

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232224171>

# Collectivism and the Meaning of Suffering

Article in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* · October 2012

DOI: 10.1037/a0030382 · Source: PubMed

---

CITATIONS

24

READS

1,426

4 authors, including:



Zachary K Rothschild

Bowdoin College

35 PUBLICATIONS 1,834 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

# Collectivism and the Meaning of Suffering

Daniel Sullivan and Mark J. Landau  
University of Kansas

Aaron C. Kay  
Duke University

Zachary K. Rothschild  
University of Kansas

People need to understand why an instance of suffering occurred and what purpose it might have. One widespread account of suffering is a *repressive suffering construal* (RSC): interpreting suffering as occurring because people deviate from social norms and as having the purpose of reinforcing the social order. Based on the theorizing of Emile Durkheim and others, we propose that RSC is associated with social morality—the belief that society dictates morality—and is encouraged by collectivist (as opposed to individualist) sentiments. Study 1 showed that dispositional collectivism predicts both social morality and RSC. Studies 2–4 showed that priming collectivist (vs. individualist) self-construal increases RSC of various types of suffering and that this effect is mediated by increased social morality (Study 4). Study 5 examined behavioral intentions, demonstrating that parents primed with a collectivist self-construal interpreted children’s suffering more repressively and showed greater support for corporal punishment of children.

*Keywords:* repressive suffering construal, suffering, collectivism, individualism, moral foundations

People have a fundamental need to make sense of the harsh reality of widespread human suffering. As Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, and Park (1997) wrote,

It is as if the desire to make suffering intelligible and to turn it to some advantage is one of those dignifying peculiarities of our species, like the ability to cook or conjugate verbs or conceive of the idea of justice. (p. 119)

At a practical level, understanding why an incident of suffering occurred may enable the individual to avoid such incidents in the future (Douglas, 1966). At a more symbolic level, the conviction that one knows how to avoid suffering offers a sense of control, without which the individual might feel as if her efforts in the world were potentially futile (Lerner, 1980). Nietzsche (1964) in fact argued that one of the primary functions of a cultural worldview,<sup>1</sup> as well as one of the main reasons why cultural worldviews were created in the first place, is to provide explanatory solace in the face of suffering. Indeed, since suffering is highly aversive and implies the possible futility of all human endeavors, unexplained suffering may actually pose a threat to the validity of one’s cultural

worldview or sense of the meaningfulness of life (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Nietzsche, 1967).

As Shweder et al. (1997) and Douglas (1994) noted, a given instance of suffering can be explained in a variety of different ways, and each cultural worldview might encourage a different explanation. If someone contracts an illness, for example, she may believe that she has been exposed to an airborne virus and that her best course of action is to ingest antiviral drugs. Alternatively, she may instead believe that the illness is her just punishment for deviation from a moral norm of her culture (such as abstaining from sex before marriage) and that her best course of action is to do penance or adhere strongly to this norm in the future.

The latter of these explanations can be classified as a *repressive suffering construal* (RSC): a construal of suffering as punishment for the violation of a social norm and as having the purpose of maintaining social order. This class of explanation for suffering is one of the oldest in human cultural history (Ricoeur, 1967; Weber, 1946) and can be observed, for example, in the common phenomenon of blaming victims for their own misfortune (Lerner, 1980). However, despite the ubiquity of RSCs, little empirical research within social psychology has investigated the cultural factors that determine whether people interpret suffering repressively or the psychological process through which such cultural factors operate.

Theory (e.g., Durkheim, 1893/1997) suggests that collectivist cultures will be more likely to interpret suffering repressively than

---

This article was published Online First October 8, 2012.

Daniel Sullivan and Mark J. Landau, Department of Psychology, University of Kansas; Aaron C. Kay, Department of Management & Organizations and Department of Psychology & Neuroscience, Duke University; Zachary K. Rothschild, Department of Psychology, University of Kansas.

This research was partly supported by the National Science Foundation through a Graduate Research Fellowship awarded to Daniel Sullivan, under Grant DGE-0907996.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Daniel Sullivan, Department of Psychology, University of Kansas, 1415 Jayhawk Boulevard Room 426, Lawrence, KS 66045-7556. E-mail: dsully@ku.edu

---

<sup>1</sup> We define a *cultural worldview* as a coherent set of beliefs about (a) how reality reliably operates (or the nature of causality and physics), (b) what types of personal actions are valuable, and (c) how one’s actions and experience are meaningfully related to a broader collective history and ordered cosmos. The latter two aspects of a worldview provide the foundation of an individual’s sense of her life’s ultimate significance (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003).

will individualist cultures. In settings where individuals are closely bound through frequent interpersonal contact and kinship relations and where economic as well as socioemotional interdependence prevails, a strong sense of a mutually enforced social morality is vital. In such settings, the tendency to interpret suffering as caused by deviation from social norms and as ultimately serving to maintain those norms helps reinforce this communal ethic. Based on this line of thought, in five studies, we tested the hypothesized link between a collectivist orientation and the tendency to construe suffering as repressive.

### Repressive Suffering Construal

Following the work of Douglas (1966) and Shweder et al. (1997), we assert that individuals are motivated not only to interpret and explain suffering but to find explanations that satisfy two aims: (a) to provide a causal account of why a given misfortune befell a particular person or group of people and (b) to provide a teleological account of the purpose that the consequent suffering serves. When these two aims are met, suffering appears meaningful: The individual not only knows why the misfortune occurred and what she can do to avoid it but also is assured that this misfortune and others like it are not pointless but rather fulfill some important function, making them regrettable but necessary. Accordingly, we conceive of a repressive construal of suffering as providing both a causal and a teleological account of suffering. Causally, a repressive construal involves the assumption that suffering occurs as a result of deviating from social norms or behaving immorally; teleologically, a repressive construal involves the corresponding assumption that the purpose of suffering is to enforce compliance with norms and maintain the social order. We now turn to a selective review of theory and research suggesting that people often rely on both of these assumptions when explaining suffering.

As many scholars (e.g., Douglas, 1966; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Lerner, 1980; Wolfenstein, 1957) have argued, people have historically preferred not to explain suffering in terms of chance probabilities or the workings of impartial physical forces. Instead, people tend to attach a deeper meaning and agentic causes to their explanations of suffering. Weber (1946) claimed that one of the earliest and most common of these causal ontologies of misfortune was the belief that suffering indicated immorality or past deviation from social norms on the part of the sufferer. In this early line of thought—according to Weber, common among preindustrial cultures—people reasoned that natural disasters, disease, and poverty affected some people and not others because the former broke laws or customs and thus violated a sacred or social covenant. In short, those who suffered were seen as antisocial, morally corrupt, and generally disliked—deserving of their fate.

The empirical literature suggests that this causal account of suffering remains common in industrialized modernity. Across a variety of social domains and using various operationalizations, research inspired by just-world theory (Lerner, 1980) has shown that individuals ascribe more blame to suffering victims who appear completely undeserving of their fate (for a review of this research, see Hafer & Bègue, 2005). Just-world theory holds that people take apparently undeserved suffering to be a sign of the victim's moral culpability or dubious character

because such an interpretation sustains their conviction that the world is a place where actions lead to expected outcomes (i.e., good deeds beget benevolent results).

Because of its focus on people's motivation to see the world as navigable and predictable, just-world research highlights people's tendency to give a causal account of suffering through victim blaming, rather than their need to give a teleological account of suffering (although some recent research inspired by just-world theory examines expected victim outcomes, which relate more to the attempt to justify suffering as having some ultimate purpose; see Anderson, Kay, & Fitzsimons, 2010). We assert, however, that the proclivity to explain suffering as caused by victim immorality is generally associated with a corresponding tendency to see suffering as having the ultimate purpose of reinforcing the social order. If suffering is viewed as deserved punishment for deviation from norms, then presumably the ascribed function of that punishment is the maintenance of these norms.

Emile Durkheim (1893/1997) reviewed penal codes in different historical settings to argue that punishment that merely inflicts suffering on a criminal—what he called a *repressive sanction*—has often been legitimized as a means of deterring future crimes because it (allegedly) incapacitates the criminal and discourages others from pursuing the same path. More recently, Carlsmith, Darley, and Robinson (2002) found that U.S. college students strongly endorse such deterrence motives as justification for the punishment of criminals. Moving beyond teleological justifications for punishment that is expressly inflicted by social authorities on criminals, we believe that if people interpret any incident of suffering repressively as punishment for moral or cultural deviance, they will concurrently ascribe a socially protective function to that suffering. For example, if a disease is interpreted as punishment for lascivious conduct, then that disease will also be seen as having the function of deterring such conduct.

Together, the causal interpretation of suffering as caused by social deviance and its teleological interpretation as preventing deviance constitute an RSC. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1967) identified these two interrelated interpretations as forming the earliest systematic instantiation of suffering construal in what he called *archaic religions*. Partly supporting this analysis, anthropologists working in diverse areas across the world have noted the high presence of RSCs in preindustrial societies. The Ojibwe (or Salteaux) First Nation of Canada traditionally explained pernicious bouts of illness as the result of interpersonal or religious infractions and believed that a confession to the community on the part of the ailing individual will remove the suffering and reinforce communal bonds (Hallowell, 1976). Similar interpretations of physical maladies and seemingly random misfortune have been documented in a rural American Indian community in Guatemala (Gillin, 1951) and the Naath (or Nuer) group in South Sudan (Evans-Pritchard, 1956).

Given that anthropological and social psychological research on people's justifications for penal sanctions and interpretations of others' suffering suggests that RSC is common, the question arises as to what psychological factors especially promote such construal.

### Social Morality: The Cultural Background of RSC

Deutsch (1975), Douglas (1994), and Shweder et al. (1997) converged on the idea that different types of social organization require different ideas about justice, morality, and the ontology of suffering. This implies that RSCs may be more common in some cultural worldviews than in others.

Durkheim (1893/1997) argued that repressive sanctions are most common in communities displaying high levels of what he called the *conscience collective* (in English, *collective conscience* or *collective consciousness*). This term implies the belief that societal laws are absolutely binding on the individual and sacrosanct. More than a century later, Shweder et al. (1997) identified three different *ethics* that can be used to classify the moral understandings of different groups across the globe. Two of these ethics are, in our opinion, representative of Durkheim's *conscience collective*: the *ethic of community*, which involves a focus on maintaining social cohesion and hierarchy through adherence to norms and duties, and the *ethic of divinity*, which involves a focus on preventing moral contamination through the enforcement of sacred rules and the prohibition of immoral acts. We believe that these two ethics often co-occur and can be subsumed for our purposes under the broader term *social morality*: the belief that society dictates morality and that individual deviations from societal moral codes are harmful and corruptive of society.

