traits. Considering parental and cultural influences, coupled with other factors, it is quite becoming a viewpoint that young people in collectivist cultural societies posses a lower degree of self image and confidence which calls for more studies and research towards improving the situation as most research works in social psychology have been dominated by Western Individualist studies.

In the cause of studying self-esteem cross-culturally, it is necessary to be cognizant of translation issues and response bias, and to address such methodological shortcomings. Quantitative studies lend themselves to generalizable data wherein the individual histories and cultural dynamism of the person are not fully realized. To overcome quantitative shortcomings, qualitative research is imperative in order to gain a better understanding of the influence of culture in young people's identity construction (Kibria 1993; Wolf 1997). The study of self-esteem is strengthened immeasurably by the use of a variety of research methodologies; whenever different research methodologies lead to similar findings we can be more confident about inferences .(Covington,1989)

Objectives of the Study

Cross-culturally, it is obvious that a lot of studies have been carried out among Western- oriented social psychologists in the past, and more recently are the emergence of some studies from the Eastern collectivist bloc. However, in the quest of exploring more into the self esteem and self confidence of the students within this cultural group, it is the goal of this study to examine the differences and commonalities between Arab and Malaysian University students in regards to their self esteem and how they envision their self image.



Hypothesis

Due to some emerging evidences linking Arab and Asian cultures together as being collectivist oriented, we propose that there will be no significant difference between the self-esteem of Malaysian and Arab Undergraduate students.

Operational Definition of Terms

Self esteem; Something experienced as a part of, or background to, all of the individual's thoughts, feelings and actions (Branden, 2000).

Collectivism; This is the cultural orientation of a group of people that believes and practice values reflecting interdependence, living in peace and harmony with others, competent participation in social events, and obedience to authority (Rosenthal,2000),

Individualism; This concept of orientation upheld by some group of people which entails independence, autonomy, self-worth, and viewing themselves as separate and possessing personal attributes (Rosenthal 2000)

Global Personal self esteem; this is a kind of self esteem that involves viewing oneself in a comprehensive sense as a form of an overall evaluation (Wylie, 1979).

Ethnic Self Esteem; A form of self esteem that entails the evaluation of specific aspects of the one- self with a link to one's ethnic identity.(Wylie, 1979).

Reviews of Related Studies

This review will also focus on the cultural differences and similarities and their linkages within the collectivist community.

in a study conducted by Kurman and Sriram (1987) on Self enhancement, generality of self evaluation and affectivity in Israel and Singapore, a cross-cultural comparison in self enhancement of academic self evaluation between secondary school students in both countries was conducted. Participants include 302 Singaporean Chinese students (165 males and 137 females). The Israeli sample comprise of 330 Israeli-born eight graders(137 males and 139 females).On the average, the students in both samples were about 14 years old. Questionnaires were administered and actual grades of the students for the previous term were obtained from school records. They hypothesized that self enhancement would be less prominent in the Singaporean sample than in the Israeli sample.

Compared to the Singaporeans, Israeli views themselves more positively. This is consistent with findings of higher self-evaluation among Westerners (Bond and Cheung, 1983).Also self enhancement was evident in both student samples, but it was stronger in the Israelis'. Moreover, the interaction between generality of self-evaluation and culture provides a clear contrast between the two cultures. (Kurman and Sriram 1987). The findings of this study is pointing towards the direction that students or adolescents in the Middle East where most Arab cultural groups are situated may possess higher esteem and confidence of their self Nisha, Roseman, Naidu, Thapa, & Rettek (1995) carried out a cross-cultural comparison of the self concepts of American and Indian students. Objectives of the study were to explore the manner in which self concepts are construed in the two cultures and also, to highlight gender socialization differences in relation to these cultural differences. Subjects were 306 undergraduates from Allahabad in India and 317 undergraduates from New York City. The Kuhn and Mcpartland (1954) Twenty Statements Test (TST) was administered to assess the self concepts of the Indian and American students. I t was found out that American students



made many more social identity statements than did Indians. This finding is consistent with Markus and Kitayama's (1991) thesis that Western cultures tend to have an independent conception of the self that locates crucial self representations within the individual, whereas Eastern cultures tend to have an interdependent conception of the self in which the self is defined most importantly in terms of its relationship with others.

