

Holistic Individualism in the Age of Aquarius: Measuring Individualism/Collectivism in New Age, Catholic, and Atheist/Agnostic Groups

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The New Age has been reported to be an exemplary religion of modernity, that emphasizes the importance of autonomy and self-development. Attempts to establish whether New Age ideas and practices were oriented toward self-transcendence or if, instead, they reinforced secular individualistic values and behaviors have become a central point of debate among researchers. In order to bring some new light to this debate we compared New Age with Roman Catholic and atheist/agnostic participants on a battery of social-psychological measures, including values, self-concepts, and individualism/collectivism. Results indicate that New Age individuals adopt an individualist outlook similar to that of nonreligious people, but also define themselves using a set of abstract holistic self-concepts, show avoidance of competitive goals, and stress values of universalism. We call this pattern “holistic individualism” for its fusion of an individualistic value orientation with highly abstract holistic perceptions of the self.

Modern societies have engendered the development of privatized types of religion, which tend to empower the self rather than a transcendent being with ultimate authority (Berger, Berger, and Kellner 1974; Heelas 1996, 2000). Woodhead and Heelas (2000) have named as “holistic” the modern forms of religion that fuse the divine with the natural and human realms of being. They claim that this holistic type of religion stresses individualistic values of freedom and self-assertion, while premodern types of religion are associated with communal structures, a historical body of traditions and beliefs, and values of obedience and humility. Many of the vast array of ideas and practices that constitute holistic religion fall under the broad conceptual umbrella, that is the New Age. Emerging from the 1960s counterculture, the New Age had as one of its central tenets the expectation of a coming new golden age—the Age of Aquarius (Hanegraaff 1996). Although it emerged in Britain and the United States—historically countries from which religious liberalism and individualistic ideologies sprang (Lukes 1973)—New Age networks have grown throughout the industrialized world, including predominantly Catholic countries such as Brazil (Amaral 2000), and Far Eastern countries such as Japan (Shimazono 1999).

Although there has been a considerable growth in the academic study of the New Age in the past two decades (see Kemp and Lewis 2007) it has been argued that the “the majority of academic studies of the New Age are primarily either replications of insider’s accounts of their worldviews, or guides to resources available to religious seekership, or both” (Wood 2003:165). Other limitations on New Age research include its segmented approach, focusing on particular groups of interest rather than in the individual, and the paucity of quantitative comparative studies (see Granqvist and Hagekull 2001). This article aims to bring an original contribution to the New Age research corpus by looking at the types of motivations and self-perceptions endorsed by New Age adherents, a topic that has been of central importance though usually framed in a moral light (i.e., the so-called individualistic/narcissistic vs. spiritual/holistic character of this movement).

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INDIVIDUALISM AND NEW AGE RELIGIOSITY

New Age practices and beliefs are in harmony with the modern individualist emphasis on the self. "In the context of our culture," Heelas (1996:154) writes, "it is impossible to think of a self that is more autonomous or free, more in control or powerful, more responsible, more perfect, more internalised, more expressivistic than that presented in various New Age discourses." On the other hand, the ideals of the New Age point toward values of self-transcendence. Given this ambiguity, many academic studies have tended toward a somewhat sympathetic view of the New Age, following Heelas' (1996) suggestion that while being an individualistic modern spirituality—a "self-religion"—its activities are able to transform people in a positive way. Similarly, Rose (2005) argued that although New Age participants employed many therapies that could be used for narcissistic and hedonistic purposes, they stressed the importance of spirituality and not that of sensual pleasure. Similarly, Hedges and Beckford (2000) in an ethnographic study of New Age healing have argued that self-centered and selfless practices coexist in the New Age, and that rather than individualizing tendencies the New Age may foster, through its universalism, a commitment to values of benevolence and compassion.

