

# Social Science as Dialogue: Narcissism, Individualist and Collectivist Values, and Religious Interest in Iran and the United States

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This investigation most importantly sought to illustrate the use of social science to promote cross-cultural dialogue. Fukuyama (1992) explained contemporary cultural trends in terms of a triumphant individualism that would overcome all other forms of social life, including what he described as the “fundamentalist resentment” of Iran. Lasch (1979) more pessimistically diagnosed Western social arrangements in terms of an emerging “culture of narcissism.” In this study, Iranian and American university students responded to measures of narcissism, individualist and collectivist values, religious interest, and psychological adjustment (identity, self-actualization, and self-consciousness). Variables related to a sense of community (collectivist values, religious interest, and identity) correlated negatively with narcissism in both societies, as did self-actualization. These data supported a moderate position between the polarized extremes of Fukuyama and Lasch and more importantly demonstrated how social scientific methods might be useful in creating a “space” for conducting a “dialogue between civilizations.”

In a speech to the United Nations, Iranian president Khatami (1999) called for a “dialogue among civilizations.” An important backdrop to his arguments was an earlier analysis of the international situation in terms of an unavoidable “conflict of civilizations” (Huntington, 1996). Much has happened since that speech, and many might reasonably conclude that conflict has been more obvious than dialogue. Dialogues nevertheless can occur at many levels whether or not actual conflicts exist. Several philosophers have argued, for example, that the forms of rationality underlying modern science were a Western innovation designed to overcome the religiously motivated violence of the Reformation (Stout, 1988; Toulmin, 1990; Watson, 1993, 1994). Circumstances demanded “a vocabulary whose sense did not depend on prior agree-

ment about the nature of God and the structures of cosmos and society ordained by him" (Stout: 161). Contemporary expressions of the scientific method, therefore, had at least some origins in a hope to promote greater understanding through dialogue.

Conflicts between the West and the Muslim world once again suggest a need for dialogue that does "not depend on prior agreement about the nature of God and the structures of cosmos and society ordained by him." The general purpose of this study was to illustrate the possibility of using social scientific methods to advance the goals of dialogue within the context of this specific situation. The opportunity for making that attempt involved an empirical examination of the polarized interpretative positions that can be drawn from the ideas of Fukuyama (1992) and Lasch (1979). When considered together, these two social theorists have voiced a "conflict within a civilization" that can help clarify a "conflict between civilizations." Among other things, Fukuyama offered a severe critique of the Iranian social order, which by implication might be extended to other Muslim societies as well. Lasch articulated a very different kind of argument, which by inference might be directed toward the West from a Muslim perspective.

In a highly influential work, Fukuyama (1992) proclaimed that humanity has reached the "end of history." Within his Hegelian framework, the master-slave dialectic has at long last been resolved through the capitalist and democratic promotion of what essentially is a form of individualism. "Slaves" through work have developed rational, scientific supports for the middleclass freedoms that now afford each individual an opportunity to gain recognition that is worthy of a "master." This achievement satisfies what Hegel saw as the elemental desire of each human to be desired by others, and personal and cultural purposes are synchronized within the matchless economic and political progress of the West. An "end of history" means that no strikingly new sociopolitical innovations are necessary or even possible, but it does not mean the end of noteworthy events. Economic and political potentials must be actualized, and numerous problems must be overcome. In an increasingly "rational" world, for example, the decline of religion has weakened moral traditions that historically nurtured communal life (Fukuyama: 325-327), and this secularization has given birth to a growing "fundamentalist resentment" that Fukuyama sees symbolized in the Iranian Islamic Revolution (Fukuyama: 235-237).