On the influence of perfectionism, self-esteem and self-efficacy on self-handicapping in relation to individualism and collectivism in students in the United Kingdom and Lebanon carried out by Briony, Angela, & May (2005), One hundred and twenty eight participants (64 UK and 64 from Lebanon) completed the Individualism and Collectivism Scale; the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale; the Perfectionism Cognitions Inventory; the Self-handicapping Scale; the Generalized Self-efficacy Scale; and the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. In the study, it was suggested that a number of cross-cultural differences might be found in relation to individualism-collectivism, perfectionism, self-handicapping, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. It was predicted that individuals from an individualist culture (United Kingdom) would have higher levels of self-reliance and distance from in-groups than people from a collectivist culture (Lebanon) who would have higher levels of family integrity and Interdependence (relying on important figures surrounding an individual). Although, Lebanon is not the most extremely collectivist of cultures, it is predominantly more collectivist than individualist as the family commands primary loyalty in Lebanese society and integrates people into strong, cohesive groups (Collelo, 1989). It was also hypothesized that the British would have higher levels of self-orientated perfectionism than the Lebanese, who would have higher levels of other-orientated and socially-prescribed perfectionism. Previous researches, with US students, lead to the prediction that British students would have higher levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy than the Lebanese.

Results indicated that Lebanese students showed characteristics of both collectivist and individualist societies, whereas the British students were more individualistic. The results also showed that Lebanese students reported higher levels of self-esteem than the British, contradicting other studies that found it to be lower in collectivist countries (Ip & Bond, 1995), The Lebanese students also had similar levels of generalized self-efficacy as to the British students. This means that the former possesses more confidence, generally optimistic, and considers the world a good place to be.

In a joint study on global self-esteem, ethnic self-esteem, and family integrity on Turkish and Dutch early adolescents in the Netherlands, Verkuyten (2001) examined the relationship between global and ethnic self esteem between the two groups. In considering the general greater importance attached to ethnic identity and their predicted higher ethnic self-esteem, it was expected that there will be a stronger correlation between ethnic and global self-esteem among Turkish than Dutch adolescents. Also it was proposed that parental approval, support, and acceptance, as well as family harmony are most highly predictive for global self-esteem in adolescence.

In the two studies, a total of 490 adolescents between 10 and 13 years of age participated. The number of participants of a Dutch father and mother was 291 (59%), and 199 had parents of Turkish origin (41%). For the second study, 864 participants between 10 and 13 years of age. The number of self-defined ethnic Dutch participants was 708 and there were 156 ethnic Turkish participants. In essence, the findings of both studies were very similar. In relation to some other studies it was found that there was no difference in global self-esteem between Turkish and Dutch adolescents. However, in the first study, there was a difference in global self-esteem reflecting that the Dutch possess a higher level when for ethnic self-esteem



has been controlled. Moreover, results from the study also revealed that Turkish adolescents had in both studies a more positive ethnic self-esteem than the Dutch (Verkuyten, 2001). In another study carried out by Jenny Kurman (2003) on why is self-enhancement low in certain collectivist cultures? How self-enhancement is related to self-esteem and subjective well-being was examined. Participants of the studies include (1a). High school students in the 11th grade, 243 Singaporean Chinese and 227 urban and secular Israelis, were surveyed during regular school classes. The self-construal of the two groups were compared (1b) At the beginning of the academic school year, 144 Israeli and 155 Singaporean 1st-year's self-enhancement motive arising from the perceived centrality of others, and cultural restrictions on college students were surveyed.(1c) 104 Japanese and 105 Israeli university students were surveyed. The collectivism-individualism level of the groups was not assessed in this study (1d). Two groups of Israeli students were compared, one comprised of Israeli-born students (n = 80) and the other of students of Ethiopian origin (n = 64) who had immigrated to Israel when they were young children and have lived in Israel for an average of 10.02 years. Results revealed from the samples showed that self-enhancement measures were markedly and positively co-related to self-esteem and subjective wellbeing in collectivist cultures as well as independent ones, which means that there is psychological benefits of self-enhancement in all tested cultures. It was also found that cultural differences in modesty, not the perceived centrality of others, best explains cultural differences in self-enhancement. In essence, the results support the points that cultural and religious restrictions, rather than the lack of a self-enhancement motive, are responsible for the low self-enhancement found in certain collectivist cultures.

