

On social status, cultural orientation and well-being: A comparison between urban
and rural areas in Greece¹

Konstantinos Kafetsios²

&

Sotirios Karaolanis

Department of Psychology, University of Crete, Greece

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² Corresponding Author: Konstantinos Kafetsios, Psychology Department, University of Crete, Gallos campus, Rethymno, 74100, kafetsik@uoc.gr

Abstract

The aim of the present research was to explore relationships between subjective social status (SSS), cultural identity, and wellbeing in a sample of employed and unemployed persons from different regions in Greece. We collected data from a total of 1800 participants from urban (N = 1267), rural (N = 205), and semi-urban (N = 328) areas in Greece. One third of the sample were unemployed. The three groups did not differ in gender or age composition. Participants from the rural areas were less well-educated and were more likely to be unemployed than participants from the other two regions, but those differences were not large. Cultural orientation (independent and interdependent self-construal) did not differ, on average, by area or by employment status. However, relationships between SSS and individual-level cultural orientations as measured by Singelis' (1994) self construal scale, were starkly different in the three regions. In the urban areas SSS was associated with higher independent self construal; SSS was not a predictor of interdependent self-construal in the urban areas. In the rural areas the relationship was reversed, with higher SSS being associated with higher interdependence but not with independence. Well-being (Diener, 1995) was predicted by SSS almost in similar levels in two regions, yet, this relationship was partially mediated by an independent cultural orientation in urban areas and by an interdependent cultural orientation in rural areas. Finally, the extent to which relationships between SSS and wellbeing were partially mediated by participants' trait positive affect also differed in the two regions. In the urban area, trait positive affect accounted for half of the variation between SSS and well-being, whereas in the rural areas, positive trait affect fully mediated relationships between SSS and well-being. This research depicts relationships between social status and well-being, highlighting the significance of interactions between regional and individual-level cultural orientations.

Keywords: cultural orientation, social status, Greece, well-being

Introduction

Recently, there is an emerging interest in social psychology for the study of social class (e.g., Fiske, 2010). This interest was preceded by prolific research that associates social class with health and well-being outcomes (e.g., Adler et al., 1994). What is new, however, is the realization that subjective social class, that is, the subjective level of self versus others in a social hierarchy, features as a unique predictor of psycho-social outcomes even after controlling for objective socio-economic status (Adler et al., 2000).

There is a plethora of research that has shown a positive association between a person's social standing and his or her subjective well-being (see Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 1985; Easterlin, 1974). According to Diener et al. (1993) happiness and wealth are associated in different countries because richer individuals eclipse in some factors of having a better life. These factors are not stable as they dependant on cultural and social variables. Specifically, individuals with similar wealth might be happy or unhappy relying on their previous wealth or the income of those around them.

The present study aimed to test relationships between subjective socio-economic correlates with independent and interdependent self-construal and well-being outcomes in a large sample comprising employed and unemployed persons from urban and rural areas in Greece.

Subjective Social Status

Subjective social status has been understood as “a person's belief about his location in a status order” (Davis, 1956), in other words SSS explains the view of a person about his/her socioeconomic structure (Gough, 1949; Jackman & Jackman, 1973; Kluegel, Singleton, & Starnes, 1977). In theory, the idea of subjective social status is broader than that of “relative social standing” which is merely an illustration of income gap. Jackman (1979) demonstrated that education, income and occupation are shaping someone's judgment about his/her subjective social class. In a more in-depth analysis she discovered subjective class to be widely defined as both a social and an economic fact in Americans' self-representations. An assessment of subjective

social status is also possible to contain not only present social conditions, but also to integrate an evaluation of the person's past (socioeconomic, educational, and economic background), along with their future plans. Subjective social status would be normally anticipated to include the individual's family assets, good fortune, and life opportunities.