An important counterpoint to Fukuyama's speculations is a persistent Western concern about the effects of individualism. The nineteenth-century French social theorist Alexis de Tocqueville (1945a/1835, 1945b/1840) coined the term "individualism" and used it to describe an atomization of social life that seemed to accompany the democratic demand for equality. In particular, Tocqueville worried that equality led to an individualism that could disintegrate into the anarchy of a selfish egotism. Rising social disorder then would justify increasingly tyrannical governmental controls, which in turn would create conditions for further democratic revolutions, thereby reestablishing the destabilizing dynamics of individualism (Siedentop, 1994). Tocqueville's enduring relevance for social theory is evident in more recent warnings that "individualism may have grown cancerous—that it may be destroying those social integuments

that Tocqueville saw as moderating its more destructive potentialities, that it may be threatening the survival of freedom itself” (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985: vii). Religion was deemed by Tocqueville to be one of those “social integuments” (Bellah et al.: 219-249).

Lasch (1979) is among the numerous commentators who have used diverse theoretical frameworks to criticize the Western emphasis on individualism and the self (e.g., Cushman, 1997; Gergen, 1991; Sampson, 1988). He used psychoanalytic thought to diagnose the West in terms of an emerging “culture of narcissism.” Within this “corrupt, permissive, hedonistic culture” (Lasch: 178), religious solutions for the problems of life are increasingly rejected in favor of therapies that encourage narcissistic immaturity:

“‘Love’ as self-sacrifice or self-abasement, ‘meaning’ as submission to a higher loyalty—these sublimations strike the therapeutic sensibility as intolerably oppressive, offensive to common sense and injurious to personal health and well-being. To liberate humanity from such outmoded ideas of love and duty has become the mission of the post-Freudian therapies and particularly of their converts and popularizers, for whom mental health means the overthrow of inhibitions and the immediate gratification of every impulse” (Lasch: 13).

Encouraged by the commodity consumption of capitalism and by a democratic suspiciousness of authority, this tendency toward impulsive self-gratification has supposedly produced wide-ranging psychosocial pathologies. A narrow, solipsistic self-consciousness and an inability to identify with others are only two examples (Lasch: 71-99, 182-186). Indeed, for Lasch, it was the Marquis de Sade who “uncannily glimpsed the whole subsequent development of personal life under capitalism” and who was in some ways “the most farsighted and certainly the most disturbing of the prophets of revolutionary individualism” (Lasch: 69). In short, Lasch did not see society as moving toward any “end of history,” unless that end was death: “In a dying culture, narcissism appears to embody—in the guise of personal ‘growth’ and ‘awareness’—the highest attainment of spiritual enlightenment” (Lasch: 235).

The present study sought to illustrate the use of social scientific methods to promote a “dialogue of civilizations” by examining the polarized positions implied in the arguments of Fukuyama (1992) and Lasch (1979). This goal was accomplished in four most important ways. First, self-reported narcissism was assessed in order to explore Lasch’s “culture of narcissism” hypothesis.

Second, personal commitments to individualist and collectivist values were recorded with a scale that made it possible to test assumptions associated with both Fukuyama and Lasch (Chan, 1994). Individualist values included an exciting life, pleasure, independence, creativity, a varied life, being daring, and freedom. These particular values seemed relevant to interpretations of the West made both by Fukuyama (e.g., freedom) and by Lasch (e.g., the pleasure of “hedonism”). Collectivist values included obedience, politeness, self-discipline, national security, social order, and honor

of parents and elders. These values apparently reflected the “integuments” of communal life that even Fukuyama (1992: 325-327) identified as being essential to society (also see, Fukuyama, 1995).

Third, both Fukuyama and Lasch have acknowledged that religion can beneficially influence communal life; so, research participants indicated their degree of interest in religion. The use of Iranian as well as American samples also made it possible to examine Fukuyama’s differentiation between democratic and (what he but not most Iranians would call) “fundamentalist” societies.

