

Well-being in Relation to Identity Consistency in a Collectivistic Culture

* Grace Lalkhawngaihi & ** H.K Laldinpuii Fente

Abstract

Empirical findings on the influence of identity consistency on psychological health and functioning in the Eastern and Western cultural settings tend to be dissimilar, understandably so, given the cultural differences especially in collectivism and individualism. The present study examined the importance of identity consistency in the context of group situations for emotional, social, and psychological well-being among young adults (20 to 40 years) of a strongly collectivistic society of Mizoram, India. Participants included 206 members of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in Mizoram who were selected randomly in equal proportion of gender (103 males and 103 females). Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (Keyes, 2002), Identity Consistency Scale (Suh, 2002), and Levels of Group Participation Scale (Rasmussen, 2003) were used for measurement of the constructs. Results revealed that both Mizo young male and female adults were considerably consistent in their identity presentations across social situations; they were moderately involved in social activities and scored relatively high on measures of emotional, social, psychological and overall well-being. Moderation analyses showed that for young Mizo women who were inconsistent in situational self-presentation, higher social participation significantly increased their emotional well-being. For young adult males, no significant moderation effect of identity consistency between group participation and well-being was found. Discussions gleaned upon identity management in multiple social situations, cultural specific factors, concepts of self-continuity and social roles in the context of the Mizo society and well-being in collectivistic cultures.

Keywords: well-being, group participation, identity consistency

Authors

* Grace Lalkhawngaihi
Department of Psychology
Mizoram University, India
grace.lralte@gmail.com

** H.K Laldinpuii Fente
Department of Psychology
Mizoram University, India
hkdinpuii.psy@mzu.edu.in

In collectivistic societies, different social identities coexist harmoniously within an individual. This may be the reason why the understanding of self is complex in collectivistic contexts (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Suh, 2002). According to Daukantaite & Thompson (2014), identity consistency reflects the consistency of individual's self-presentations in different social roles and situations. Theorists who observed individuals from collectivistic culture argue that identity inconsistency in forms of identity flexibility would be important to gain social competency (Kitayama & Markus, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1994). To be inconsistent or having flexible identity in such context would mean orienting one's behaviour according to different social demands. These views thus support the contention that there can be varying reception of self-consistency in different cultures.

Existing research evidences portray identity consistency as a virtue mostly in individualistic culture, as studies have shown the significant prediction of well-being from identity consistency among individualistic samples (Daukantaite & Thompson, 2014; Suh, 2002). However in collectivistic settings, to be consistent in self-presentation may be equated with social rigidity (Markus et al., 1997; Triandis, 1989). This may explain why significant prediction of well-being by identity consistency was not found in most studies among collectivistic samples (Suh, 2002).

Suh (2002) however questioned the nature of well-being scale used for measuring the relationship between identity consistency and well-being. He argued that most well-being scales exclude the social features which are instrumental in detecting the overall well-being of collectivistic people. Keyes and Waterman (2003) presented a comprehensive definition of well-being as persons' self-analysis of their lives in all aspects of psychological, emotional and social dimensions.

Psychological well-being reflects characteristics that are personal to an individual including self-independence, self-competence, self-awareness, personal growth and

development (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Emotional well-being simply indicates the occurrence of either positive or negative feelings in the evaluation of one's satisfaction in life (Diener et al., 2004). Triandis (1995) categorized these two dimensions of well-being- psychological and emotional as hedonistic in nature, and attributed it to individualistic people. Social well-being on the other hand represents life satisfaction derived from fulfilment of social-responsibilities, roles and duties which largely constitute the happiness of collectivistic individuals (Triandis, 1995). It also reflects social coherence, social integration, social actualization, social contribution and social acceptance (Keyes, 1998).

As endorsement of identity consistency varies across cultures, the relationship between identity consistency and well-being may also differ between cultures. Researchers observed that individualistic people experienced happiness at a personal level, whereas collectivistic people derive happiness more in relation to societal factors (Cross et al., 2003; Diener & Suh, 2000; Diener et al., 2000). The emphasis of internal factors such as personal values and belief system is much more among individualists (Kashima et al., 1992). Collectivists are more likely to sample both internal and external factors in framing their identities (Markus & Kitayama, 1994).

Consequently, collectivistic individuals are known to define their self in relation to social characteristics (Kanagawa et al., 2001; Suh 2002). This may supplement the prediction of Diener and Suh (2000) who believed that the influence of identity consistency on well-being will be weaker among collectivistic people. Research evidences have shown stronger prediction of well-being by social indicators and not by identity consistency among collectivistic samples (Suh, 2002); and no significant relationship between identity consistency and social well-being (Daukantaite and Thompson, 2014).