In a cross-cultural study carried out by Harrington and Liu (2002), self-enhancement and attitudes towards high achievers: a bicultural view of the independent and interdependent self was examined. It was aimed at exploring the differences and similarities between Maori and New Zealand Europeans regarding their respective ideologies towards individualism and collectivism, coupled with their concepts of global self esteem and self enhancement. It was predicted that Maoris would score higher than the New Zealand Europeans on collectivist orientation scales, and on the other hand, New Zealand Europeans will score higher on individualism than on collectivist self-aspects.

Two hundred and eighty (215 women, 65 men) New Zealand European, and 88 (55 women, 33 men) Maori students at Victoria University of Wellington participated in the study. The Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES), Tall Poppy scale (TPS), The individualism/ Collectivism inventory (ICI) were used to collect data from the participants. As predicted, results revealed indicated that Maori demonstrated higher collectivist-group orientation than their New Zealand counter parts. However, findings showed that Maori were significantly more self-enhancing in the overall results, which means that valuing collectivism does not necessitate lower levels of individual pursuit or positive self-assessment. More so, it was found that Maori sample actually exhibited higher levels of self-esteem than did Europeans. (Harrington & Liu, 2002).

Methods

Participants

In this study, 102 Undergraduates students of International Islamic University Malaysia, between 19 and 27 years of age participated. The number of Malay participants was 54 (mean=15.3, & SD=1.9), and their Arab counterparts was 48 (mean=15.5, & SD=2-9). All the participants were male students. The study was carried out in theclass rooms where the 10- item questionnaire was administered to all the participants after their study sessions under our supervision.



Measures

The Rosenberg self esteem scale is used to collect data from the participants. The 10-item Likert scale with items is answered on a four point scale - from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Five of the items on this scale are positively worded, and 5 of the items are negatively worded. These Items includes Item 2,5, 6,8, & 9. The RSES contains an equal number of positively (e.g., people feeling satisfied with life) and negatively (e.g., people feeling they are failures) worded items. To characterize the RSES more completely, we computed the mean score, standard deviation, Cronbach's alpha.

However, the RSES is used because of its long history of use, its simple language, and its brevity (it takes only 1 or 2 min to complete). Moreover, the RSES displays a transparent one-dimensional factor structure (Corwyn, 2000; Whiteside-Mansell & Corwyn, 2003). Rosenberg Self esteem, with its internal reliability (Cronbach alpha=.82,) According to Schmit & Allik (2005, the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale has been used with its reliability in 23 countries and translated to their various cultural languages. Some of these countries includes, Australia (alpha=.89), Canada (alpha=.80), Ethiopia (alpha=.64), Botswana (alpha=.72) Hong kong (alpha=.79), Lebanon (alpha=.82), Malaysia (alpha=.74). Also its factor structure is largely replicated across a large and diverse sample of human languages and cultures which makes it suitable for this cross-cultural study.

Procedure

With the nature of this study being cross-cultural as to comparing the differences between two groups from two different cultures, participants were selected as to ensure the equivalence of the sample in regards to their social status, educational and background, and in order to avoid and minimize rival hypothesis. To minimize the problems of adequacy, representativeness and comparability of samples, the undergraduate students were selected due to their similarities as it is in other cultural societies (Wan Rafael, 2004).

The 102 participants were selected based on purposive convenient sampling, which aid us in obtaining maximum information. Vockell and Ascher (1995). Purposeful sampling includes subjects who should facilitate the expansion of the study done. In order to ensure the comparability with similarities of participants, only male undergraduate students of IIUM were chosen. Besides, the class room setting was used as the assessment venue where both the Malay and Arab students were identified and their lecturers' consent was obtained. Moreover, the English version of the scale was used in order to avoid some translation problems.