Finally, self-actualization, identity, and the Internal State Awareness and Self-Reflectiveness dimensions of Private Self-Consciousness (Mittal & Balasubramanian, 1987) were measured to assess the adjustment implications of all other variables. Self-actualization reflected the “post-Freudian” ideal of some of the therapies that Lasch (1979: 13) accused of promoting narcissism. As a sense of belonging to the community (Erikson, 1968), a firm identity is supposedly beyond the narcissist, who “cannot identify with someone else without seeing the other as an extension of himself” (Lasch: 86). Fukuyama’s (1992) Hegelianism sees the “end of history” as achieved through the “absolute self-consciousness” of an unalienated self-awareness. In this self-awareness, the individual no longer projects human freedom on to a mythical God (Fukuyama: 64, 198) and is able to maintain the positive self-evaluations that underlie the democratic demand for personal dignity (Fukuyama: 165). For Lasch, however, the “culture of narcissism” encourages the obsessive anxieties of “an escalating cycle of self-consciousness” (Lasch: 90). In previous research, Internal State Awareness predicted adjustment, whereas Self-Reflectiveness correlated with maladjustment (e.g., Watson, Hickman, Morris, Stutz, & Whiting, 1994). Both variables, thus, seemed relevant to the contrasting theoretical implications of self-consciousness.

Fukuyama and Lasch have articulated largely opposite positions with complex interpretative implications. Both, for example, seem to imply that collectivist values and religious interests should correlate negatively with narcissism. Lasch, however, seems to suggest that narcissism, self-actualization, individualist values, and Self-Reflectiveness might correlate positively with each other and negatively with identity and Internal State Awareness. Fukuyama, in contrast, interprets the individualistic democratization of recognition as a process of personal and cultural maturation. For him, therefore, individualist values, self-actualization, identity, and Internal State Awareness might correlate positively with each other and negatively with narcissism and Self-Reflectiveness. Given his pessimistic assessment of “fundamentalist” societies, Fukuyama also might assume that the positive influences of individualism and self-actualization would be less evident in Iran.

## METHOD

### *Participants*

All participants were volunteers. The Iranian sample contained Muslim university students from Tehran. Of these, 102 were male, 122 were female, and eight failed to

indicate gender. Their average age was 21.87 ( $SD = 3.31$ ). The American sample included 96 males, 144 females, and one individual who did not report gender. All Americans attended a branch campus in a state university system in the southeastern United States. The Americans were 72.6% Caucasian, 22.4% African American, and 5.0% belonging to various other racial groups. Studies with literally thousands of similar students over the past 20 years have documented that this mostly Christian population is approximately 80% Protestant (with Baptists defining roughly half that percentage), 10% Catholic, and 10% with various other religious and nonreligious orientations (e.g., Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1989). The Americans were slightly younger than the Iranians with a mean age of 19.51 ( $SD = 3.58$ ). This age difference occurred because some Iranian males must continue their education after two years of compulsory military service and because Iranians sometimes take several years to pass highly competitive entrance examinations before gaining admission into a university.

### **Measures**

Psychological scales were included in a questionnaire booklet that contained measures used in a number of different studies. Booklets for the two samples were as similar as possible with the Iranians, of course, receiving Persian versions of all scales. The initial translation of measures into Persian was accomplished via extensive email conversations by the first and second authors. The nuances of all English statements were discussed fully before settling upon an appropriate Persian translation. To determine the adequacy of the Persian translation, someone unfamiliar with the hypotheses of this study translated all measures back into English. The back-translated English versions then were compared with the original measures, and all necessary changes were made in the Persian versions. No significant difficulties in translation were encountered.

Participants indicated their degree of interest in religion by responding to a single question: "How interested are you in religion?" Answers ranged from 0 (*not at all interested*) to 9 (*extremely interested*). Especially with the younger generation, religion can be a controversial issue in contemporary Iran (Mason, 2002), and this single item was used to measure religious allegiances in as unobtrusive a manner as possible. In previous studies, this item was used to select individuals with commitments strong enough to examine variables of interest in the psychology of religion (e.g., Batson & Gray, 1981). Responses to this statement later proved to be a sensitive index of religious motivation and displayed robust positive correlations with religious variables that predict psychosocial adjustment (e.g., Watson, Morris, Hood, Milliron, & Stutz, 1998). Finally, and most importantly, positive correlations of this item with adjusted forms of religious commitment were as strong in Iran as they were in the United States (Ghorbani, Watson, Ghramaleki, Morris, & Hood, 2002).