Subjective class identity is affected by numerous factors. One of the more important is gender, with the need to differentiate the class identities of men and women emerged (Baxter, 1994; Ritter & Hargens, 1975). In women SSS has been found to encompass their own employment status (Ritter & Hargens, 1975), their education level (Abbott, 1987; Jackman & Jackman, 1973), and also their husbands' objective class (Baxter, 1994). Most of the research in this area has been on subjective social "class", which has been calculated by participants self-ratings themselves of different social class groups like lower, working class, middle class, or upper class (e.g. Jackman & Jackman, 1973; Kluegel, Singleton, & Starnes, 1977). For this procedure to work efficiently, all participants should have almost the same views of the class system. The groups of "working class" and "middle class" can be defined in many ways, and are politically charged (Evans, Kelley, & Kolosi, 1992), so employing this terminology in subjective class research can be leading the wrong way. Such an approach, as is understood, poses several problems, conceptual and operational.

Recent research on the social psychology of class contends that subjective social status independently predicts outcomes such as life outcomes and is moderately correlated with objective indicators of class such as income and education (Kraus et al., 2009). Subjective social class, that is, the subjectively perceived level of self versus others in a social hierarchy features as a unique predictor of psycho-social outcomes even after controlling for objective socio-economic status (Adler et al., 2000).

The procedure of allocating oneself social status includes procedures of social comparison (comparison of self to others) and identity conceptualizations of the self. The interesting question is whether people use the typical aspects of socioeconomic class (income, education, occupation), calculations of wealth, or whether other aspects like psychological well-being affect the evaluation of subjective status. Specifically,

to what degree is the understanding of status defined by a person's self-construal, and to what degree is it defined by subjective well-being.

The cultural self

In recent decades there has been a rising interest on how culture shapes the self. A large number of influential theories have been presented concerning various facets of the self (e.g., Greenwald & Pratkanis 1988; Hermans 2003; Higgins 1987; McAdams 2013a; Triandis 1989;). Between these innovative theories to the self, one of the most auspicious and extensively used is the self-construal theory (Markus and Kitayama 1991). The main notion of this approach is that there are two distinct types of self-concept, interdependent and independent.

The notion of self-construal illustrates the basic, though contradictory, human desires for both individuation and affiliation (e.g., Benjamin 1974, 1996; Bowlby 1969; Franz & White 1985; Hermans 1999; Kafetsios & Hess, 2013; Maslow 1970). Self-construal is defined as a “constellation of thoughts, feelings, and actions concerning one’s relationship to others, and self as distinct from others” (Singelis 1994, p. 581). From the one side, it connects the cultural element of individualism-collectivism with personality; also, it is an example of impassioned debates on the intricacy of the self.

Considering that both individuation and connection constitute common human desires, each person might have both independent and interdependent self-construals. The intensity and approachability of these self-construals are specific to the individual and show the individual’s harmony between individuation and connection (Brewer & Gardner 1996; Imamoğlu 2003; Singelis 1994). Such a harmony is influenced by the current sociocultural and family environment that an individual is set in (Adams 1998; Kagitcibasi, 2005).

Subjective well-being

Subjective wellbeing has been the main interest of research for the past twenty years (Diener, 1984; Leung & Leung, 1992; Diener & Diener, 1995). Well-being has been associated with cultural orientations. Current cross-cultural research has supplied proof for culture-specific correlates of life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1995). Overall, researchers find that there are two conceptually logical and psychologically

important paths to life satisfaction, the independent and interdependent self-construal (Kwan, Bond and Singelis, 1997). Independent self-construal achieves life satisfaction over mediation by person self-esteem, while interdependent self-construal achieves life satisfaction through mediation by relationship balance. These outcomes are satisfactory if someone assumes that the independent and the interdependent variables are 1) ‘orthogonal’ to each other and are 2) separate constructs.

In the present research we adopted a within-culture cognitive situated approach. That is, within a given culture, self-construal can vary on the interdependence and independence continua (Oyserman et al., 2002). This variation is particularly evident because of situational determinants and primes (e.g., groups, obligations, relations). These primed self-construals give rise to independent and interdependent mind-sets that can consequently influence related cognitions, emotions and behavior (Oyserman, 2011).

