

Introduction/Rationale

Values are basic beliefs that guide how we behave, what we deem acceptable and unacceptable, important and unimportant, and appropriate versus inappropriate behavior. Cultural values are those which dictate the norms of a society with regard to how individuals should interact with each other, the importance of social hierarchy, the relationship individuals have with nature and time, as well as the role of individualism and collectivism (the emphasis should be put on the group over the individual). Currently the counseling psychology literature has very few ways to measure how much a person adheres to a set of cultural values. The purpose of this study is to create a dependable survey of the values of the dominant US culture so that in the future researchers can more accurately examine how cultural values plays a role in mental health and daily life.

Method

The construct was defined using two approaches. First, the primary investigator performed a thorough literature review encompassing the fields of counseling, clinical and social psychology, as well as sociology. This literature review yielded nine domains: autonomy, individual competitiveness, material achievement, mastery over nature, future time orientation, open self-expression, individual class mobility, nuclear family orientation and egalitarianism. The next step was the creation of a survey that was emailed to the APA Division 17 (Counseling Psychology) listserv. This survey asked participants to rate the “Western”-ness of each domain on a scale of one (not at all Western) to seven (very Western). Also, the participants were asked to rate how well a set of five sample items reflected each domain on a similar seven point Likert type scale. The participants were given a chance to express their reactions to the domains, to express any other domains that make up the construct, and to discuss the label for the domain (i.e. Western values, Euro-Centric values, etc.). Though the term Western was used throughout the survey, one purpose of the study was to find a consensus on a term for this values orientation.

Results/Data Analysis

52 participants completed the survey, the majority of which were masters or PhD level in education. Results showed autonomy was the most “Western” of the proposed domains (mean rating of 6.43) which was rated between Western and very Western. The results of the sample items generally concurred with the overall mean rating of their respective domains. The qualitative responses favored the label of “European American cultural values,” and the participants replied with a variety of other potential domains, including religious values and general individualism. Data was analyzed by mean and standard deviation calculation in Microsoft Excel.

Discussion

A final set of seven domains were generated for the construct of European American cultural values, and this pilot survey lends positive evidence in our conceptualization. Future research aims to create a scale using these domains to develop the acculturation and multicultural psychology literature.