We assert that where sentiments of social morality are high, suffering is more likely to be construed in a repressive manner. Where people are highly concerned with maintaining social cohesion and conforming to strict, socially dictated religious or traditional codes for behavior, personal suffering is likely to be considered an indication that a disruption has occurred in the social or divine order, a disruption that must be rectified. In the next section, we propose that because cultural collectivism is positively associated with social morality, settings and situations that induce collectivist sentiments will also elevate the tendency to construe suffering as repressive.

### Collectivism and RSC

The distinction between individualist and collectivist cultures has offered the most fruitful starting point for research on culturally determined differences in attitudes, behavior, and cognition (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Oyserman & Lee, 2008b). Collectivists tend to see themselves as inescapably embedded in a network of social relationships and as part of a greater social whole. Conversely, individualists have a default independent self-construal based on an atomistic understanding of the self, meaning they tend to see themselves in terms of their personal (rather than group) identities and consider most of their social relationships potentially dissoluble (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). At the same time, the behavior of collectivists is best predicted from the norms and goals of the group; the personal goals of collectivists tend to overlap with those of the group (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). The behavior of individualists, however, is best predicted from their personal goals (which may conflict with group goals) and attitudes. In short, the collectivism-individualism dichotomy holds that some cultures foster thought and behavior primarily oriented to the maintenance of the social group and interpersonal relationships, while other cultures encour-

age individuals to behave in ways that maximize their own self-interest and -expression.

Collectivist orientations tend to be associated with endorsement of values that represent social morality (Oishi, Schimmack, Diener, & Suh, 1998). In addition, cultural collectivism is often related to (although not synonymous with) *tight* (as opposed to *loose*) culture (Gelfand et al., 2011). Individuals in tight cultures feel bound to one another by their mutual respect for codified traditions and sacred social norms. They have a clear sense of their role within a social hierarchy, which they generally perceive to be legitimate and unquestionable. They respect authority figures and show considerable willingness to sacrifice their own interests to either these authorities or the group as a whole. They are sensitive to deviations from the group's norms and strive to curtail any activity that threatens the established social order (see Douglas, 1994). Because of this, it is theorized that RSCs tend to be more common in collectivist cultures (Durkheim, 1893/1997; Fiske, 1991). Indeed, the aforementioned preindustrial societies, in which the commonality of RSC has been observed by anthropologists, are all relatively collectivist in nature.

Based on the foregoing analysis, we hypothesized that (a) collectivism would be positively associated with social morality, (b) social morality would be positively associated with RSC, and therefore (c) collectivism would be positively associated with RSC. We tested these links in five studies. In our first study, we sought correlational support for our overall model by assessing dispositional variation in collectivism, as well as endorsement of social morality and RSC. We expected that higher levels of collectivism would predict stronger endorsement of social morality and a greater tendency to construe suffering as repressive and that the effect of collectivism on RSC would occur via an indirect effect on social morality.

In four additional studies, we sought experimental evidence for the contention that collectivism encourages repressive construals of suffering. Studies 2 and 3 drew on Oyserman and Lee's (2008b) situated cognition perspective on culture, which posits that individuals within a given cultural context can be situationally primed with collectivist and individualist self-construals. Specifically, we primed U.S. citizens with either an individualist or collectivist self-construal and then assessed their tendency to repressively construe either suffering in general (Study 2) or a particular incident of suffering (Study 3). We predicted that those participants primed with a collectivist self-construal—that is, those for whom more collectivist cognitions had been brought online—would exhibit greater RSC. Studies 4 and 5 examined the process and outcomes of this effect. In Study 4, we primed undergraduate students with either an individualist or collectivist self-construal and then assessed their endorsement of social morality and tendency to repressively construe the suffering experienced by teenagers. Matching our predictions for the individual-difference measures collected in Study 1, we expected collectivist-primed participants to show higher RSC and for this effect to be mediated by a corresponding increase in endorsement of social morality. Focusing on the consequences for policy endorsement and behavioral intentions of RSC, in Study 5, we primed parents with either an individualist or collectivist self-construal and assessed their tendency to construe the suffering of children repressively, as well as their support for corporal punishment of young students. We predicted that collectivist-primed participants would show height-



ened support for corporal punishment measures and that this effect would be driven by a corresponding increase in RSC.

### Study 1

Study 1 sought initial support for our model by examining individual variation in collectivism, social morality endorsement, and RSC. We assessed dispositional collectivism using the dimensional collectivism scale designed by Singelis et al. (1995). Past research and the present theoretical analysis support the hypotheses that collectivism would positively predict both social morality and RSC. Furthermore, we hypothesized that the effect of collectivism on RSC would occur via an indirect effect on social morality.

We assessed social morality using a previously validated measure of moral foundations (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). This measure assesses what considerations individuals characteristically rely on to make moral judgments. These considerations include the perceived importance of breaches in hierarchy or deviation from traditional roles (the *authority* foundation), of maintaining loyalty to one's social group (the *ingroup* foundation), and of violations of physical or spiritual purity (the *purity* foundation). Haidt and Joseph (2007) claimed that the ingroup and authority moral foundations represent the ethic of community and that the purity moral foundation represents the ethic of divinity. Graham et al.'s (2009) full measure also assesses the relevance of *harm* and *fairness* moral foundations, but these are theorized to be more individualistic foundations characteristic of the ethic of autonomy and are therefore irrelevant to our current analysis. On the basis of our assertion that social morality combines the ethics of community and divinity, we treated individual differences in reliance on the ingroup, authority, and purity foundations as a composite measure of social morality endorsement. Accordingly, we administered select subscales of the moral foundations measure to test our hypotheses that social morality endorsement would be positively associated with both collectivism and RSC.

Given that no measure of RSC has yet appeared in the literature, for Study 1, we designed a measure of the tendency to construe suffering in general as repressive. Following our theoretical analysis, we designed a scale with items measuring people's tendency to both *causally* explain suffering as stemming from personal immorality and deviance and *teleologically* construe the function of suffering as maintaining the social order.

Finally, we wanted to test whether our model held while controlling for demographic and attitudinal variables that might conceivably influence social morality and/or RSC. Political conservatism has been shown to be positively associated with conformity to traditional moral and religious norms and values and has also been linked to punitive attitudes toward individuals and groups seen as threatening societal order (Altemeyer, 1998). Thus, political orientation could be associated with both social morality and RSC and might account for any observed relationship between these variables. We assert, however, that the association between collectivist sentiments and RSC exists independent of political conservatism. Thus, we predicted that political orientation would not fully account for the hypothesized association between collectivism and RSC. We also included measures of three variables that have been shown to be predictive of support for socially sanctioned punishment: education and income level (Dowler, 2003), as

well as religiosity (e.g., Ulmer, Bader, & Gault, 2008). We predicted that the effect of collectivism on RSC would hold even controlling for these potentially related variables.

### Method

One hundred and seventy-seven participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete a survey designed with Qualtrics software.<sup>2</sup> Of these, the data of 15 participants were excluded because they failed to complete all measures, leaving a final total of 162 participants (72 female). Participants were paid \$.30 for their participation.

**Demographics and covariates.** In addition to providing some basic demographic information, participants indicated their religious beliefs by responding to the item "How important are your religious beliefs to you?" (1 = *not at all important*, 9 = *very important*;  $M_{Grand} = 4.52$ ,  $SD = 3.00$ ). They then responded to an item assessing political orientation: "When it comes to social issues, how would you describe your political beliefs?" (1 = *very conservative*, 5 = *moderate*, 9 = *very liberal*;  $M_{Grand} = 5.91$ ,  $SD = 2.13$ ). Participants then rated their highest attained level of education on the following scale: 1 = *less than 8 years*, 2 = *between 8 and 11 years*, 3 = *12 years, or completed high school*, 4 = *post-high school training other than college (vocational or technical)*, 5 = *some college*, 6 = *college graduate*, 7 = *postgraduate* ( $M_{Grand} = 5.26$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ). They indicated their total household income on the following scale: 1 = *less than \$15,000*, 2 = *between \$15,000 and \$25,000*, 3 = *between \$25,000 and \$35,000*, 4 = *between \$35,000 and \$50,000*, 5 = *between \$50,000 and \$75,000*, 6 = *between \$75,000 and \$100,000*, 7 = *more than \$100,000* ( $M_{Grand} = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ).

**Collectivism.** Participants then completed a modified version of the dimensional collectivism scale (Singelis et al., 1995). Specifically, participants rated their level of agreement (on 7-point scales) with 10 items assessing different aspects of collectivism (sample items: "I usually sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of my group," "My happiness depends very much on the happiness of those around me"). The items showed good reliability ( $\alpha = .82$ ), and we averaged them to form composite collectivism scores, with higher values indicating greater dispositional collectivism.

**Social morality.** Participants completed nine items modified from the moral relevance items developed by Graham et al. (2009). Specifically, participants indicated (on 7-point scales) the importance to their moral thinking of three sets of three elements, each relevant to one of three of the moral foundations subscales: the authority (sample item: "It is important to respect the traditions of society"), ingroup (sample item: "It is important that people never

<sup>2</sup> Mechanical Turk is a service provided by Amazon.com. Through this interface, anyone using the Internet can sign up to participate in "Human Intelligence Tasks" (such as research studies) that are completed online. Recruitment messages for studies appear at the Mechanical Turk website, and members of the site can decide to participate based on these messages. We limited Mechanical Turk samples to U.S. residents, meaning we obtained demographics similar to those of all U.S. Internet users. In all studies using samples obtained through Mechanical Turk (Studies 1–3), only one participant indicated that he or she had previously participated in a study designed by our research team. The data from this participant were removed from the data set prior to analyses to avoid possible demand and interdependence of observations.

betray their group”), and purity (sample item: “It is important not to violate standards of purity and decency”) subscales. These subscales best represent our construct of social morality. All nine items showed good reliability ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and were averaged to form a composite measure, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement of social morality.

**RSC.** Participants completed a five-item measure of construal of suffering in general as repressive. Two items assessed a repressive *causal* account of suffering: “By and large, the people who suffer most severely in life are immoral people,” and “By and large, the people who suffer most severely in life are the people who break society’s rules.” Three additional items assessed a repressive *teleological* account of suffering: “In many cases, it is necessary for people to suffer so that they won’t do harm to society as a whole,” “In many cases, the purpose of suffering is to prevent people who have done harm to others from doing any further harm,” and “By suffering, the sufferer is often paying back a debt owed to society or other people.” All items were answered on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The items showed good reliability ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and were averaged to form a composite measure of RSC.