The Internal State Awareness and Self-Reflectiveness dimensions (Mittal & Balasubramanian, 1987) of the Private Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975) recorded individual differences in introspective self-awareness. The

more adaptive Internal State Awareness (e.g., "I'm aware of the way my mind works when I work through a problem") and the more maladaptive Self-Reflectiveness (e.g., "I'm constantly examining my motives") subscales contained four items. Reactions to each item occurred along a 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) Likert scale.

The Margolis and Thomas (1980) Narcissism Scale was designed to measure a pathological form of narcissistic self-functioning (Soyer, Rovenpor, Kopelman, Mullins, & Watson, 2001). For each of the 24 items, subjects chose between a narcissistic (e.g., "I resent others having what I lack") and a non-narcissistic response (e.g., "I try to appreciate it when others have what I lack"). One forced-choice item exhibited a negative item-to-total correlation in both samples and was dropped to improve internal reliability. This eliminated item stated, "I foresee the day when life will be ideal," in contrast to the non-narcissistic option that "I foresee the day when life will be better for me."

The Jones and Crandall (1986) Short Index of Self-Actualization had 14 items, and the Ochse and Plug (1986) Identity Scale contained 19 items. Both were presented using a 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) Likert scale. The Short Index of Self-Actualization was designed to measure the mental health ideal of the post-Freudian humanistic psychotherapies (e.g., "I do not feel ashamed of any of my emotions"). The Identity scale was designed to measure Erikson's conception of healthy identity formation (e.g., "I feel proud to be a member of the society in which I live"). In previous research, both scales were valid and useful in exploring religious variables (Watson, Milliron, Morris, & Hood, 1995; Watson, Morris, Hood, Milliron, & Stutz, 1998).

The Individualist and Collectivist Values Scales (Chan, 1994) contained seven and six items, respectively. Each presented a relevant value plus a parenthetical clarification. For example, "Social order (stability of society)" was a collectivist value, whereas "Independence (self-reliance, choice of own goals and interests)" was an individualist value. Possible reactions ranged from 0 (*not important*) to 4 (*of supreme importance*). These measures have usefully clarified values in both American and Iranian samples (Ghorbani, Bing, Watson, Davison, & LeBreton, 2003; Watson, Sherbak, & Morris, 1998; Watson & Morris, 2002).

### **Procedure**

Questionnaire booklets were presented to both samples with the same basic instructions. Subjects responded to these booklets in groups of varying size, but with none larger than approximately 75. The time needed to complete all measures was less than an hour in virtually every instance.

American participants entered responses to all scales on standardized answer sheets. These answer sheets later were read into a computer data file by optical scanning equipment. Iranian subjects indicated their reactions to questionnaire items on paper answer sheets. Their responses subsequently were entered into a computer data file by hand. In order to prevent mistakes, the Iranian data were entered and checked twice.

**TABLE 1**  
**Alpha ( $\alpha$ ), Mean (M) Item Response, and Standard Deviation (SD) for All Measures in Iranian (N = 232) and American (N = 241) Samples and Descriptive Statistics for Males and Females\***