Another significant social phenomenon which may typically demand either consistent or inconsistent self-presentation is social group participation. Group participation reflects the

extent of interactions, engagement and exchange of dialogues or actions one has in social settings (Bradburn, 1969). In collectivistic settings, being unique may not be as appreciated as being compliant because social conformity is considered essential for social harmony, thereby attenuating the expression of uniqueness (Yamaguchi, 1994). These observations may help draw a parallel between being unique and being consistent, because standing out may be viewed negatively if it compromises social norms in collectivistic culture. Therefore, one would have to embrace inconsistency as a form of social adjustment in collectivistic environments.

This phenomenon has been explained clearly by Tajfel and Turner (1979) who understood 'self' as having personal identity and social identity. According to them, individuals are unique when they express their personal identity, but the distinctiveness of individuals is lost when they express their social identity. This is because social identity represents the similarity of an individual with respect to his/her social groups. Yamaguchi (1994) supports this explanation by stating that an individual's collectivistic actions can be traced back to their group membership. In a collectivistic setting, individuals may naturally sample their social identities more than their personal identity because of multiple social situations. This may result in social identities presumably taking over the 'self' system of an individual (Triandis, 1989). Collectivistic people are therefore known to invest more on collective causes rather than individual causes (Yamaguchi, 1994). These observations reveal the importance of group participation in understanding the pattern of identity expression in a collectivistic setting.

Group participation is significantly linked with values of collectivism (Batson et al., 2022). Presenting oneself in socially appropriate ways may be equated with identity inconsistency or being flexible among communities which has more social situations, such as collectivistic cultures (Choi & Choi, 2002; Swann et al., 2012; Yamaguchi, 1994). Therefore,

collectivism may be related with lesser consistency in identity presentations (Markus & Kitayama, 2003; Oishi et al., 2004; Suh, 2002). The interplay of identity consistency and group participation is then expected to affect the well-being of collectivistic individuals at all levels i.e. psychological, emotional and social. Consequently, the present study explored the moderating role of identity consistency in the relationship between group participation and well-being.

The rationale for taking Mizo samples is because of their fulfilment of collectivistic characteristics required for the purpose of this study. Mizo people are collectivistic in nature (Fente & Singh, 2008). Social group membership among the Mizos is mostly organized in forms of Community Based Organisations (CBOs). CBOs are non-profit voluntary organisations with great emphasis on collective actions, goals and labours (Chechetto-Salles & Geyer, 2006). All Mizos are members of *Young Mizo Association* (YMA). Since, young Mizo adults are most active and play significant social roles in YMA, sample selection for the current study will confine to young Mizo population.

Young Mizos are known to express their collectivism through active engagements in CBOs that are systematically functioning in their state. During the process of active social participations in these CBOs, they are expected to sample their collective or social identity more than their individual identity; therefore, it is likely that young Mizos will be more flexible in their identity presentation. It would be interesting to study the impact of being flexible during group participation on the well-being of the Mizos.

Objectives

To determine the moderating role of identity consistency between group participation and well-being among young Mizo adults.

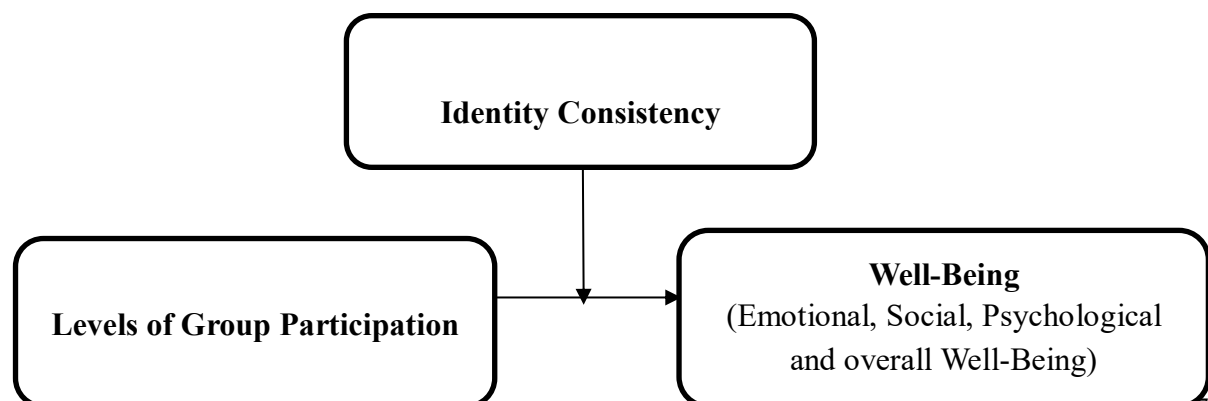
Hypotheses

At low level of identity consistency, group participation will be positively related to well-being.