## Results and Discussion

**Social morality.** We tested the possible effects of collectivism on social morality using hierarchical linear regression analysis. With social morality as our outcome variable, in Step 1, we entered our covariates: religiosity, political orientation, education level, and income level. In Step 2, we entered our primary predictor of collectivism.<sup>3</sup> Among our covariates, we observed only main effects of religiosity,  $\beta = .30$ ,  $SE = .03$ ,  $t(147) = 3.65$ ,  $p < .001$ , and political orientation,  $\beta = -.17$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $t(147) = -2.07$ ,  $p = .04$ . The inclusion of collectivism in Step 2 contributed significantly to our ability to account for the variance in social morality,  $\Delta R^2 = .30$ ,  $F(1, 146) = 78.79$ ,  $p < .001$ . As hypothesized, collectivism was significantly positively associated with endorsement of social morality,  $\beta = .62$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t(146) = 8.88$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**RSC.** We submitted our RSC scores to the same hierarchical linear regression analysis. Among our covariates, we observed only a main effect of political orientation,  $\beta = -.27$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t(147) = -3.20$ ,  $p < .01$ . Including collectivism in Step 2 contributed significantly to our ability to account for the variance in RSC,  $\Delta R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(1, 146) = 8.59$ ,  $p < .01$ . As expected, collectivism predicted RSC significantly and positively,  $\beta = .25$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $t(146) = 2.93$ ,  $p < .01$ . The correlations between all variables are presented in Table 1.<sup>4</sup>

**Indirect effects analysis.** Our analysis suggests that the effect of collectivism on RSC occurs through an indirect effect on social morality. We assessed this possibility using Preacher and Hayes’s (2008) procedure and SPSS macro for testing indirect effects. Specifically, we regressed RSC scores onto collectivism scores, with social morality entered as the proposed mediating variable and religiosity, political orientation, education level, and income level entered as covariates. Five thousand bootstrapping resamples were performed. The 95% confidence interval obtained for the indirect effect of collectivism on RSC via social morality did not contain zero (.04, .53). We thus found evidence at  $\alpha = .05$  that the positive association between collectivism and RSC occurred

through an indirect effect on social morality (for a graphical depiction of the indirect effects model, see Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

Study 1 effectively demonstrated the hypothesized link between individual differences in collectivism, RSC, and social morality. Predicted associations were found between collectivism and RSC, as well as between RSC and subscales representative of concern with the ethics of community and divinity, which we claim constitute social morality. Evidence was found that the effect of collectivism on RSC occurs via an indirect effect on social morality. In addition, the predicted associations were significant even when the effects of religiosity, political orientation, education, and income level were controlled for.

Due to the correlational nature of the Study 1 data, we could not be certain whether collectivism causes RSC. We therefore felt it was necessary to obtain experimental evidence for our proposed causal account. There are established experimental methods for inducing a collectivist self-construal, as we discuss below. We utilized these methods in Studies 2–5 to assess the effect of primed general collectivist self-construal on RSC.

## Study 2

Oyserman and Lee’s (2008b) situated cognition perspective on culture suggests that individuals in all cultures have access to individualist and collectivist cognitive content and that content of either type may be activated through subtle primes. More specif-

<sup>3</sup> In this and the following studies, the analyses were originally conducted with gender and ethnicity as between-groups factors. In only one of these studies did we observe a main effect or interaction involving either of these factors: Study 5 revealed a main effect of gender, such that men expressed greater endorsement of RSC compared to women,  $F(1, 108) = 7.30$ ,  $p < .01$ . Since such effects did not consistently emerge across the studies or interact with our variables of primary theoretical interest, we have simplified our presentation by not mentioning these factors further.

<sup>4</sup> Because we used a dimensional collectivism scale (Singelis et al., 1995), we conducted supplemental analyses to determine whether there were differences in the extent to which vertical versus horizontal collectivism predicted RSC. While horizontal collectivism generally represents a sense of ingroup solidarity and self-definition as part of the collective, vertical collectivism is more connected to the maintenance of a collectivist hierarchy through self-sacrifice and obedience to norms (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). In the dimensional collectivism scale we employed, five items each are designed to assess the separate dimensions of vertical and horizontal collectivism. We ran the same regression analysis, with RSC as the dependent variable, but with vertical and horizontal collectivism entered as separate predictors in the second step. In this analysis, vertical collectivism accounted almost exclusively for the increase in explained variance in Step 2,  $\beta = .35$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t(145) = 3.83$ ,  $p < .001$ . Alternately, horizontal collectivism did not predict RSC when controlling for the effect of vertical collectivism,  $\beta = -.07$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $t(145) = -0.75$ ,  $p = .46$ . This suggests that it is the more vertical aspects of collectivism—that is, preference for tradition and hierarchy—that primarily carry the effect of this variable on RSC. However, future research should investigate this possibility further. This issue is addressed in the General Discussion.

<sup>5</sup> Following Preacher and Hayes’s (2008) recommendation, we used bootstrapping tests for indirect effects and mediational hypotheses in Studies 1, 4, and 5 because this approach does not rely on distributional assumptions that are likely violated in the case of testing for indirect effects. However, it was also the case that the data in each study showed significant or marginally significant evidence for mediation using the more traditional, nonbootstrapping approach of the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982), which is generally a more conservative test. Specifically, for Study 1,  $Z = 2.27$ ,  $p = .02$ ; for Study 4,  $Z = 2.14$ ,  $p = .03$ ; for Study 5,  $Z = 1.71$ ,  $p = .09$ .

Table 1  
Correlations Between All Variables (Study 1)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Collectivism	—						
2. Social morality	.64**	—					
3. Repressive suffering construal	.24**	.35**	—				
4. Religiosity	.42*	.36**	.16*	—			
5. Political orientation	-.11	-.28**	-.27**	-.40**	—		
6. Education level	.09	.02	-.08	-.12	.13	—	
7. Income level	.11	.04	-.05	.02	-.04	.31**	—

Note. Higher political orientation scores indicate greater liberalism.  $N = 162$ .

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

ically, these authors claimed that priming a collectivist self-construal increases cognitive accessibility of (a) collectivist values, (b) relational and social aspects of the self-concept, and (c) obligations to ingroup members. Supporting this notion, dozens of studies in multiple countries have shown that priming collectivism (as opposed to individualism) in a variety of ways engenders more collectivist attitudes and cognitions (for review, see Oyserman & Lee, 2008a).

Drawing on this prior work, we experimentally tested the link between collectivism and RSC by priming either a collectivist or an individualist self-construal using a previously validated manipulation (Brewer & Gardner, 1996) and then assessing RSC using the new measure described in Study 1. We predicted that individuals primed with a collectivist self-construal (as compared to those primed with an individualist self-construal) would demonstrate a greater tendency to construe suffering in general as repressive.

Finally, we were interested in again controlling for potentially related variables and further establishing the independence of RSC as a construct. Study 1 showed that the relationship between collectivism and RSC holds when controlling for a variety of potentially related demographic and attitudinal variables. Nevertheless, we also found RSC to be significantly associated with both religiosity ( $r = .16$ ) and political orientation ( $r = -.27$ ). To further assess the potential effect of these variables, we again measured religiosity, political orientation, and education level.

## Method

Sixty-eight participants were recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete a survey designed with Qualtrics software. Participants were paid \$1.80 for their participation. Eight participants were excluded from the final analyses because they expressed either some confusion or suspicion concerning the procedure.<sup>6</sup> This left a final total of 60 participants (33 female) who were randomly assigned to either an individualist or collectivist self-construal priming condition. Endorsement of RSC was our dependent measure of interest.

**Demographics and religiosity.** Participants indicated their gender and ethnicity. They also indicated their political affiliation on a 9-point scale (1 = *very conservative*, 5 = *moderate*, 9 = *very liberal*;  $M_{\text{Grand}} = 5.60$ ,  $SD = 2.21$ ). They then indicated their highest attained level of education on the same 7-point scale used in Study 1 ( $M_{\text{Grand}} = 5.60$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ).

Participants then answered three questions concerning their religious beliefs: “How important are your religious beliefs to you?”

(1 = *not at all important*, 9 = *very important*), “To what extent do you think that God or some type of nonhuman entity is in control of the events in the universe?” (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*), and “To what extent do you think that the events in the universe unfold according to God’s, or some type of nonhuman entity’s, plan?” (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*). These three items showed good reliability ( $\alpha = .91$ ) and were accordingly combined into a composite measure of religiosity.

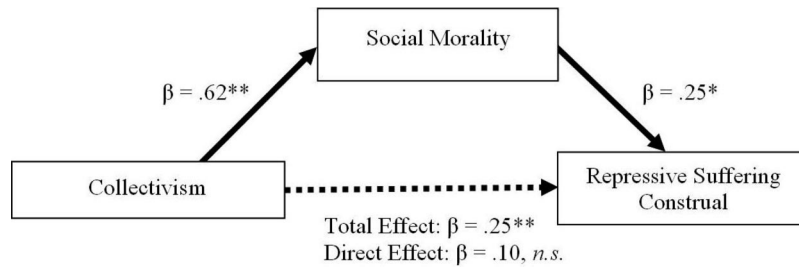
**Self-construal prime.** Participants were primed with either an individualist or collectivist self-construal using a pronoun-circling task modified from one used by Brewer and Gardner (1996) and validated in several studies (for review, see Oyserman & Lee, 2008a). In an ostensible grammar task, participants read a short story about a trip to a major metropolitan area and were asked to click on any personal pronouns they found in the story. In the individualist self-construal prime condition, all the (20) pronouns used in the story were first-person singular: *I*, *me*, or *my*. In the collectivist self-construal prime condition, all the (20) pronouns used in the story were first-person plural: *we*, *us*, or *our*. After removing the data of two participants who expressed considerable difficulty completing the task (see Footnote 6), level of perceived task difficulty (on a 7-point scale, 1 = *not at all difficult*, 7 = *very difficult*) was low overall ( $M_{\text{Grand}} = 1.57$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) and did not differ as a function of condition,  $t(58) = 1.30$ ,  $p = .20$ .

**RSC.** Participants completed the same five-item measure of general RSC used in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

## Results and Discussion

Submitting our RSC measure to an independent-samples  $t$  test (self-construal: individualist vs. collectivist) revealed the predicted effect,  $t(58) = 2.08$ ,  $p = .04$ . Participants primed with a collectivist self-construal expressed higher levels of RSC ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) than participants primed with an

<sup>6</sup> After completing the study, participants were given the opportunity to provide open-ended responses to a question about whether they had any comments about their experience during the study. Prior to any analyses, the data of eight participants were excluded based on confusions or suspicions expressed in response to this item. Specifically, two participants claimed that they had difficulty completing the computerized version of the pronoun-circling task used to prime self-construal, three participants felt confused by the subjective nature of the questions they were asked about suffering, and three additional participants expressed strong suspicion, claiming that they felt like they were being deceived in the study.



*Figure 1.* Indirect effects model (Study 1). All path coefficients represent standardized regression weights. The model controls for religiosity, political orientation, education level, and income. The direct effect coefficient represents the effect of the independent variable after controlling for the effect of the proposed mediator. Total adjusted  $R^2$  for the model = .15,  $F(6, 145) = 5.23$ ,  $p < .001$ . \* Significant at  $p < .05$ . \*\* Significant at  $p < .01$ .

individualist self-construal ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ). Furthermore, the effect of self-construal on RSC remained significant ( $p = .04$ ) when political orientation, religiosity, and education level were entered simultaneously as covariates. RSC was not significantly correlated with political orientation, religiosity, or education level ( $r_s < .22$ ,  $p_s > .10$ ).