Aims and expectations

We aimed to examine the relationship between perceived social status, self-construal, and wellbeing in rural and urban areas in Greece. Based on the culture as situated cognition approach (Oyserman, 2011) we expected that independent self-construal will be a more influential aspect of the self in urban areas and hence it will be positively associated with SSS. This hypothesis is also supported by evidence that the availability of money increases individualistic tendencies. Based on the well-being literature we also expected that SSS will be associated with well-being. Conversely, in rural areas we expected that interdependence will be the more influential facet of SSS relationships with well-being however, we did not hold expectations regarding relationships between interdependence and well-being

Sample

The sample comprised 1800 participants from rural (N = 205), semirural (N = 328) and urban (N = 1267) areas of Greece. In each area there were equal numbers of employed and unemployed persons and men and women.

Measures

Subjective social status was measured with the use of the MacArthur scale of Subjective Social Status (Adler et al., 2000; Goodman et al., 2001). This is a scale that depicts a ladder consisting of 10 different ranks with each rank representing people with different levels of education, income, and occupation status. Participants are instructed to select the level that represents their standing relatively to the people in their social milieu.

Self-Construal Scale is a measure of trait or chronic self-construal. We used the revised version of the SCS that consists of two orthogonal dimensions that measure the strength of independent and interdependent self-construal. Each subscale contained 15 items and responses were made on a seven point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The independent self-construal subscale contains items that assess uniqueness in social behavior and related cognitions and emotions (e.g., “I do my own thing, regardless of what others think”); the interdependent self construal subscale includes items that assess connectedness in social behavior especially emotions, cognitions, and behavior with regards to in-groups (e.g., “It is important to me to respect decisions made by the group”). Several studies have shown the SCS distinguishes between independent and interdependent self-construal at the individual level (Singelis, 1994).

Well-being was measured with the Diener et al. (2009) measure of well-being ($\alpha = .87$). Trait positive affect and trait negative affect were measured with single item scales.

Results

SSS differed by area. Results from an ANOVA ($F(2,1774) = 9.77, p < .001$) found average SSS to be significantly lower in rural areas ($M = 5.05, SD = 1.54$) than in urban or semi-urban areas which, on average, were similar ($M = 5.56, SD = 1.52/1.63$). On average women did not differ from men on SSS and neither were men or women different in SSS in rural or urban areas. As expected, unemployed persons reported far lower SSS ($M = 4.75, SD = 1.62$ vs $M = 5.96, SD = 1.36$) than employed persons ($F(1, 194,16), p < .001$). Zero-order correlations across the sample are presented in Table 1.

As depicted in Table 2 SSS was associated with higher independence in the urban areas and higher interdependence in the rural areas.

As can be observed in Table 3, SSS significantly predicted Independent self-construal in Urban areas and (at a much higher rate) interdependent self-construal in rural areas. These effects appeared where controlling for objective aspects of social class to do with income and education. Interestingly, in urban areas women reported lower independent self-construal as expected, but this observation was not repeated in rural areas. Finally, SSS relationship with Independent self-construal was fully mediated by trait positive affect in urban areas, whereas, in rural areas trait positive affect had partial effects on SSS and interdependent self-construal associations, suggesting that positive affective is a central feature of independence and social class in urban areas, but the same cannot be said for interdependence and social class associations in rural areas. In the latter, one assumes that emotion is not a central feature of higher social status persons.

Finally, we regressed well-being on SSS, self-construal and trait PA in urban and rural areas in three steps. In both areas, SSS was a significant predictor of well-being. In the urban areas SSS relationship with well-being was partially mediated by independent self-construal and trait PA, yet in rural areas interdependent self-construal more strongly influences SSS relationships with well-being and in combination with Trait PA they fully mediated SSS relationships with well-being.

Discussion

Using a large sample comprising persons from different social strata in urban and rural areas in Greece we tested for anticipated relationships between subjective socio-economic correlates and independent and interdependent self-construal and well-being outcomes.