Sample

Mizo members of Young Mizo Association (YMA) within the age range of 20 to 40 years identified as young adults (Santrock, 2018) were selected using systematic random sampling procedure across 20 localities in Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram, India. There were 206 participants with equal proportion of (103) male and female (103) gender groups. The mean age was 28 years in both male and female groups. Most participants were unmarried (35% males and 43% females). There were 38% male and 33% female graduates. The rest completed up till Higher Secondary level of School education. In terms of employment, 64% participants (34% male and 30% females) were employed, and 36% were unemployed (15 males and 21% females). On average, all participants reported to have been active in social group activities for the last 7 years. A larger percentage of participants (68%) were common members in YMA, 30% were males and 38% females. Participants having designations such as Office Bearer or Executive Committee member under local branch of YMA included 21% males and 11% females.

Moderation model depicting the moderating role of identity consistency between group participation and aspects of well-being



Psychological Tools

i) *Identity Consistency (IC; Suh, E.M, 2002)*: It is a 5 point Likert scale with 20 items. As prescribed by the authors, Principal Component Analysis was used to formulate an identity consistency matrix which was constituted from 20 personality traits x 4 matrix of self-rating on general self, family, friends and social group. Identity consistency score was obtained by computing the percentage of variance accounted for by the first factor. Identity consistency is considered higher when the percentage of variance accounted for by the first factor is high and vice versa. High identity consistency score indicates that the subject is highly consistent in his/her self-presentation across family, friends and in social groups.

ii) *Levels of Group Participation Scale (LOP; Rasmussen, M .F, 2003)*: This is a 5-point Likert scale comprising of 6 items to measure the participants' level of participation in CBOs. High scores in LOP indicated high level of participation in social groups. Cronbach's alpha was found to be .94 in a reliability analysis conducted earlier among Mizo youths (Lalkhawngaihi et al., 2019).

iii) *Mental Health Continuum- Short Form (MHC-SF; Keyes, C. L. M, 2002)*: This is a 6-point Likert scale having 14 items, having three subscales: - Emotional well-being (3 items), Social well-being (5 items) & Psychological well-being (6 items). High scores on emotional well-being indicate that the participant's feelings are positive; high scores on psychological well-being reflect greater personal satisfaction; high scores on social well-being depict social satisfaction. The internal consistency for all three subscales was greater than .80 (Keyes, 2005).

Results and Interpretation

The psychometric adequacy of all the behavioural measures i.e. levels of group participation (LOP) and Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF) was first ascertained for item-total coefficients of correlation, inter-scale relationships and reliability coefficients. The procedure for arriving at the Identity Consistency Index (Suh, 2002) used Factor Analysis (Principal Component Analysis). PROCESS v3.4 (Hayes, 2019) was employed for moderation analyses. Linearity, independent errors, normality,

homoscedasticity and multicollinearity were checked to meet the assumptions of multiple regression analysis. Using *PROCESS* v3.4 (Hayes, 2018) tool, the means were centered and bootstrapping (1000) were automatically executed in *SPSS* 20.

The mean scores on Identity Consistency for young male adults was found to be $M=72.58$. For young female adults, it was found to be $M=78.2$. The mean score of young adults in total was calculated to be $M=75.4$ (refer to Table 1.1). Results indicated that young Mizo adults were moderately high on identity consistency. This implies that young Mizos, both male and female, showed consistency in their self- presentation or traits across interactions with their family members, friends and people from social groups.

The item mean scores on Group Participation was found to be $M=3.41$ for young male adults, $M=2.85$ for young female adults and $M=3.13$ for all young adults (Table 1.1). Results indicate that the level of group participation (5-point scales) of young male adults is higher than average. The level of group participation of young female adults was a little above average. The overall mean score revealed that young Mizo adults were considerably active in community participations and social activities.

The item mean scores on Emotional Well-Being, Social Well-Being, Psychological Well-Being and the overall Well-Being ranged from $M=3.9$ to $M=5$ for young male and female Mizo adults as displayed in Table 1.1. Results imply that the level of positive feelings, social satisfaction, personal happiness and overall mental health of young male and female Mizo adults was relatively high.

Table 1.1

Mean scores of young adults (male, female, and pooled) in Identity Consistency (IC), Levels of Group Participation (LOP), Emotional, Social, Psychological and Overall Well-Being (EWB, SWB, PWB, MHC-SF).