The results of this experimental study replicate the link between collectivism and RSC observed in Study 1 while providing greater certainty about causality. In addition, RSC seems to be distinct from potentially related variables, such as religiosity, education level, and political orientation.

Study 2 established that primed collectivist self-construal increases repressive construals of suffering *in general*. However, three important questions remained regarding the nature of this effect. First, will the same prime increase the tendency to construe a *particular* concrete instance of suffering repressively, rather than general suffering in the abstract? Second, what is the mechanism behind this effect: Does a contextually salient collectivist self-construal increase RSC via an increase in social morality, as we claim? Finally, what are some of the outcomes of this effect: Does elevated RSC have consequences for behavioral intentions and other practically important variables? Study 3 answers the first of these questions and helps demonstrate the broader societal significance of RSC by examining preferences for different construals of the suffering that results from acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). Studies 4 and 5 address the remaining two questions in turn.

### Study 3

According to Sontag (1989), AIDS is an illness that has been shrouded in metaphoric construals and meaning-laden interpretations. Sontag argued that the uncertainty of the scientific community regarding how to most effectively treat and cure AIDS, combined with the popular conception that AIDS differentially affects certain population demographics, results in both a heightened need on the part of the public to find explanations for the syndrome and a tendency to find an explanation in dispositional attributions.

Fleshing out this analysis, Douglas (1994) provided an account of the different attributions that have emerged for AIDS as a function of the type of social group most attracted to each attribution. Those individuals who feel the strongest ties to the collec-

tive and who define themselves primarily in terms of their group membership tend to view AIDS in terms of the possibility of contagion and to associate the syndrome with counternormative lifestyles that they feel should be limited. Therefore, according to Douglas, people in whom strong collectivist sentiments are active should be motivated to construe AIDS as repressive. A second possible interpretation comes from those marginalized populations viewed by society at large as being at risk for the syndrome (such as the homosexual community). Individuals in this category may actually come to see AIDS as a marker of an alternate social identity, and the risk of contracting AIDS as an opportunity for self-expression, rather than a possibility to be feared or reviled. Finally, according to Douglas, individualists within a modern community—people who are not especially attached to the collective but who are also not defined by membership in a marginalized subgroup—want only assurance that AIDS is understood by scientific authorities and can be controlled or contained through medical techniques and social practices.

Drawing on Douglas's (1994) analysis, we designed Study 3 to test whether the proposed link between collectivism and RSC has practically important consequences for people's interpretation of the suffering resulting from AIDS. We primed participants with either a collectivist or an individualist self-construal and then presented them with three written accounts of AIDS that reflect the three construals described by Douglas: a repressive construal (which focused on the notion that AIDS is a result of deviant behavior and that to combat AIDS, society should curtail deviant behavior), a redemptive construal (which focused on the experience of AIDS among patients, who sometimes view the syndrome in a more positive light), and a scientific-rational construal (which focused on the medical and scientific communities' understanding of and ability to control AIDS). We measured participants' liking for each construal. Based on Douglas's analysis and the results of the previous studies, we predicted that participants primed with a collectivist self-construal would show greater preference for the RSC of AIDS-related suffering than participants primed with an individualist self-construal. While all three construals of the suffering that results from AIDS portray it in ways that are laden with cultural meaning and give both causal and teleological accounts of this suffering, only the repressive interpretation of AIDS traces its causal origin back to antisocial behavior and its



teleological function to maintaining the social order through discouraging counternormative behavior.

## Method

Fifty-seven participants (33 female; recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk) completed a survey designed with Qualtrics software in exchange for \$1.80. Participants were randomly assigned to either an individualist or collectivist self-construal priming condition. We then assessed participants' preference for three different construals of AIDS: a repressive construal, a redemptive construal, and a scientific-rational construal.

**Self-construal prime.** After completing initial demographics measures, participants performed the same pronoun-circling task (Brewer & Gardner, 1996) used in Study 2. Perceived difficulty of the pronoun-circling task did not differ as a function of condition,  $t(55) = 1.10, p = .28$ .

**AIDS construals.** Participants then read three fabricated blog posts allegedly taken from an online science blog. The posts were ostensibly written by medical experts as part of an online debate about the causes of AIDS and how best our society should handle the issue of AIDS. In reality, the blog posts constituted our three construals of the suffering brought about by AIDS, based on the categories described by Douglas (1994). Importantly, because we propose that meaningful interpretations of suffering should offer both causal and teleological accounts of the misfortune in question, we designed each construal of AIDS-related suffering to provide different explanation of the origins of AIDS and the purpose it might serve.

In the *repressive AIDS construal*, the ostensible medical expert argued that AIDS is a result of deviant behavior and that our society should be committed to preventing individuals from engaging in such behavior in order to stop the spread of AIDS. The ostensible author thereby stressed the two important components of a RSC: Causally, the suffering brought about by AIDS is a result of antisocial behavior, and teleologically, the purpose of this suffering is to protect society by curtailing the growth of antisocial populations. The repressive construal included statements such as "By making people aware that AIDS is a likely result of careless sex and drug use, we can protect society from the dangerous consequences of these activities and destroy AIDS at the source."

In the *redemptive AIDS construal*, the ostensible author stressed the highly personal nature of the experience of living with AIDS for patients. To illustrate this, the author related the story of an ostensible patient who had had a life-transformative experience after developing AIDS. This patient had decided to divorce his wife and pursue his lifelong dream of painting as a result of the liberating realizations he had experienced in his encounter with AIDS. Thus, while this construal also imbued the suffering brought about by AIDS with meaning, the meaning was not repressive and social but rather redemptive and personal in nature. Specifically, the redemptive construal portrayed AIDS as causally unrelated to deviant behavior and as teleologically serving functions of individuation and identity reformation. The redemptive construal included statements such as "AIDS can change a person's outlook on life, giving them a new identity or a feeling of freedom. . . . The best thing our society can do is show respect and tolerance for those who have this condition."

In the *scientific-rational AIDS construal*, the ostensible author highlighted the extant scientific knowledge concerning the transfer of simian immunodeficiency virus in chimpanzees to human immunodeficiency virus in humans. The author argued that this occurrence was a matter of random chance, implicitly denying that any higher order meaning can be attached to the emergence of AIDS. Furthermore, rather than claim that society should repress individuals in at-risk populations or respect and celebrate those whose lives have been transformed by AIDS, the author simply advocated the use of drugs and scientific research to treat and prevent the syndrome. In short, this construal provided a biological/medical causal explanation for AIDS and a teleological account of the syndrome as encouraging individuals to rationally control the level of risk they experience in their daily lives. The scientific-rational construal included statements such as "By investing money and research into the development of means of sexual protection, needle exchange programs, and drugs, we can control and understand the risk of AIDS."

After reading each AIDS construal, participants completed three items assessing their preference for the author and the author's opinion on the issue: "I appreciated this perspective on the issues surrounding AIDS," "The author of this opinion seems qualified to discuss AIDS," and "I would be in favor of public policy and legislation based on this opinion" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Each set of three items was averaged to form three composite preference scores for the repressive ( $\alpha = .91$ ), redemptive ( $\alpha = .89$ ), and scientific-rational ( $\alpha = .87$ ) AIDS construals. Presentation of the AIDS construals was counterbalanced.

## Results and Discussion

To determine whether our self-construal prime differentially affected preferences for the three AIDS construals, we first performed a 2 (self-construal: individualist vs. collectivist)  $\times$  3 (order of presentation: repressive AIDS construal first vs. redemptive AIDS construal first vs. scientific-rational AIDS construal first)  $\times$  3 (AIDS construal: repressive vs. redemptive vs. scientific-rational) mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA) with AIDS construal serving as a within-subjects factor. The predicted Self-Construal Prime  $\times$  AIDS Construal interaction was marginally significant,  $F(2, 51) = 2.87, p = .06, \eta^2 = .05$ . We considered this finding sufficient evidence that our self-construal prime was having differential effects on preferences for each AIDS construal. Accordingly, we performed separate Self-Construal  $\times$  Order of Presentation analyses on each of these measures.

Submitting preference scores for the repressive AIDS construal to a 2 (self-construal: individualist vs. collectivist)  $\times$  3 (order of presentation) ANOVA revealed the predicted main effect for self-construal,  $F(1, 51) = 4.10, p = .05, \eta^2 = .07$ . Participants primed with a collectivist self-construal expressed greater preference for the repressive AIDS construal ( $M = 4.40, SD = 1.49$ ) than participants primed with an individualist self-construal ( $M = 3.53, SD = 1.85$ ). No significant effect of presentation order or interaction was observed.

Submitting preference scores for the redemptive and scientific-rational AIDS construals to the same analysis revealed no significant main effects or interactions ( $F_s < 2.6, p_s > .09$ ).

In line with our analysis, participants primed with a collectivist self-construal showed greater endorsement of a repressive con-

strual of AIDS-related suffering than participants primed with individualism. Combining this result with the finding from Study 2, evidence was found that primed collectivism increases preference for a repressive construal of both suffering in general and a particular type of suffering.

We might have expected to observe not only an increase in preference for a repressive construal of AIDS-related suffering among collectivism-primed participants but also a *decrease* in preference for the redemptive suffering construal, which portrayed AIDS as individuating. It is possible that we did not observe this effect because redemptive narratives of this sort are highly common and often preferred in U.S. culture (e.g., McAdams, 2006). The accessibility of such narratives for our U.S. participants might have circumvented any active dislike for redemptive construals that might otherwise have been activated by a collectivist orientation.

Having shown in Studies 2 and 3 that primed collectivist self-construal increases RSC, in Study 4, we investigated the process through which this effect occurs. Based on the correlational findings of Study 1, we predicted that the effect of our experimental manipulation would occur through social morality, which captures a preference for tradition, hierarchy, and purity.

### Study 4

In Study 4, we again examined the tendency to repressively construe a contextualized experience of suffering, namely, the much lamented (at least in the modern United States) suffering of the teenager. We recruited undergraduate participants who either still were in or had only recently matured beyond their teenage years and assessed the extent to which they repressively construed teenage suffering as a function of contextually salient individualist versus collectivist self-construal.

In addition to extending Studies 1 to 3 to examine interpretations of another, specific type of suffering, Study 4 was designed to experimentally test the proposed mediational process examined correlationally in Study 1. Specifically, after priming collectivist or individualist self-construal and prior to measuring RSC, we assessed participants' endorsement of social morality. Based on our theoretical analysis, we predicted that primed collectivist self-construal would increase endorsement of both social morality and RSC and that the effect of collectivist self-construal on RSC would be mediated by the corresponding increase in social morality.