In contrast, other sociologists are quite clear in their categorical rejection of the New Age as a "real" religion, considering its principles to be a replication of the "modern epistemology of capitalism and individualism," in which religious practices are hedonistically treated like consumable products (Bruce 2000). The most important piece of empirical evidence showing that adherents of New Age practices and beliefs are more individualistic than religious people has been provided by Houtman and Mascini's (2002) study using a nationally representative panel of Dutch respondents. Over 1,800 participants filled in a questionnaire with measures on New Age and Christian religiosity, and a set of other measures including rationalism and moral individualism. Moral individualism was operationalized as the rejection of authoritarianism and traditional ideas about family life and sexuality, a democratic inclination, and an emphasis on "postmaterialist" values (e.g., liberal attitudes toward law and order). They combined a set of measures, including scales of authoritarianism and sexual permissiveness, and Ingleheart's index for postmaterialism, which assesses social and economical attitudes, to arrive at a final score for moral individualism. The authors concluded that the rise of the New Age and the decline of the Christian churches were associated with increased levels of moral individualism, New Age individuals being more individualistic than Christians, and as much as nonreligious people.

These results present the strongest empirical evidence that New Age practices and beliefs are associated with more individualistic values than are Christian orientations. However, two limitations of Houtman and Mascini's study have to be considered: first, its definition and measures of individualism are mostly restricted to social-political attitudes; second, it does not allow for a distinction between the sort of individualism espoused by New Age participants and that of nonreligious people. The fact that moral individualism is understood to be the cause for both the rise of the New Age and nonreligiousness does not explain the obviously contrasting ideological and behavioral differences underlying these two groups. In order to overcome these limitations we suggest the need for: (1) a methodological approach that combines measures of individualism sensitive to motivational and cognitive social-individual aspects; and (2) a theoretical understanding of the ideological idiosyncrasy of the New Age, which emphasizes the individual's needs and desires while framing him or her in holistic connection with the whole of life—a pattern, that we henceforth call "holistic individualism."

ASSESSING "HOLISTIC INDIVIDUALISM"

In cross-cultural research the term holistic is often used interchangeably with sociocentric and collectivist, and opposed to individualistic. Cognitively, the holistic perspective sees the individual never in the abstract but as part of a social context, in relationship with other entities (Shweder and

Bourne 1982). In the New Age, however, holism is not a category of social contextualization but of cosmological belief. In a study of the New Age in the town of Glastonbury, Prince and Riches (2000) describe how holism functions less as a determinant of daily life than as a background principle. Accordingly, they find New Age society to be relatively individualistic, while espousing a magical ideology that reacts against the mind/body dualism and envisages each person in direct connection with cosmological processes. Hanegraaff (1996) has also analyzed how New Age holism is characteristically defined in abstract terms and by opposition to views such as dualism and reductionism. He also considers the idea of cosmological interrelatedness to be one of its central tenets.

To speak of an individualism that can be holistic is, in cross-cultural research, a contradiction in terms. It may, nonetheless, be possible to consider the coexistence of these two dimensions if one of them refers not to a social context but to an ideological one, as it happens with the New Age. Thus, while individualism seems to be the “social locus” in the New Age, with its emphasis on self-development and self-expression, its central belief is one of holistic integration of the individual in the cosmos. On the other hand, holistic ideas are sometimes expressed in almost moral terms, especially in the way the New Age stresses values of self-transcendence—but to what extent these ideas find a social embodiment or remain an abstract principle is still an open question. In order to investigate the plausibility of a “holistic individualism” construct in relation to the New Age, this study used a social psychological approach centered on measurements of individualism and collectivism.

The Social Psychological Measurement of Individualism/Collectivism (I/C)

A number of studies have reported that holding an individualist or independent versus collectivist or interdependent concept of the self has different implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation (Markus and Kitayama 1991). These differences are explained by the fact that in a collectivist setting individuals are more likely to see themselves as part of an encompassing social network and to act in accordance with what one perceives to be the feelings, thoughts, and actions of the others; in individualistic cultures the self is construed as separate, autonomous, and self-contained. Triandis and colleagues (Triandis, McCusker, and Hui 1990) have tested a variety of measures and generally advocated that the best way of assessing individualism/collectivism (I/C) is by combining several instruments. Some of the most often used and validated methods include the analysis of self-concepts (e.g., Cousins 1989; Lalljee and Angelova 1995; Shweder and Bourne 1982), values or motivational goals (Schwartz 1992, 1994), and the personal versus in-group structure of these goals, which leads to the differentiation between vertical and horizontal types of I/C (Singelis et al. 1995; Triandis 1995).