Participants from the rural areas reported overall lower SSS, however there were no significant differences between participants in urban and rural areas either in self-construal or well-being.

Cultural orientation (independent and interdependent self-construal) did not differ, on average, by area or by employment status. However, relationships between SSS and individual level cultural orientations were starkly different in the two

regions. In the urban areas SSS was associated with higher independent self construal; SSS was not a predictor of interdependent self-construal in the urban areas. In the rural areas the relationship was reversed, with higher SSS being associated with higher interdependent self construal and not with independence. In all three areas income was not a predictor of cultural orientation when SSS.

Wellbeing (Diener, 1995) was predicted by SSS almost in similar levels in three regions, yet, this relationship was partially mediated by an independent cultural orientation in urban areas and by an interdependent cultural orientation in rural areas. Finally, the extent to which relationships between SSS and wellbeing were partially mediated by participants' trait positive affect also differed in the regions. In the urban area, trait positive affect accounted for half of the variation between SSS and wellbeing, whereas in the rural areas, positive trait affect fully mediated relationships between SSS and wellbeing.

This research highlights relationships between Subjective Social Status and well being, underlining the significance of interactions between regional and individual level cultural orientations. Importantly, the research depicts the socially situated nature of constructions of the self, and its relationships with theoretically less malleable social constructions, such as SSS. Findings that higher SSS was a predictor of interdependent self-construal in rural areas cast a cultural view on findings that, higher SES and money is almost always associated with more independent thoughts and behavior (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2008). The cultural boundaries of those effects require further investigation.

The research vindicates recent findings from individualistic cultures that subjective social class, that is, the subjective level of self versus others in a social hierarchy, features as a unique predictor of psycho-social outcomes even after controlling for objective socio-economic status (Adler et al., 2000). Interestingly, SSS was a more important correlate over income.

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Table 1:

Zero order correlations between study's key variables in rural and urban areas

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1	.010	-.092	-.077	-.081	.025	.111	-.044
2. SSS	.061 *	1	.346**	.141 *	.190**	.316**	.273**	-.111
3. Income	.025	.429**	1	.103	.035	.248**	.101	-.110
4. Independent SC	-.080**	.067*	.012	1	.402**	.537**	.454**	-.206**
5. Interdependent SC	.066*	.033	.025	.293**	1	.478**	.259**	-.112
6. Wellbeing	.074**	.248**	.132**	.343**	.414**	1	.573**	-.335**
7. Trait PA	-.007	.172**	.056*	.266**	.273**	.591**	1	-.507**
8. Trait NA	-.012	-.144**	-.074**	-.146**	-.191**	-.457**	-.671**	1

Note: Upper diagonal presents results from rural areas; lower diagonal presents results from urban areas

Table 2:

SSS as a predictor of IND and INTR self-construal in Urban and Rural areas in Greece

	Independent SC		Interdependent SC	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Step 1				
SSS	.09***	.02	.13	.22**
Income	-.02	.03	.07	-.02
Sex	-.08*	.07	-.07	-.08
Education	-.02	.01	-.14*	-.12
Step 2				
SSS	.04	-.03	.01	.15*
Income	-.02	.02	.05	-.03
Sex	-.07*	.08	-.13	-.11
Education	-.02	.02	-.05	-.07
Trait PA	.27***	.28***	.46***	.21**

Table 3:

SSS, self-construal and trait PA as predictors of well-being in urban and rural areas in Greece

WB	URBAN	RURAL
SSS	.23***	.27***
Income	.03	.19**
Sex	.06*	.07
Education	.03	-.12
SSS	.20***	.17**
Income	.03	.20**
Sex	.09**	.10
Education	.04	-.07
Independent SC	.33***	
Interdependent SC		.43***
SSS	.12***	.07
Income	.04	.17**

Sex	.09	.03
Education	.04	.01
Independent SC	.20***	-
Interdependent SC	-	.34***
Trait PA	.51***	.45***
R2	.42	.47
F	(5, 1236) = 175.12	(5, 193) = 34.30