A secondary goal of Study 4 was to obtain converging evidence for the effect of collectivist sentiments on RSC by manipulating self-construal via a different method than that used in Studies 2 and 3. We used an alternate means of priming individualist and collectivist self-construal based in past cultural psychological research (e.g., Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). Rather than subtly (and presumably nonconsciously) priming participants with different self-construals as in Studies 2 and 3, we asked participants to consciously reflect on either their close connection to and role within a local, hierarchically organized associational network—their family—or their relative independence from this network. Obtaining parallel effects of this more explicit collectivism prime on RSC would provide convergent evidence that activated collectivist sentiments do in fact heighten this particular form of suffering interpretation.

### Method

Sixty University of Kansas (Lawrence, Kansas) undergraduates of U.S. national origin completed an online study in exchange for course credit. Of these, five participants' data were removed because, in response to an item included at the beginning of the survey, they indicated having highly negative relationships with their families. We removed these participants' data because we were attempting to manipulate self-construal in the family context and we felt that participants with negative relationships to their family would be insensitive to our manipulation. Inspection of participant responses to our induction (see below for full description) bore out this assumption because these participants—regardless of condition—focused primarily on problems they experienced with their family members, such as ongoing arguments or major lifestyle differences. Including the data from these participants did not significantly alter the pattern of results.<sup>7</sup> Excluding them left a final total of 55 participants (27 female) who were randomly assigned to either an individualist or collectivist self-construal priming condition. Endorsements of social morality and RSC within the family context were our outcome measures of interest.

**Demographics and covariate.** Participants indicated their gender and ethnicity. They also indicated the extent to which they had personally suffered as a teenager by responding to the item “As a teenager, I experienced a great deal of suffering” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*;  $M_{\text{Grand}} = 3.35$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ). We included this item in order to control for individual variation in experience with this particular context of suffering in our primary analyses. Whereas, in Studies 1 and 2, we measured general perceptions of suffering and, in Study 3, we assessed suffering interpretations in a context where participants were unlikely to have experienced any suffering themselves, in this case, we oriented participants to a context where there would likely be considerable variability in the degree of personally experienced suffering. We included this covariate to determine whether our experimental prime would have an effect while holding individual variation in contextualized suffering experience constant.

**Self-construal prime.** Participants were primed with either an individualist or collectivist self-construal in an open-ended writing task modified from similar manipulations used in prior research (Kastenmüller, Greitemeyer, Jonas, Fischer, & Frey, 2010; Trafimow et al., 1991). Participants wrote short essays in response to two prompts. In the individualist self-construal condition, the first prompt asked participants to “write about how you are *different* from the other members of your family. . . .

<sup>7</sup> Including data from these participants did not alter the pattern of results in any way, although the effect of condition on RSC became marginal,  $F(1, 57) = 2.93$ ,  $p = .09$ . All other effects remained significant, including the bootstrapping test for mediation. We do not believe that the slight difference in results obtained when data from these participants were included reflects in any way on our theorizing about the present phenomenon. Because the exclusion variable asked participants only about their relationship to their family, and not about suffering, we do not believe this difference provides any information about how people might interpret suffering differently based on the quality of their family relationships. Rather, we simply believe that the family-based manipulation was less effective at inducing collectivist self-construal in these participants.

Discuss how you are sometimes emotionally distant from and don't identify with your family." We asked participants in the individualist self-construal condition to write about their emotional distance from family members based on past research suggesting that individualism is associated with greater emotional distance in the family and a greater tendency to experience socially disengaging emotions, whereas the opposite patterns are true for collectivism (e.g., Georgas et al., 2001; Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006). Participants in this condition also responded to a second prompt asking them to "please write about a role you play outside of your relationship to your family, and how this role contributes to the part of you that exists beyond your family background."

In the collectivist self-construal condition, the first prompt asked participants to "write about how you are *similar* to the other members of your family. . . . Discuss how you are emotionally connected to and identify with your family." The second prompt instructed participants to "write about the role you play in your family, and how you both rely on other family members and are relied on by them."

**Social morality.** Endorsement of social morality was assessed with nine items designed to reflect the self-construal priming context of familial relationships. Six of these items were modified versions of items from Graham et al.'s (2009) moral foundations scale. These items were highly similar to those used in Study 1 but were modified to reflect the family context. Sample items included "It is important never to betray one's family" and "It is important to respect family traditions." In addition, three other items assessed another core aspect of social morality, namely, perceptions that deviations from social norms are harmful for the group as a whole (e.g., "Breaking family traditions can be harmful for the family as a whole"). These items were completed on 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), and scores were averaged to yield a composite measure of endorsement of social morality ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

**RSC.** Before assessing RSC, we asked participants to reflect on a particular way in which suffering often manifests within the family context. Specifically, participants were informed that teenagers often experience suffering to a greater extent than other groups in the population (e.g., they have a greater likelihood of being involved in a car accident). Importantly, our participants were undergraduate students who either were still teenagers or had recently come to the end of their teenage years ( $M_{\text{Age}} = 19.42$  years). After reading this short description of teenagers' suffering, participants completed a measure of RSC assessing the extent to which they believed this suffering relates to teenagers' relationships with their families. In particular, they responded to two items assessing endorsement of the causal aspect of RSC ("Teenagers often experience suffering because they try to defy the rules and conventions of their family" and "Teenagers often experience suffering because they don't listen to their parents' advice") and one item assessing endorsement of the teleological aspect ("The suffering of teenagers should teach them to respect society's rules"). The items were completed on 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), and scores were averaged to yield a composite measure of RSC endorsement in the context of teenage suffering ( $\alpha = .76$ ).

## Results and Discussion

**Social morality.** We submitted our social morality measure to a between-subjects analysis of covariance (ANCOVA; self-construal: individualist vs. collectivist), with personal experience of teenage suffering entered as the covariate. The predicted effect of self-construal emerged,  $F(1, 52) = 6.04, p = .02, \eta^2 = .11$ . Participants primed with a collectivist self-construal expressed higher endorsement of social morality ( $M = 5.53, SD = 1.00$ ) than participants primed with an individualist self-construal ( $M = 4.91, SD = 1.02$ ).

**RSC.** Submitting our RSC measure to a similar analysis also revealed the predicted effect,  $F(1, 52) = 4.12, p = .05, \eta^2 = .07$ . Participants primed with a collectivist self-construal expressed higher levels of RSC ( $M = 4.99, SD = 1.49$ ) than participants primed with an individualist self-construal ( $M = 4.33, SD = 1.18$ ).

Interestingly, our covariate of personal experience with teenage suffering was significantly *negatively* correlated with both social morality ( $r = -.30, p = .03$ ) and RSC ( $r = -.32, p = .02$ ) in this sample. This suggests that although activating a collectivist self-construal can cause U.S. undergraduates to construe suffering more repressively, it is probably not their default interpretation of their own suffering as teenagers. We found no interaction between condition and personal experience of teenage suffering on either RSC,  $\beta = -.24, SE = .20, t(51) = -0.77, p = .45$ , or social morality,  $\beta = -.36, SE = .15, t(51) = -1.17, p = .24$ . Omitting the covariate from our analyses did not alter the pattern of results, although the effect of condition on RSC became marginally significant,  $F(1, 53) = 3.25, p = .07$ .

**Mediation analysis.** Using Preacher and Hayes's (2008) procedure and SPSS macro for testing indirect effects, we tested our hypothesis that the effect of self-construal condition on RSC would be mediated by endorsement of social morality. Specifically, we regressed RSC scores onto self-construal (dummy-coded: individualist self-construal = 0, collectivist self-construal = 1), with social morality entered as the mediator and personal experience with teenage suffering entered as the covariate. Five thousand bootstrapping resamples were performed. The 95% confidence interval obtained for the indirect effect of self-construal on RSC via the mediator of social morality did not contain zero (.11, .92). Therefore, we are confident at  $\alpha = .05$  that the higher level of RSC displayed by participants in the collectivist self-construal condition occurred through the corresponding increase in endorsement of social morality among these participants (for a graphical depiction of the mediation model, see Figure 2).

Study 4 provided convergent evidence for the causal link between collectivist sentiments and RSC observed in Studies 2 and 3. As in Study 3, participants construed suffering in a particular context—a context with which they were presumably familiar—in a more repressive manner after collectivist self-construal was induced. This effect emerged independently of individual variation in participants' actual experience of suffering in the context under investigation (the teenage years). Furthermore, the study employed a different, more explicit manipulation of self-construal than that used in Studies 2 and 3, suggesting that our effects are not methodological artifacts.

Perhaps more importantly, the Study 4 findings replicate the mediational pattern observed in Study 1, but now in the context of an experiment with random assignment to condition. The effect of



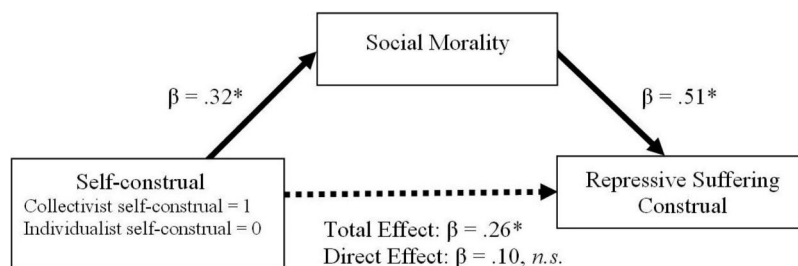


Figure 2. Mediation model (Study 4). All path coefficients represent standardized regression weights. The model controls for personal history of suffering. The direct effect coefficient represents the effect of the independent variable after controlling for the effect of the proposed mediator. Total adjusted  $R^2$  for the model = .34,  $F(3, 51) = 10.31$ ,  $p < .001$ . \* Significant at  $p < .05$ .

primed collectivist self-construal on RSC occurred via an indirect effect on social morality. Taken together, Studies 1 and 4 strongly support our proposed theoretical model: Collectivist cognitions activate a tendency to conceptualize morality in more social terms, and this increased activation of social morality predisposes individuals to interpret suffering as repressive.

It is important to note that in this study, we manipulated self-construal by asking participants to think about their similarity to or difference from others, as well as their emotional closeness to or distance from others. We believe this is a valid manipulation of the construct, as feelings of identification and empathy with others are generally considered to be part of a collectivist orientation, whereas feelings of uniqueness and lack of close emotional connection to others are generally considered part of an individualist orientation (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, we should acknowledge the possibility that a sense of emotional closeness, rather than induced collectivist self-construal per se, may have been driving the effects observed in this study (as we used the same manipulation in Study 5, the same limitation also applies in that study). Although this is possible, we do not believe it poses a major problem for our interpretation of the current findings, given that Studies 1–3 provide converging evidence using more direct measures or inductions of individualism and collectivism.

Indeed, taken together, Studies 1–4 offer an array of evidence pertaining to the hypothesized link between collectivism and RSC, as well as the uniqueness of this association, the process through which it is formed, and the contexts in which it may occur. In our final study, we examined RSC in yet another socially relevant context, namely, parents' construal of the suffering of children. In this context, we investigated the potential effect of RSC on behavioral intentions.