Measures	Iran			United States			Males		Females	
	$\alpha$	M	SD	$\alpha$	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Narcissism Scale	.70	0.34	0.17	.77	0.24	0.17	0.32	0.18	0.26	0.17
Individualist Values	.73	2.79	0.68	.79	2.83	0.67	2.84	0.73	2.80	0.63
Collectivist Values	.80	2.91	0.78	.79	2.94	0.69	2.89	0.81	2.95	0.68
Identity Scale	.77	2.11	0.55	.86	2.49	0.62	2.21	0.61	2.39	0.61
Self-Actualization	.52	2.23	0.45	.64	2.49	0.48	2.34	0.48	2.39	0.49
Internal State Awareness	.55	2.71	0.75	.59	2.84	0.67	2.71	0.72	2.81	0.70
Self-Reflectiveness	.58	2.88	0.73	.69	2.43	0.86	2.55	0.89	2.71	0.78
Religious Interest	-	6.82	2.11	-	6.86	2.33	6.62	2.44	6.99	2.02

\* Means represent the average response per item for each measure.

After the creation of the two data files, coefficient alphas for all measures were computed in each sample separately in order to maximize internal consistency reliabilities. As noted above, one item from the Narcissism Scale was eliminated because it displayed a negative item to total correlation in both samples. Correlations among the narcissism, values, religious interest, and adjustment variables were computed separately for the Iranian and American samples, and these relationships were clarified as needed with partial correlations. Comparisons of means across culture and gender were also computed in an attempt to offer a final summarizing sketch of these data.

## RESULTS

Coefficient alphas and descriptive statistics for both samples are summarized in Table 1. The means and standard deviations for males and females are presented as well. In both samples, the two self-consciousness subscales displayed poor reliability coefficients, a frequently observed outcome that has supported previous calls for the development of better measures (Britt, 1992). The Short Index of Self-Actualization also had a poor internal reliability, suggesting a need for caution in interpreting results for this scale, especially in the Iranian sample.

Table 2 shows the correlations among the narcissism, values, religious interest, and adjustment variables for the Iranians (above the diagonal) and for the Americans

**TABLE 2**  
**Correlations among Narcissism, Values, Identity, Self-Actualization, Private-Self  
 Consciousness and Religious Interest Measures in Iran and the United States<sup>1</sup>**

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Narcissism Scale	-	-.06	-.40***	-.46***	-.53***	-.34***	-.27***	-.29***
2. Individualist Values	.00	-	.40***	.06	.17*	.30***	.30***	-.05
3. Collectivist Values	-.22**	.55***	-	.21**	.23***	.27***	.31***	.34***
4. Identity Scale	-.55***	.12	.21**	-	.54***	.27***	.14*	.15*
5. Self-Actualization	-.56***	.29**	.19**	.58***	-	.33***	.22**	.06
6. Internal State Awareness	-.18**	.16*	.20**	.15*	.34***	-	.50***	.13
7. Self-Reflectiveness	.10	.16*	.12	-.33***	-.08	.35***	-	.07
8. Religious Interest	-.15*	-.09	.11	.11	.06	.19**	.06	-

\*  $p < .05$       \*\*  $p < .01$       \*\*\*  $p < .001$

<sup>1</sup> Correlations for the Iranian sample are above the diagonal, and those for the Americans are below.

(below the diagonal). A preliminary examination of gender-specific correlations in both samples revealed no conceptually noteworthy differences between males and females.

Many findings were similar in the two samples. Narcissism failed to correlate with individualist values, but displayed negative associations with collectivist values, identity, self-actualization, Internal State Awareness, and religious interest. In addition to negative correlations with narcissism, religious interest correlated positively with collectivist values and identity in Iran and positively with Internal State Awareness in the United States. In both cultures, identity, self-actualization, and Internal State Awareness correlated positively with one another, as would be expected of presumed measures of healthy functioning. Internal State Awareness was associated with adjustment in both samples, but Self-Reflectiveness consistently predicted adjustment only in Iran. In the United States, Self-Reflectiveness exhibited a positive relationship with individualist values and a negative correlation with identity.

Moderately strong positive correlations appeared between collectivist and individualistic values in both the Iranians and the Americans, and collectivist values correlated positively with all three measures of mental health. Individualist values were associated with greater self-actualization and Internal State Awareness, but were unrelated to identity in both samples.