	Young male adults (n=103)	Young female adults (n=103)	Total young adults (N=206)
IC	72.58	78.21	75.4
LOP	3.41	2.85	3.13
EWB	5.01	4.73	4.87
SWB	4.03	3.94	3.99
PWB	4.18	4.12	4.15
MHC-SF	4.25	4.15	4.20

PROCESS v3.4 (Hayes, 2018) was used for executing moderation analyses to address the objective of this study i.e. to determine the moderating role of Identity Consistency between Group Participation levels and Well-Being among young Mizo adults. It was hypothesized that at low level of Identity Consistency, Group Participation levels will be positively related to Well-Being. In SPSS 20, all four measures of well-being i.e. Emotional, Social, Psychological and overall Well-Being were each entered as dependent criterion variables separately for all units of the analyses.

Moderation analysis of Identity Consistency between Levels of Group Participation and Emotional Well-Being revealed that for young female Mizos, 5.7% of the total variance in Emotional Well-Being was significantly explained by Group Participation and Identity Consistency (shown in Table 1.2). Significant interaction effect ($b = -0.013$, 95% CI $[-0.025$,
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-0.001], $t = -2.097$, $p < .05$) indicated that Identity Consistency had a significant moderating role in determining the relationship between Group Participation and Emotional Well-Being for young Mizo women.

Conditional effects of Group Participation on Emotional Well-Being at different values of Identity Consistency revealed (Table 1.2, and simple slope analysis shown in Figure 1 reflects) that the relationship between Group Participation and Emotional Well-Being was significantly positive at low level of Identity Consistency ($b = 0.363$, 95% CI [0.075, 0.652], $t = 2.497$, $p < .05$). This indicates that for young Mizo women whose self-presentation is less consistent in different social roles or situations, the more they participate in social groups the more they experience positive emotions.

Table 1.2

Results of Moderation analysis of Identity Consistency between Levels of Group Participation and Emotional Well-Being for young female adults (n=103).

Model Summary

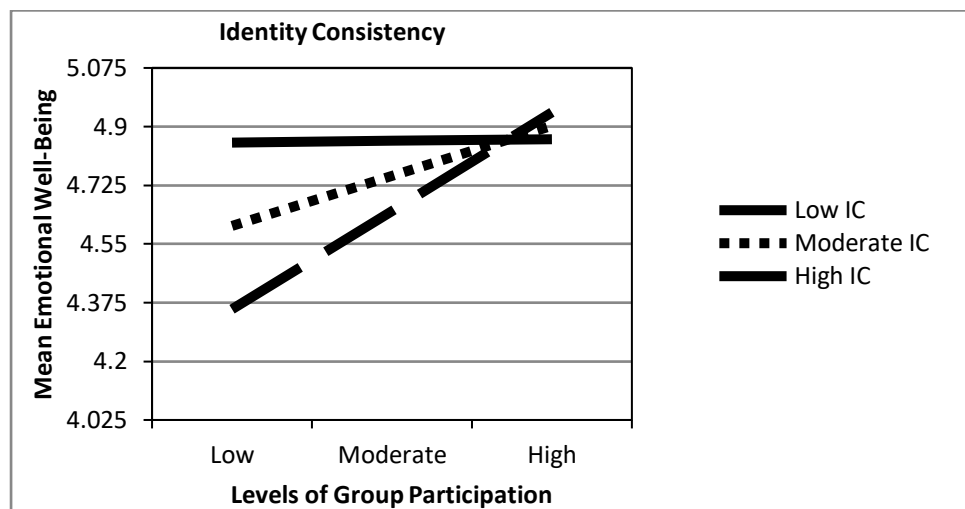
R	R-sq	MSE	F(HC3)	df1	df2	p
.238	.057	.885	2.898	3.000	99.000	.039
Model						
	coeff(b)	se(HC3)	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	4.753	.096	49.710	.000	4.563	4.943
LOP	.185	.108	1.718	.089	-.029	.398
IC	.008	.007	1.083	.281	-.006	.021
Int_1	-.013	.006	-2.097	.039	-.025	-.001

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

	IC	Effect	se(HC3)	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Low	-13.732	.363	.145	2.497	.014	.075	.652
Average	.000	.185	.108	1.718	.089	-.029	.398
High	13.732	.006	.128	.048	.962	-.248	.261

Figure 1

Simple slopes equations of the regression of emotional well-being on group participation at three levels of Identity Consistency for young female adults.



As for the relationships between the other subscales of well-being (Social, Psychological and overall Well-Being) and Group Participation levels, Identity Consistency was not found to play any significant moderating role for young females. Further, significant moderation effect of Identity Consistency between Group Participation levels and measures of Well-Being was neither found for young male adults in this study.