### Study 5

In Study 5, we moved beyond investigations of the boundary conditions and process of the collectivism–RSC link and focused on socially important consequences of this causal association. While, in Study 4, we focused on young people's understanding of the suffering experienced within the family context as a teenager, in Study 5, we reversed our focus and investigated how parents construe the suffering of children within their families. Specifically, we reasoned that because RSC involves the ideas that deviant behavior warrants punishment and suffering serves a prosocial function, parents with a heightened tendency to construe suffering repressively might be more

willing to endorse punitive measures with regard to their own and others' children, including corporal punishment.

Supporting this possibility, Durkheim (1893/1997) considered corporal punishment to be a key aspect of the repressive sanctions he identified as common in collectivistic societies and eras. In the context of parenting practices, Sheikh and Janoff-Bulman (2010) identified a *parental restrictiveness* style characteristic of parents who seek to instill an avoidance orientation in their children. Parental restrictiveness focuses on punishment for misdeeds and demarcating acceptable boundaries rather than the fostering of valued behavior. Taking Sheikh and Janoff-Bulman's work on the consequences of avoidance-oriented socialization together with the extensive literature suggesting that individuals in collectivist cultures are more prevention focused and avoidance oriented (e.g., Lee & Semin, 2009), it is reasonable to assume that collectivist sentiments might be positively associated with parental restrictiveness and support for some corporal punishment of children.

As a preliminary test of this assumption prior to conducting our full investigation in Study 5, we compared U.S. national data on rates of corporal punishment of children in public schools with state-wide levels of collectivism. Vandello and Cohen (1999) constructed and validated a state collectivism scale out of a composite of social structural and demographic indicators, providing a unique collectivism score for each state (with higher scores indicating greater collectivism). Data on the projected number of students subjected to corporal punishment—defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2012) as “paddling, spanking, or other forms of physical punishment”—in each state in 2006 are available through the department's Civil Rights Data Collection project. The bootstrapped correlation between state-level collectivism and percentage of students exposed to corporal punishment is  $r = .34$ ,  $p = .02$ .<sup>8</sup> Although this finding is correlational and doubtless multide-

<sup>8</sup> The correlation we report excludes Hawaii and includes the remaining 49 states. Vandello and Cohen (1999) referred to Hawaii as a special case; halfway between the United States and Asia, it has a large percentage of people of Asian descent. The tendency for Asian countries to be relatively more collectivistic makes it unsurprising that Hawaii is an outlier on Vandello and Cohen's collectivism scale, being nearly four standard deviations above the mean. However, corporal punishment is not legal in Hawaii. Given that Hawaii is something of a special case in the United States as regards collectivism, we considered it appropriate to calculate our correlation excluding Hawaii. Including Hawaii in the data set, the bootstrapped correlation between state-level collectivism and percentage of students subjected to corporal punishment is  $r = .27$ ,  $p = .07$ .



terminated, it nevertheless offers intriguing initial evidence that greater collectivism may lead to greater endorsement of corporal punishment of children.

Testing this possibility experimentally, we predicted that primed collectivist self-construal would increase punitiveness towards children and that this effect would occur through the activation of RSC. That is, we predicted that parents induced to construe themselves in a collectivistic fashion should be more likely to interpret the suffering of children in a repressive manner and that this interpretation might then prompt them to see strict punishment of children as functional or even necessary.

## Method

One hundred and twenty-nine U.S. residents who indicated that they were parents of at least one child were recruited through the Clear Voice online survey panel. Of these, 16 participants' data were removed because they failed to complete all measures, leaving a final total of 113 participants (59 female;  $M_{Age} = 41.80$  years) who were randomly assigned to either an individualist or collectivist self-construal priming condition.<sup>9</sup> Endorsement of RSC within the family context and support for corporal punishment were our outcome measures of interest.

**Demographics and covariate.** Participants indicated their gender and ethnicity. They also indicated the extent to which they had personally suffered as a child by responding to the item "As a child, I experienced a great deal of suffering" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*;  $M_{Grand} = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ). Following our procedure in Study 4, we included this item in order to control for individual variation in experience with this particular context of suffering in our primary analyses.

**Self-construal prime.** Participants were primed with either an individualist or collectivist self-construal in an open-ended writing task nearly identical to that used in Study 4.

**RSC.** Before assessing RSC, we asked participants to reflect on a particular way in which suffering often manifests within the family context. Specifically, participants were informed that children often experience suffering to a greater extent than other groups in the population (e.g., they have a greater likelihood of experiencing emotional distress). After reading this short description of children's suffering, participants completed a measure of RSC in the context of this suffering, highly similar to the measure used in Study 4. More specifically, they responded to two items assessing endorsement of the causal aspect of RSC ("Children often experience suffering because they break society's rules and conventions" and "Children often experience suffering because they don't listen to their parents' advice") and one item assessing endorsement of the teleological aspect ("The suffering of children helps them mature into functioning members of society"). The items were completed on 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), and scores were averaged to yield a composite measure of RSC endorsement in the context of childhood suffering ( $\alpha = .68$ ).

**Support for corporal punishment.** We measured participants' support for corporal punishment in two ways. First, we asked participants to respond to a single-item continuous measure: "I would favor policies in the school district of my own child which allowed (non-abusive) physical punishment of misbehaving children by teachers" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Second, we presented participants with a forced-choice item asking them to hypothetically choose between allowing their own child to receive corporal punishment in school or not. Specifically, we first informed participants,

In school districts in states where corporal punishment of students is allowed, parents are often given an option between having their child punished for extreme misbehavior either through suspension (missing some amount of school) or corporal punishment (receiving a paddling from a principal or vice-principal).

We then asked participants to contemplate what they would do if their child were just now entering school and they were presented with this choice. Participants were given the option of choosing either (hypothetical) suspension or corporal punishment for their child.

## Results and Discussion

**RSC.** We submitted our RSC measure to a between-subjects ANCOVA (self-construal: individualist vs. collectivist), with personal experience of childhood suffering entered as the covariate. The predicted effect of self-construal emerged,  $F(1, 108) = 3.78$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Participants primed with a collectivist self-construal expressed greater RSC ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) compared to those primed with an individualist self-construal ( $M = 4.53$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ).

Somewhat surprisingly, unlike in Study 4, our covariate of personal experience with contextualized suffering (in the case of Study 5, with childhood suffering) *positively* predicted RSC ( $r = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ ).<sup>10</sup> We found no interaction between condition and personal experience of childhood suffering on either RSC,  $\beta = -.11$ ,  $SE = .12$ ,  $t(109) = -0.46$ ,  $p = .64$ , or support for corporal punishment,  $\beta = .30$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $t(108) = 1.26$ ,  $p = .21$ . Omitting the covariate did not alter the pattern of results, although the effect of condition on RSC became marginal,  $F(1, 109) = 3.07$ ,  $p = .08$ .

**Support for corporal punishment: Continuous measure.** Submitting our continuous measure of support for corporal pun-

<sup>9</sup> Although all participants recruited for the study had indicated that they were parents in an earlier qualifying survey, a small subset ( $n = 10$ ; approximately 9% of the sample) did not indicate that they had a child in response to a demographic item included in our materials. The reason for this discrepancy is unclear; for some participants, it may have simply been an error, while perhaps others were expecting but did not yet have a child. We included these participants' data in our analyses because, although we were interested in recruiting parents to enhance the external validity and practical implications of our study, we had no theoretical reason to expect our predicted effects to differ between parents and nonparents. Including parenthood (as indicated during our data collection) as a covariate in all analyses did not alter the pattern of results in any way, although the effect of self-construal on RSC was only marginally significant in this analysis,  $F(1, 109) = 3.25$ ,  $p = .07$ .

<sup>10</sup> We hesitate to draw conclusions about the divergent effects of the covariate in the two studies, since they were conducted with different populations (undergraduates vs. parents) and involved different suffering contexts (teenage vs. childhood suffering). One speculative explanation for the differential pattern is that, in an individualistic culture, RSC may become a somewhat more viable means of making sense of suffering as time passes and the suffering context becomes more distant in memory. Thus, undergraduates were dispositionally resistant to explain their recent teenage suffering repressively, but parents were more likely to use such explanations for their temporally distant childhood suffering. Of course, it is also possible that our sample of working parents was more collectivistic overall than our undergraduate sample.

ishment to a similar analysis also revealed the predicted effect,  $F(1, 108) = 6.10, p = .02, \eta^2 = .05$ . Participants primed with a collectivist self-construal expressed greater support for corporal punishment in their child's school district ( $M = 4.19, SD = 2.05$ ) compared to participants primed with an individualist self-construal ( $M = 3.20, SD = 2.13$ ).

#### Support for corporal punishment: Forced-choice measure.

We submitted participants' choices of either suspension or corporal punishment for their child, as a function of self-construal condition, to a chi-square test. We obtained a significant result,  $\chi^2(1) = 3.92, p = .05$ . The relevant data are presented in Table 2. As is clear, participants overwhelmingly preferred suspension for their child over corporal punishment (77% chose suspension). Importantly, however, the number of participants who chose corporal punishment in the collectivist self-construal condition was more than double the number who chose corporal punishment in the individualist self-construal condition.

**Mediation analysis.** Using Preacher and Hayes's (2008) procedure and SPSS macro for testing indirect effects, we tested our hypothesis that the effect of self-construal condition on our continuous measure of support for corporal punishment would be mediated by endorsement of RSC. Specifically, we regressed support for corporal punishment scores onto self-construal (dummy-coded: individualist self-construal = 0, collectivist self-construal = 1), with RSC entered as the mediator and personal experience with childhood suffering entered as the covariate. Five thousand bootstrapping resamples were performed. The 95% confidence interval obtained for the indirect effect of self-construal on support for corporal punishment via the mediator of RSC did not contain zero (.01, .55). Therefore, we are confident at  $\alpha = .05$  that the greater support for corporal punishment displayed by participants in the collectivist self-construal condition at least partially occurred through a corresponding increase in the tendency to construe children's suffering repressively (for a graphical depiction of the mediation model, see Figure 3).

Replicating the effects found in Studies 2–4, Study 5 showed again that priming collectivist self-construal increases participants' endorsement of statements reflecting RSC. In addition, Study 5 revealed evidence for some of the potential consequences of construing a particular form of suffering as repressive. Parents who construed the suffering of children in general more repressively were also more likely to endorse corporal punishment in the public school system, indeed, in their own child's school district. This experimental evidence corroborates our correlational finding that state-wide collectivism (as assessed by Vandello & Cohen, 1999) is positively associated with state-level corporal punishment rates and suggests that this link may be partly the result of increased RSC in collectivist communities.