The analysis of self-concepts is one of the most direct ways of testing how the individual perceives him- or herself in relation to in-groups and society; furthermore, it also allows for a more particular understanding of how individualist and collectivist cultures may endow their members with a cognitive framework that emphasizes either contextual or abstract forms of self-perception. For example, collectivism has been reported to be associated with self-concepts that include references to social entities (e.g., “I am a son,” referring to family, or “I am a Catholic” referring to religion; Triandis, McCusker, and Hui 1990) and to concrete self-concepts (e.g., “I am 20 years old,” or “I am a student”), while individualism is associated with more abstract self-definitions that often emphasize psychological traits (e.g., “I am honest” or “I am intelligent”; Cousins 1989).

Cross-cultural research on values has had a significant step forward with Schwartz’s (1992) development of a survey comprised of 56 single values, which are clustered in 10 distinct motivational types of values, including Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation, Self-Direction, Universalism, Benevolence, Tradition, Conformity, and Security. This survey has now been validated in more than 50 countries and the scale has also been used to study how value types

are related to religiosity. A recent meta-analysis (Saroglou, Delpierre, and Dernelle 2004) reviewing studies from 15 countries, using more than 8,000 participants mostly from Catholic religious backgrounds—but also including Protestant denominations, Greek Orthodox, Jews, and Muslims—has shown that religion is positively associated with values of Tradition, Conformity, and Benevolence, and negatively correlated with Hedonism, Stimulation, and Self-Direction. Similar results had been obtained in a previous study (Schwartz and Huisman 1995:91), where this set of correlations was predicted on the general assumption that traditional religious orientations characteristically stress “reaching toward and submitting to forces beyond the self,” thus emphasizing values of Tradition, Conformity, and Benevolence. Regarding the I/C construct, Schwartz (1994) has suggested that the most adequate operationalization entails focusing on the autonomy or embeddedness of the person vis-à-vis the group. In this way, values of Openness to Change (achievement, stimulation, self-direction, and hedonism) would stress personal autonomy and thus be associated with individualist cultures, while values of Conservation (tradition, conformity, and security) emphasize group embeddedness and are related to collectivist cultures. In sum, research undertaken with this instrument reports that traditional religiosity is positively associated with types of values characteristic of collectivism and negatively correlated with individualistic ones. However, although benevolence and universalism are values that belong to the Self-Transcendence dimension, research shows no significant association between universalism and religiosity. It may be that because collectivism emphasizes the relation to the in-group, the collectivist person would find more value in benefiting someone closer to her or him. On the other hand, universalist values are defined in a more abstract and secularized way (e.g., social justice, equality, union with nature).

Individualism, both at the cultural and individual level, has also been shown to be associated with the prioritization of personal goals over the goals of the in-group, whether family or colleagues, while the collectivist self gives priority to the in-group, even if it may involve sacrificing one's interests (Singelis et al. 1995; Triandis 1995). Typically, individualism asserts independence and priority of individual goals before those of the in-group, including the stimulation of competition; collectivism, on the other hand, usually gives priority to the goals of the in-group (Triandis 1995). In order to measure the structure of the individual's goals regarding the in-group while accounting for hierarchy (acceptance of in/equality), measures of vertical and horizontal I/C were developed (Singelis et al. 1995). Thus, Vertical Individualism is understood as a cultural pattern that postulates an autonomous self where inequality is expected. For Horizontal Individualism, though sharing the same principle of the autonomy of the self, equality between individuals is assumed. On the other hand, in Vertical Collectivism the individual sees the self as an aspect of the in-group, but inequality between members of the group (some will have a higher status than others) is expected. Finally, for Horizontal Collectivism the self is interdependent but equality is an essential characteristic of this pattern. Although intended to be used as four different measures, in order to increase the validity of a measure of I/C at the cross-cultural level, Singelis and colleagues (1995) have reported that the horizontal-vertical constructs are statistically related to each other and can be collapsed. Finally, from their analysis of how it relates to other measures and previous literature, they have concluded that Vertical Collectivism represents the most central element of collectivism, in which the individual not only feels to be part of the in-group but is also ready to sacrifice himself or herself for the collective.