Discussion

The current finding revealed that for only young Mizo women who were less consistent in their identity presentation across social settings, the more they were socially involved the greater was their experience of positive emotions. This revelation supports the hypothesis stating that at low level of identity consistency, level of group participation will be positively related to well-being. Through this finding, it may be inferred that younger women

from collectivistic communities find emotional satisfaction from participating in social activities when they maintain flexibility in their identity presentation based on social roles or demands.

Collectivism may be associated more with identity inconsistency rather than identity consistency as may be reflected in the current study. This assumption also finds support from cultural psychologists who investigated identity flexibility and collectivistic values as related concepts (Markus & Kitayama, 2003; Oishi et al., 2004; Suh, 2002). Similarly, the importance of social adjustments in different social settings as addressed by researchers (Choi & Choi, 2002; Swann et al., 2012; Yamaguchi, 1994) may help explain the present finding. This may be especially significant and relevant in collectivistic culture as discussed earlier.

Batson et al. (2002) expressed a strong relation between collectivism and community engagements. Traits related to collectivism like social obedience, management of expression both verbal and non-verbal has been associated with self-presentation and impression management (Lalwani et al., 2006). These explanations may help justify the positive relation between social engagement and positive emotions among young Mizos who were less consistent in their self-presentation and belonged to a collectivistic culture (Fente & Singh, 2008). The connection between collectivism, social interactions and flexible self-presentation reviewed in this study may be established stronger through the present finding. A study on Mizo youths revealed that Mizo millennials who were traditionally inclined embraced conservative traditional values (Lalramthar & Fente, 2020). This finding portrays the collectivistic setting of Mizo society and the existence of collectivism among Mizo youths.

Brennan et al. (2007) emphasized on the role of social rules and obligations as a driving force of social behaviour. Therefore, in collectivistic societies social appraisal

becomes important as a guide to social behaviour. In such societies, existence of different social groups creates multiple social settings. Such situations may come with social expectations and the need for validation to function socially. Hancock (1994) described that the more youths participate in community initiatives, the more they acquire the need for social validation. This may be essential to obtain sensible membership or a sense of affiliation to social groups. It may be contented that once young people become socially active and carry the spirit of social contribution, they may be inclined to conform to social norms that may provide cultural scripts for actions and behaviour.

In a typical Mizo collectivistic upbringing, the role and responsibilities of young adults exist in multiple social settings. Therefore, social situations influence the behaviour of Mizo youths on a very large scale. As may also be seen from the sample information, all Mizo youths are members of community based organizations like YMA (Young Mizo Association)), and have been active in YMA activities since the last 7 years. Other than these community organisations, majority of Mizo youths also engage in Church youth fellowships. This adds to the variety of social roles and situations they participate in. It may be noted that such multiple social interactions would lead to multiple self-presentation. It was also found (Daukantaite & Thompson, 2014) that young adults were generally less consistent in their identity presentation in multiple social roles and contexts.

Donahue et al (1993) used role theory to argue that when social role increases individuals tend to endorse self-concept differentiation. In a Mizo society, the younger age groups are assigned maximal social duties and obligations. The struggle to juggle between traditional roles in CBOs like YMA and faith based organisations like Church fellowships in addition to normal family and informal social groups especially for young Mizo women may

have led to identity inconsistency which is rather appreciated and applauded in a collectivistic Mizo society.

Mizo youths are essential human capitals in Mizo society. They have been taught from a very early age to practice the most important Mizo ethos, an untranslatable term called “*Tlawmngaihna*” which is close to altruism and selfless acts (Angom, 2020; Khawbung, 2019). In addition to this, Mizo youths like any other young individuals indulge in an extensive use of social networking sites (Lalnunpuii and Verma, 2016). This may also require youths to engage in maintaining a virtual profile which may be vaguely or quite different from their other selves. Therefore, the multiplicity of social contexts in the lives of Mizo youths may have determined the sampling of different identities.

The present study may be limited only for conceptual applications among youths experiencing collectivistic culture settings. A cross cultural study comparing youths from both individualistic and collectivistic communities would enrich the existing literature. It would also open avenues for academic investigations on culture factors to explain trends of identity consistency in varying cultures.

In summary, this study revealed that young Mizo women generally manage multiple identities and social roles according to social demands and expectations. The current study to some extent supplements the notion held for typical collectivistic societies, which is that flexibility in the form of adaptive self-presentation yield positive well-being among collectivistic cultures. Hence, such gender specific and culture specific results may be taken into account for better understanding of individuals and groups in societies, even while considering implementation of programs and schemes especially in the social and health sectors.

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