Results

In the course of analyzing the result of this study, the differences in self-esteem between Malay and Arab Undergraduate students were determined by means of the t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) Data were analyzed using SPSS package. However, in regards to variables in under study, (Rosenberg self Esteem Scale and other demographic variables), the researchers examined all the responses from the data in which all noted missing values as regards any of the variable was omitted before final data entry and computation were made. The researchers transformed the reversed score items into normal score before the total scores were obtained. The Cronbach Alpha Test was conducted to check the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach Alpha coefficients of RSES is (0.434)

After that, the researchers analysed the data by computing descriptive statistics, correlation coefficient, and t statistics. Descriptive statistics used in this study were frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Independent sample t-tests were used to measure



differences between the Malay and Arab participants in Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale. However, the ANOVA was used to examine the differences between Self Esteem and the student’s educational status.

The following result describes the testing of the hypothesis under study.

Table 1.
t-test table showing the differences between the Malay and Arab Self Esteem

Scales	Malay(n = 54)		Arab(n = 48)		t	P
	M	SD	M	SD		
Self Esteem	15.30	1.94	15.50	2.98	.29	.76

From the above table, it is revealed that there is no significant difference between the Malay and their Arab counterparts in regards to their self esteem. $F(0.76) \hat{=} 0.29, p < .05$. This result supports the hypothesis as earlier stated that there will be no significant difference between Malay and Arab undergraduate student’s self esteem with mean differences of (M=15.5 & SD=2.98)for Arabs and (M=15.3 & SD=1.94) for Malays.

Table.2
Descriptive Statistics of the Participants and their level of studies (N=102)

Summary Level of study	N	M	SD
100	38	15.66	2.54
200	45	15.63	2.84
300	9	15.30	2.26
400	10	15.22	2.22

Table.3
One Way ANOVA table showing the differences between Self Esteem and Level of Study of student

Source	SS	df	MS	F(3,98)	P
Between	4.15	3	1.384	0.22	0.88
Within	614.7	98	6.27		
Total	618.8	101			

The above table shows that there is no significant difference between the self esteem and the level of study of undergraduate students (3.98), 0.88, p=.05.



Discussion

From the analyses of results it is illustrated there is no significant differences between the Malay and Arab undergraduate students as hypothesized. This result may reflect the possibility of the common nature of both samples in regards to socio-cultural and religious similarities and collectivist cultural orientation. Besides the result further showed that there was no significant difference as regards the comparison between self esteem and the level of study of the participants.

However, with the low reliability coefficient from the scale in relation to our samples, it may be that the English version that was used to our non-Western participants may not be suitable for this study. The imposed etic approach may not be adequate for the effectiveness and adequacy of the study. Besides, despite efforts to minimize the cross cultural problems through ensuring the comparability of investigation procedures and the adequate representativeness of samples as earlier mentioned, the inability to use a translated version of the scale is one of the limitation of the study.

Asides this, the study was not really able to implement a comprehensive comparison and equivalence of the participants. Despite there was selection of Malay and Arab participants with some similarities as students of IIUM, under the similar status undergraduate schooling within a similar age range of young adults and similar religious belief system, it is quite difficult to ascertain their equivalence of other factors like socio-economic background and geographical residence, whether urban or rural, which may count as one of the major limitations that can restrict the degree of the study's validity.

Conclusion

Based on our findings, this study further expresses the characteristics embedded in the collectivist cultures as posited by earlier studies. Despite both Arab and Malay undergraduates expresses a high level of their self image, they tends to possess similar cultural orientation, most especially as regards their religious and family system. This result can be correlated with that of Briony et al (2005) which indicated Lebanese students having a high self esteem.

However, as more studies are springing up from this cultural group, it is of great importance to further research into the psychological and social nature of individuals within those societies with collectivist orientation in order to have a clearer picture as to the nature of its variation and similarities with the Individualistic Western cultures.

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