Table 2  
Support for Corporal Punishment—Forced-Choice Measure  
(Study 5)

Choice	Condition	
	Individualist self-construal	Collectivist self-construal
Suspension	46	41
Corporal punishment	8	18

It is important to acknowledge that we are not commenting on the effectiveness or implications of corporal punishment as a strategy for child rearing and education but simply are indicating that it is a potential consequence of the repressive construal of children's suffering. Sheikh and Janoff-Bulman (2010) seemed to argue that parental restrictiveness is often a defective strategy for parenting, potentially producing shame-oriented children who will exhibit failures in self-regulation and a greater incidence of moral transgressions. However, it is important to note that much of the research on which their theory is based was conducted within individualistic, Western settings, from the framework of Western psychological perspectives. Self-regulation processes and parenting styles may have very different parameters and consequences in non-Western (and Western collectivist) contexts (Bernstein, 1990; Morelli & Rothbaum, 2007). Although parental restrictiveness might not optimally prepare children for self-regulation in individualistic environments (e.g., upper class or urban), restrictiveness and corporal punishment may very well prepare children for the type of self-regulation required in more collectivistic environments (e.g., lower class or rural). We return to a consideration of the normative aspects of RSC and its consequences below.

## General Discussion

Across five studies, support was found for three interrelated hypotheses: (a) Greater collectivism is associated with greater endorsement of social morality, (b) endorsement of social morality is positively associated with RSC, and (c) increased presence of collectivist sentiments is associated with increased RSC. Using an individual-differences approach, Study 1 demonstrated that dispositional collectivism positively predicted both social morality and RSC and that the latter two variables were significantly associated. In Study 2, primed collectivist (as opposed to individualist) self-construal increased the tendency to construe suffering in general as repressive. Study 3 replicated and extended this finding by showing that primed collectivist (as opposed to individualist) self-construal increased liking for a repressive construal of the suffering caused by AIDS but did not increase liking for other kinds of meaning-laden construals of suffering. In Study 4, a more explicit prime of collectivist self-construal increased the repressive construal of teenage suffering among undergraduates, and this effect was mediated by social morality endorsement. Finally, in Study 5, primed collectivist self-construal increased the repressive construal of childhood suffering among parents, leading them to show greater support for corporal punishment of children. Across these studies, patterns of association and group means suggest that RSC is relatively independent of political orientation and religiosity.

## Broader Implications and Connections to Prior Research

Construing one's own and others' suffering repressively is a pervasive phenomenon with important consequences. People who interpret random misfortune as an indication that they have behaved immorally may have difficulty adjusting to their misfortune. Many studies suggest that seeing the self as responsible for a traumatic event can lead to poor recovery outcomes (for review, see Littleton, Magee, & Axsom, 2007), especially if a more global aspect of the self is blamed, such as one's moral character. Fur-

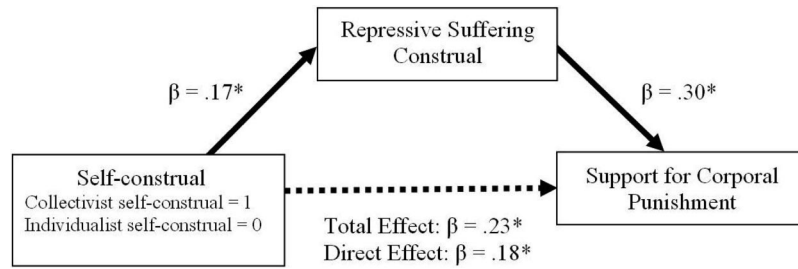


Figure 3. Mediation model (Study 5). All path coefficients represent standardized regression weights. The model controls for personal history of suffering. The direct effect coefficient represents the effect of the independent variable after controlling for the effect of the proposed mediator. Total adjusted  $R^2$  for the model = .11,  $F(3, 109) = 5.70$ ,  $p < .001$ . \* Significant at  $p \leq .05$ .

thermore, the interpretation of another person's illness, for example, as an indication that that person is immoral can lead to severely negative interpersonal and societal consequences. People may be persecuted or ostracized as a result of harmful experiences that are actually beyond their control, as Sontag (1989) argued has occurred in the case of AIDS. Indeed, the results of Study 3 suggest that circumstances encouraging RSC may prompt individuals to support public policy infringing on the freedom of individuals who are popularly associated with communicable diseases like AIDS. Furthermore, the results of Study 5 suggest that such circumstances may also encourage the corporal punishment of individuals in public institutions such as schools and prisons. More broadly, the current studies break new ground by highlighting the importance of the general tendency to construe suffering repressively and furthermore by suggesting a sociocultural factor—collectivism—that is predictive of this tendency.

The current research also makes a novel contribution insofar as it investigates the relevance of cultural factors not only to the general punitiveness of a society or group but also to the more subtle phenomenon of individuals within a group *interpreting* ambiguous suffering as punitive. For example, Gollwitzer and Bücklein (2007) investigated the relationship between self-construal and punitiveness. Their findings suggested that a more collectivist self-construal was predictive of stronger emotional reactions to injustice and increased support for constructive (i.e., rehabilitating) punitive measures (in line with some of the results of current Study 5). However, in the present studies, we were interested not only in the link between collectivism and punitiveness but in the role of collectivism in preference for certain kinds of (punitively oriented) causal and teleological accounts of suffering in general.

The negative consequences sometimes set in motion by RSCs suggest that cultural collectivism does not universally promote social harmony and positive interpersonal relationships. Simplistic interpretations of the cultural psychological literature on individualism–collectivism might yield the conclusion that while individualistic cultures foster egoism and a lack of fellow feeling, more collectivist cultures tend to reduce interpersonal conflict and promote social solidarity. This may be true up to a point; however, the current findings, as well as other findings in the literature (e.g., Adams's, 2005, work showing that personal enemyship is more common in collectivist settings), indicate that collectivist sentiments may sometimes breed hostility and rejection between individuals and those they perceive as deviant.

We are not arguing, however, that RSC is an inherently negative or positive phenomenon. It is simply a particular (and common) way through which people make sense of their own and others' suffering. Certainly, the tendency to construe suffering repressively may sometimes have negative consequences. However, such construals give suffering a meaningful place in our lives and direct our future actions. From an evolutionary perspective, RSC may be adaptive not only because it helps maintain psychological equanimity in the face of apparently random suffering but because it tends to encourage conformance to social norms. Indeed, cross-national research suggests that the prevalence of a belief in some form of hell—a belief highly representative of the notion that social deviance begets eventual punishment and personal misfortune—significantly predicts lower rates of a variety of crimes (Shariff & Rhemtulla, 2012). This type of evidence implies that the widespread presence of RSC within a culture might actually deter deviance and elicit some prosocial effects. At the same time, less meaning-laden, more rational construals of suffering might reduce the unneeded suffering of blamed victims, but they might also contribute to a decreased sense of the meaningfulness of life and greater anxiety in the face of inexplicable suffering.

### Directions for Future Research

Future studies might further investigate the consequences of RSC. Since individuals are more likely to see suffering as serving a positive social function when collectivist sentiments are active, circumstances encouraging such orientations may actually lead individuals to engage in behaviors that bring about suffering insofar as they see such suffering as preserving the social order. Study 5 at least initially indicates that parents who repressively construe the suffering of children also become more supportive of policies that would allow children to be strictly punished under certain circumstances. But there are many instances in which individuals in the thrall of collectivist sentiment may be more willing to make others suffer on behalf of the collective or to suffer themselves.

Some support for this idea has been shown in recent work by Kruglanski, Gelfand, and Gunaratna (2012) on the psychology of terrorism. For example, these authors found that collectivist self-identification is negatively associated with fear of personal death and positively associated with approval of the killing of outgroup others. They interpreted these findings as suggesting that individ-

uals may be more willing to martyr themselves when collectivist sentiments are active. Our work complements this perspective by raising the possibility that it is through increased RSC that such effects of collectivist self-construal on martyrdom and support for violence may occur.

In addition to investigating more of the downstream consequences of RSC, it might be rather useful to engage in more thorough research on the experience and prevalence of this particular form of suffering interpretation. The present studies were primarily focused on establishing a conceptual link between collectivism and RSC; however, future studies might answer more specific questions about the nature of RSCs themselves. To this end, a more detailed RSC scale might be developed and validated. This scale could build off the general RSC measure used in Studies 1 and 2 but more specifically assess different dimensions of the construct. For example, such a scale could be used to establish the proposed two-factor structure of RSC (with a causal factor and a teleological factor) and to make distinctions about the particular forms of suffering people are most likely to construe in this way. For example, a scale might assess the relative tendency to engage in RSC of personal versus collective suffering or one's own misfortune versus that of a friend or stranger.

Further correlational or experimental research might also investigate in greater detail the specific associations between different forms of cultural collectivism and RSC. As many scholars (e.g., Fiske, 1991; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) have pointed out, collectivism and individualism are not monolithic types that manifest the same way in cultures around the world; there are different varieties of each. One common distinction, for example, is to separate vertical collectivist cultures—those that combine group solidarity with hierarchical social organization—from horizontal collectivist cultures—those that combine group solidarity with more egalitarian norms. It is important to note that while collectivism in general should be positively associated with endorsement of values characteristic of social morality (Oishi, Schimmack, Diener, & Suh, 1998) and while social morality predicts RSC, it is not necessarily the case that all forms of collectivism will always foster the link between social morality and RSC. Taken as a whole, our findings clearly demonstrate that collectivism in general can positively predict RSC. Nevertheless, the supplemental analyses conducted for Study 1 (see Footnote 4) suggest that when horizontal collectivism and vertical collectivism are separately assessed, vertical collectivism is the stronger predictor of RSC. Furthermore, Studies 1 and 4 show that the effect of collectivism on RSC occurs via social morality, a construct that—at least in light of current theory—is strongly representative of those characteristics most often associated with vertical collectivism: reverence for tradition, hierarchy, and purity. Thus, although collectivism may generally be associated with RSC in many contexts, it is likely that vertical collectivism in particular will more strongly and consistently predict this phenomenon. It is the extreme vigilance regarding norm violation and deviance characteristic of vertical collectivism that especially fosters the connection between social morality and RSC (Douglas, 1994; Fiske, 1991).

Future research, however, is required to evaluate the connection between different forms of collectivism and RSC in even

greater detail. In this regard, it would be beneficial if experimental primes separately inducing vertical and horizontal collectivism could be developed and validated. Naturally, cross-cultural research is also a logical next step. Our research was all done with U.S. participants, relying on dispositional variation in or experimental primes of collectivism. Research should be conducted comparing interpretations of suffering from cultures that are vertically collectivist (such as many East Asian cultural groups) to those from cultures that are either horizontally collectivist or more individualistic. While the present studies demonstrate that persons in a relatively individualist setting may be induced to construe suffering repressively when collectivist cognitions are active, it is also important to test whether RSC is the preferred mode of conceptualizing misfortune in different collectivist settings.