Previous research has documented that the psychological implications of Internal State Awareness and Self-Reflectiveness become more obvious when each is examined after controlling for the other (e.g., Watson et al., 1994). Once Internal State Awareness was partialled out in the Iranian sample, Self-Reflectiveness no longer correlated significantly with narcissism (-.13), identity (.00), or self-actualization (.07, all  $ps > .05$ ). In America, Self-Reflectiveness for the first time displayed significant correlations with narcissism (.18) and self-actualization (-.22,  $ps < .01$ ), and no longer

predicted individualist values (.12,  $p > .05$ ). In contrast, controlling for Self-Reflectiveness produced no noteworthy effects on correlations observed for Internal State Awareness in either culture.

Previous research also has established that less ambiguous findings appear when individualist values are reexamined after partialing out collectivist values and vice versa (e.g., Watson & Morris, 2002). In the Iranian sample, once collectivist values were controlled, individualist values displayed a near significant positive partial correlation with narcissism (.12,  $p = .08$ ), and the reliable association with self-actualization disappeared (.08,  $p > .05$ ). Findings for collectivist values were largely unaffected by controlling for individualist values in the Iranian sample. In the American sample, once variance attributable to collectivist values was removed, individualist values correlated positively with narcissism (.16,  $p < .05$ ) and no longer displayed significant associations with self-actualization (.11), Internal State Awareness (.06), or Self-Reflectiveness (.12,  $p$ 's  $> .05$ ). Once individualist values were controlled in the American sample, the previously observed relationship between collectivist values and self-actualization disappeared (.10,  $p > .05$ ).

Because of difficulties in understanding the precise cross-cultural meaning of these variables, no formal hypotheses were made about possible mean differences in findings for Culture and Gender (see Table 1). A 2 X 2 MANOVA nevertheless was used to draw a summarizing sketch of these variables. Significant effects were observed for Culture [ $F(8/423) = 10.54, p < .001$ ] and Gender [ $F(8/423) = 3.16, p < .01$ ], but not for their interaction [ $F(8/423) = 0.52, p > .80$ ]. Iranians scored higher on Self-Reflectiveness and narcissism and lower on self-actualization and identity [ $F_s(1/430) > 26.07, p_s < .001$ ]. Males scored higher on narcissism and lower on Self-Reflectiveness and identity [ $F_s(1/430) > 6.07, p_s < .05$ ]. Unlike the correlational procedures above, these analyses required that psychological scales possess identical measurement properties in both cultures (van de Vijer & Leung, 1997). Evidence failed to confirm that requirement. These data consequently should be interpreted with extreme caution; although, they apparently offered no support at all for any possible suggestion based upon Lasch's work that narcissistic traits would be more prevalent in the West.

## DISCUSSION

In this study, the most general and important goal was to illustrate the use of social scientific methods to promote the goals of cross-cultural dialogue. Fukuyama (1992) and Lasch (1979) developed polarized interpretations of contemporary cultural trends that displayed at least some parallels with current conflicts between Western and Muslim "civilizations." As seen within one perspective, the arguments of the other can seem extreme and upsetting. "Extreme and upsetting" positions are, nevertheless, an empirical reality. The problem is how to respond to those realities. History seemingly supplies no end to the examples of destructive responses, but according to some, the sciences developed at least in part as an effort to respond constructively to such conflicts (Stout, 1988; Toulmin, 1990). Implied in the notion of "social science as

dialogue” is the suggestion that “extreme and upsetting” perspectives can be brought into meaningful and perhaps productive conversation through empirical methods. Through such efforts, better mutual understanding and the discovery of commonalities might occur.