THE PRESENT STUDY

This study aimed at elucidating the type of individualism espoused by New Age individuals and how it contrasts from that of nonreligious people. More specifically, we asked whether holistic individualism would be expressed in a hybrid pattern of individualistic self-concepts, values, and structure of social goals, along with some collectivist-held motivations such as self-transcendent values of benevolence, some of which have been shown to be associated with traditional religiosity.

Two contrast groups were used, one consisting of practicing Catholics, and the other of nonreligious (atheist/agnostic) participants.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 159 participants (53 per group), composed of 55 men and 103 women recruited in Oxford and London, completed and returned a questionnaire. For the Catholic group, questionnaires were distributed at churches after mass and for the New Age group they were handed out after a talk at New Age centers. Nonreligious participants were sought through a pool of subjects from the Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford, and through advertisements around the city that asked for individuals who were agnostic/atheist to participate in a questionnaire study.

For the total sample, ages ranged from 18 to 84, with a mean of 43.7 ($SD = 17.1$). There was a significant age difference between groups [$F(2, 156) = 10.96, p < 0.001$]. Catholics ($M = 51.4, SD = 16.5$) were older than New Age ($M = 43.0, SD = 12.5$) and nonreligious participants ($M = 36.7, SD = 18.5$). Rose (2005) reported that 63 percent of the New Age subjects in his British sample were 18 to 44 years old and Houtman and Mascini (2002) also found this group to be younger than Protestants in the Netherlands. Most subjects (80.4 percent) had British nationality. Regarding occupation, 10.7 percent were retired, 3.1 percent were housewives, and 18.9 percent were students. The remaining individuals were employed across a range of middle-class professions, such as management, administration, high school teaching, university lecturing, medicine, journalism, and arts.

Measures

Materials in the surveys consisted of measures of self-concepts, horizontal and vertical individualism/collectivism, and values. Scales for New Age practices and traditional religiosity were also included to control for the homogeneity of the groups.

Self-Concepts (20 Statements Test)

Initially developed by Kuhn and McPartland (1954) to assess self-attitudes, it has been one of the most often used instruments in the cross-cultural study of self-concepts. It uses an open-ended format in which the individual is asked to write 20 statements in reply to the question: "Who am I?" Scoring codes usually consider social versus nonsocial responses or, in more elaborate formats, four basic categories along a concrete-abstract continuum (physical, social, attributive, and global self-concepts) are used (Cousins 1989). Due to the varied content of the abstract attributive and global concepts, subcategories were also included (see Table 1 for full description with examples taken from participants of the current study).

Vertical and Horizontal I/C

This 29-item measure looks at the structure of personal versus in-group goals and is divided into four scales (Singelis et al. 1995; Triandis 1996): Vertical Individualism stresses competition and standing out (e.g., "Competition is the law of nature"); Vertical Collectivism has a high sense of duty and sacrifice for the benefit of the group (e.g., "Self-sacrifice is a virtue"); Horizontal Individualism measures uniqueness but not distinction (e.g., "Being a unique individual is important for me"); Horizontal Collectivism is concerned with cooperation but not subordination to the in-group ("I like sharing little things with my neighbors"). From these four scales, we derived scores

for Collectivism and Hierarchy, considering the existence of two dimensions with opposite poles (Individualism-Collectivism; Horizontal-Vertical), as theoretically proposed by Triandis (1996) following Schwartz's (1992) findings.

Values

Schwartz's (1992) scale of values is composed of 10 universal types of values grouped across two dimensions. The first dimension, Openness to Change versus Conservation combines Stimulation and Self-Direction versus Security, Conformity, and Tradition types of values; the second dimension, Self-Enhancement versus Self-Transcendence, opposes Power and Achievement to Universalism and Benevolence. Finally, Hedonism is related both to Openness to Change and

TABLE 1
SCORING CODE FOR SELF-CONCEPTS WITH EXAMPLES

A—Physical

References to observable, physical attributes of self that do not imply social interaction:

I am 40 years old; 1.70 cm tall; a man/woman; white.