Speaking more broadly, our work suggests important points of convergence between the cultural psychology literature and the literatures on moral reasoning (such as Graham et al.'s, 2009, work on moral foundations) and on interpretations of misfortune (e.g., Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Shweder et al. (1997) suggested that these literatures are closely related and have much to learn from each other, and the writings of earlier theorists such as Durkheim and Weber interweaved all three of these important domains of inquiry. Yet surprisingly little research seems to have explored what we might call the “cultural grounding” of suffering construal. The present research takes an important initial step in this direction.

## References

- Adams, G. (2005). The cultural grounding of personal relationship: Enmityship in North American and West African worlds. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 948–968. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.88.6.948
- Adams, G., & Plaut, V. C. (2003). The cultural grounding of personal relationship: Friendship in North American and West African worlds. *Personal Relationships*, 10, 333–347. doi:10.1111/1475-6811.00053
- Altemeyer, B. (1998). The other “authoritarian personality”. In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 30, pp. 47–92). San Diego, CA: Academic Press. doi:10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60382-2
- Anderson, J. E., Kay, A. C., & Fitzsimons, G. M. (2010). In search of the silver lining: The justice motive fosters perceptions of benefits in the later lives of tragedy victims. *Psychological Science*, 21, 1599–1604. doi:10.1177/0956797610386620
- Bernstein, B. (1990). *Class, codes, and control: Vol. IV. The structuring of pedagogic discourse*. London, England: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9780203011263
- Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. L. (1996). Who is this “we”? Levels of collective identity and self-representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 83–93. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.71.1.83
- Carlsmith, K. M., Darley, J. M., & Robinson, P. H. (2002). Why do we punish? Deterrence and just deserts as motives for punishment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83, 284–299. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.83.2.284
- Deutsch, M. (1975). Equity, equality, and need: What determines which value will be used as the basis of distributive justice? *Journal of Social Issues*, 31, 137–149. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.1975.tb01000.x
- Douglas, M. (1966). *Purity and danger*. Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books. doi:10.4324/9780203361832
- Douglas, M. (1994). *Risk and blame*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dowler, K. (2003). Media consumption and public attitudes towards crime and justice: The relationship between fear of crime, punitive attitudes,



- and perceived police effectiveness. *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture*, 10, 109–126.
- Durkheim, E. (1997). *The division of labor in society* (W. D. Halls, Trans.). New York, NY: Free Press. (Original work published 1893)
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1956). *Nuer religion*. London, England: Oxford University Press.
- Fiske, A. P. (1991). *Structures of social life: The four elementary forms of human relations*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Gelfand, M. J., Raver, J. L., Nishii, L., Leslie, L. M., Lun, J., Lim, B. C., . . . Yamaguchi, S. (2011, May 27). *Differences between tight and loose cultures: A 33-nation study*. *Science*, 332, 1100–1104. doi:10.1126/science.1197754
- Georgas, J., Mylonas, K., Bafiti, T., Poortinga, Y. H., Christakopoulou, S., Kagitcibasi, C., . . . Kodic, Y. (2001). Functional relationships in the nuclear and extended family: A 16-culture study. *International Journal of Psychology*, 36, 289–300. doi:10.1080/00207590143000045
- Gillin, J. (1951). *The culture of security in San Carlos*. New Orleans, LA: Tulane Press.
- Gollwitzer, M., & Bücklein, K. (2007). Are “we” more punitive than “me”? Self-construal styles, justice-related attitudes, and punitive judgments. *Social Justice Research*, 20, 457–478. doi:10.1007/s11211-007-0051-y
- Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96, 1029–1046. doi:10.1037/a0015141
- Hafer, C. L., & Bègue, L. (2005). Experimental research on just-world theory: Problems, developments, and future challenges. *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 128–167. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.131.1.128
- Haidt, J., & Joseph, C. (2007). The moral mind: How 5 sets of innate intuitions guide the development of many culture-specific virtues, and perhaps even modules. In P. Carruthers, S. Laurence, & S. Stich (Eds.), *The innate mind* (Vol. 3, pp. 367–391). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hallowell, A. I. (1976). *Contributions to anthropology*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Janoff-Bulman, R. (1992). *Shattered assumptions: Towards a new psychology of trauma*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Kastenmüller, A., Greitemeyer, T., Jonas, E., Fischer, P., & Frey, D. (2010). Selective exposure: The impact of collectivism and individualism. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 49, 745–763. doi:10.1348/014466609X478988
- Kitayama, S., Mesquita, B., & Karasawa, M. (2006). Cultural affordances and emotional experience: Socially engaging and disengaging emotions in Japan and the United States. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91, 890–903. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.91.5.890
- Kruglanski, A., Gelfand, M., & Gunaratna, R. (2012). Terrorism as means to an end: How political violence bestows significance. In M. Mikulincer & P. Shaver (Eds.), *Meaning, mortality, and choice: The social psychology of existential concerns* (pp. 203–212). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/13748-011
- Lee, A. Y., & Semin, G. R. (2009). Culture through the lens of self-regulatory orientations. In R. S. Wyer, C. Chiu, & Y. Hong (Eds.), *Understanding culture: Theory, research, and application* (pp. 299–309). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Lerner, M. (1980). *The belief in a just world: A fundamental delusion*. New York, NY: Plenum Press.
- Littleton, H. L., Magee, K. T., & Axsom, D. (2007). A meta-analysis of self-attributions following three types of trauma: Sexual victimization, illness, and injury. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 37, 515–538. doi:10.1111/j.1559-1816.2007.00172.x
- Markus, H., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98, 224–253. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.98.2.224
- McAdams, D. P. (2006). The redemptive self: Generativity and the stories Americans live by. *Research in Human Development*, 3, 81–100.
- Morelli, G. A., & Rothbaum, F. (2007). Situating the child in context: Attachment relationships and self-regulation in different cultures. In S. Kitayama & D. Cohen (Eds.), *Handbook of cultural psychology* (pp. 500–527). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Nietzsche, F. (1964). *The joyful wisdom* (T. Common, Trans.). New York, NY: Russell & Russell.
- Nietzsche, F. (1967). *On the genealogy of morals and ecce homo* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). New York, NY: Random House.
- Oishi, S., Schimmack, U., Diener, E., & Suh, E. M. (1998). The measurement of values and individualism-collectivism. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 24, 1177–1189. doi:10.1177/01461672982411005
- Oyserman, D., & Lee, S. W. S. (2008a). Does culture influence what and how we think? Effects of priming individualism and collectivism. *Psychological Bulletin*, 134, 311–342. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.134.2.311
- Oyserman, D., & Lee, S. W. S. (2008 b). A situated cognition perspective on culture: Effects of priming cultural syndromes on cognition and motivation. In R. M. Sorrentino & S. Yamaguchi (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation and cognition across cultures* (pp. 237–265). San Diego, CA: Elsevier. doi:10.1016/B978-0-12-373694-9.00011-8
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2008). Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models. *Behavior Research Methods*, 40, 879–891. doi:10.3758/BRM.40.3.879
- Pyszczynski, T., Solomon, S., & Greenberg, J. (2003). *In the wake of 9/11: The psychology of terror*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/10478-000
- Ricoeur, P. (1967). *The symbolism of evil* (E. Buchanan, Trans.). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Shariff, A., & Rhemtulla, M. (2012). *Divergent effects of beliefs in heaven and hell on national crime rates*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Oregon.
- Sheikh, S., & Janoff-Bulman, R. (2010). Tracing the self-regulatory bases of moral emotions. *Emotion Review*, 2, 386–396. doi:10.1177/1754073910374660
- Shweder, R. A., Much, N. C., Mahapatra, M., & Park, L. (1997). The “Big Three” of morality (autonomy, community, and divinity), and the “Big Three” explanations of suffering. In A. Brandt & P. Rozin (Eds.), *Morality and health* (pp. 119–169). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Singelis, T. M., Triandis, H. C., Bhawuk, D. P. S., & Gelfand, M. J. (1995). Horizontal and vertical dimensions of individualism and collectivism: A theoretical and measurement refinement. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 29, 240–275. doi:10.1177/106939719502900302
- Sobel, M. E. (1982). Asymptotic intervals for indirect effects in structural equations models. In S. Leinhardt (Ed.), *Sociological methodology 1982* (pp. 290–312). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sontag, S. (1989). *AIDS and its metaphors*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Trafimow, D., Triandis, H., & Goto, S. (1991). Some tests of the distinction between the private self and collective self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 649–655. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.60.5.649
- Triandis, H. C., & Gelfand, M. J. (1998). Converging measurement of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 118–128. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.74.1.118
- Ulmer, J. T., Bader, C., & Gault, M. (2008). Do moral communities play a role in criminal sentencing? Evidence from Pennsylvania. *Sociological Quarterly*, 49, 737–768. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2008.00134.x

- U.S. Department of Education. (2012). *Civil rights data collection*. Retrieved from <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads.aspx>
- Vandello, J. A., & Cohen, D. (1999). Patterns of individualism and collectivism across the United States. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 279–292. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.77.2.279
- Weber, M. (1946). *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology* (H. H. Gerth & C. W. Mills, Trans.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Wolfenstein, K. (1957). *Disaster: A psychological essay*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Received July 27, 2011

Revision received July 16, 2012

Accepted September 10, 2012 ■

### Call for Nominations

The Publications and Communications (P&C) Board of the American Psychological Association has opened nominations for the editorships of **Behavioral Neuroscience**, **Journal of Applied Psychology**, **Journal of Educational Psychology**, **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes**, **Psychological Bulletin**, and **Psychology of Addictive Behaviors** for the years 2015–2020. Mark S. Blumberg, PhD, Steve W. J. Kozlowski, PhD, Arthur Graesser, PhD, Jeffry A. Simpson, PhD, Stephen P. Hinshaw, PhD, and Stephen A. Maisto, PhD, ABPP, respectively, are the incumbent editors.

Candidates should be members of APA and should be available to start receiving manuscripts in early 2014 to prepare for issues published in 2015. Please note that the P&C Board encourages participation by members of underrepresented groups in the publication process and would particularly welcome such nominees. Self-nominations are also encouraged.

Search chairs have been appointed as follows:

- **Behavioral Neuroscience**, John Disterhoft, PhD
- **Journal of Applied Psychology**, Neal Schmitt, PhD
- **Journal of Educational Psychology**, Neal Schmitt, PhD, and Jennifer Crocker, PhD
- **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes**, David Dunning, PhD
- **Psychological Bulletin**, Norman Abeles, PhD
- **Psychology of Addictive Behaviors**, Jennifer Crocker, PhD, and Lillian Comas-Diaz, PhD

Candidates should be nominated by accessing APA's EditorQuest site on the Web. Using your Web browser, go to <http://editorquest.apa.org>. On the Home menu on the left, find "Guests." Next, click on the link "Submit a Nomination," enter your nominee's information, and click "Submit."

Prepared statements of one page or less in support of a nominee can also be submitted by e-mail to Sarah Wiederkehr, P&C Board Search Liaison, at [swiederkehr@apa.org](mailto:swiederkehr@apa.org).

Deadline for accepting nominations is January 11, 2013, when reviews will begin.