The present data, for example, supported a more moderate position between the extremes of Fukuyama’s (1992) apologetics for the West and the critical arguments of Lasch (1979), which were more congruent with Muslim frameworks. Individualist values were not centrally important in describing self-maturity, as Fukuyama has sometimes implied. But neither were those values nor self-actualization indicative of narcissistic self-obsession, as Lasch has essentially argued. In both samples, indices of communal commitment (collectivist values, identity, and religious interest) served as the more compelling and consistent predictors of healthy self-functioning. Collectivist values also exhibited a fairly robust positive correlation with individualist values in each group, and linkages of individualist values with greater narcissism and lower religious interest became evident only after partialing out collectivist values. Similar outcomes have been reported previously, and such data once again confirmed that “social integuments” might ameliorate the destructive potentials of individualism (Ghorbani, Bing, Watson, Davison, & LeBreton, 2003; Watson & Morris, 2002). Overall, these results pointed toward more commonalities and opportunities for dialogue than differences between these two “civilizations.”

Religious interest predicted greater collectivist values and better psychological functioning across both samples. In addition to supporting Lasch’s basic conceptual framework, the negative religious interest association with narcissism, along with positive ties to identity and Internal State Awareness, upheld the claim that religion can promote narcissistic maturation (Wolfe, 1988: 52-53). This was as true in Muslim Iran as it was in Christian America. The direct relationship of religious interest with collectivist values was stronger in Iran, however, and this finding perhaps hinted at a stronger integration of communal commitments with religion in a so-called “fundamentalist” society.

With one exception, patterns of correlation were roughly comparable in Iran and the United States, and these parallels suggested that scales had similar meanings though not identical measurement properties across the two samples. Only Self-Reflectiveness displayed any obvious cultural differences, with partial correlations identifying this factor as maladjusted in America and as largely neutral in Iran. In line with previous observations (Ghorbani, Bing, Watson, Davison, & Mack, 2002), such data once again revealed the need to develop less ambiguous measures of self-awareness that could be useful in clarifying the mental health implications of self-knowledge and other related constructs cross-culturally (Ghorbani, Watson, Bing, Davison, & LeBreton, 2003).

Perhaps special emphasis should be given to the finding that Collectivist and Individualist Values correlated positively in both societies. This outcome was observed with previous Iranian and American samples (Ghorbani et al, 2003), and Indian (Sinha & Tripathi, 1994) and Chinese (Ho & Chui, 1994) studies have similarly confirmed that elements of individualism and collectivism can be integrated within the personality. Such data argue against the extreme position that individualism and collectivism

are fundamentally incompatible (e.g., Sampson, 1988, 1989). They also support recent calls for caution in how individualism and collectivism can be misused as “unduly fixed,” “caricature-like,” and “black-and-white” dichotomous categories (Voronov & Singer, 2002: 461). Relative to the goals of dialogue, such findings also serve as an important encouragement that meaningful communication is possible across “civilizations.” Positions articulated within a largely individualistic frame of reference can be received and processed in productive ways within a largely collectivist frame of reference (and vice versa).

Iran and the United States are large, diverse countries. Conclusions based on such small, not fully representative samples must be conditioned by innumerable caveats. University students, for example, will undoubtedly display many characteristics that are atypical of these two general populations. Still, with “civilizations” that sometimes seem so far apart, the observation of any commonalities at all, even among relatively small elements of both societies, may represent a useful point of departure. Implied in the notion of “social science as dialogue” is the suggestion that empirical methods might be useful in creating a “space” where productive conversations can occur between “civilizations” (Watson, 1993). The truth is that this project probably did not create a lot of “space.” Moreover, any notion that dialogue might resolve all conflict presumably would be naïve. The goal of this study, nevertheless, was to illustrate a possibility that deserves attention. Can social scientific methods create an increasingly large and useful space for conducting a “dialogue among civilizations”? The broadest implication of the present data was that this is an empirical question. Empirical attempts to answer that question can hopefully contribute to the beginning rather than to the end of a history of dialogue.

## NOTES

*Accepted for publication:* January 29, 2004.

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