B—Social

Reference to social role, institutional membership, or other social defined status:

I'm a student; a secretary; a Catholic; a husband; English/European; a member of a club; I'm a neighbor; a friend; a brother.

C—Attributes

References to self as a situation-free agent characterized by personal styles of acting, feeling, and thinking.

C.1 Preferences, interests, attitudes, beliefs

I am one who is interested in other people; who believes in justice; who likes reading; who enjoys cooking; a lover of nature; I'm fond of walking.

C.2 Wishes, aspirations

I want to adhere to my principles; to learn dancing; I'm hoping to achieve happiness; looking forward to my holidays; I'm seeking approval.

C.3 Activities, habits

One who reads books; who's busy; I'm enjoying my job; I swim often.

C.4 Qualified psychological attributes

Any psychological attribute that includes reference to other people, to time, or locale:

I am a travel companion; I'm concerned about my family; I am kind at work; I am a warm person toward my friends; I love my daughter.

C.5 Pure psychological attributes

I am honest; kind; ambitious; friendly; extroverted; a hard worker; a listener; a dreamer; an optimist; a spiritual person; funny; sensitive.

CM Attributes miscellaneous

I'm happy to have a nice home; I'm a person who has lost time; I'm fortunate and grateful.

D. Global

References to self as abstracted from social role and social engagement.

D.1 Existential-individuating

Highly private statements of self as unique and individuated:

I am me/myself/I an individual; a unique creation; a person; a person who loves; I am of significance; I am special; I am fundamentally alone.

(continued)

TABLE 1
Continued

D.2 Universal-holistic
Suggests membership in or connection with a universal, undifferentiated category:
<i>I am a human being; part of the universe; a drop in the ocean; a child of God; created by God; a link in a chain; I'm of this world; I'm connected; a person in a wider society.</i>
D.3 Metaphorical
Use of metaphors to describe oneself:
<i>I am an illusion; an enigma; a rose; a paradox; I am whole; I'm a bridge; a totem; light; Yin & Yang.</i>
D.4 Existential-transformation
<i>I am passing; I am on a journey; I am growing within; I am finding myself; I am a changing thing; a person learning/exploring.</i>
DM Global miscellaneous
<i>I am a carer of the planet; I am an awakener; I am a transformer; I have many souls.</i>
O. Other
O.A Modified physical:
<i>I am too short; My mind is still active.</i>
O.B Modified social:
<i>I am a mediocre student.</i>
O.I Immediate situation:
<i>I am hungry.</i>
O.E Modified existential
<i>Who is any of us?; Can't say.</i>
U Unreadable
X Uncodable

Self-Enhancement. Respondents were asked to rate 56 values in a scale ranging from -1 (opposed to my values) to +7 (of supreme importance).

New Age Practices

This 12-item measure asks about the frequency (ranging from “never practiced” to “practicing regularly”) of New Age techniques, such as yoga, meditation, Reiki, Shiatsu, and also divination practices such as Tarot, I-Ching, and astrology (see Höllinger and Smith 2002).

Traditional Religiosity

This scale consists of items that ask about the frequency of religious practice (religious services and praying) and self-perceived religiousness (“How religious do you consider yourself to be?”). Religious denomination was also controlled for.

RESULTS

New Age Practices and Religiosity Scales

Both scales showed a good reliability. For the New Age Practices scale, Cronbach's alpha = 0.85, and for Traditional Religiosity Cronbach's alpha = 0.88. An ANCOVA with Bonferroni *post hoc* tests and age as a covariate was carried out for each scale. For Traditional Religiosity

TABLE 2
PROPORTION OF MAIN CATEGORIES USE BY GROUP FOR SELF-CONCEPTS

		New Age	Catholic	Nonreligious	<i>F</i>
A	Physical	0.041 ^a	0.053	0.077	3.94*
B	Social	0.159 ^b	0.343	0.254	9.54**
C	Attributes	0.364 ^a	0.455	0.479	3.15*
D	Global	0.374 ^c	0.073	0.140	23.98**
O	Other	0.063	0.058	0.029	1.47

*The mean difference is significant, $p < 0.05$.

**The mean difference is significant, $p < 0.001$.

^aThe proportion is significantly lower for the New Age than for the nonreligious group.

^bThe proportion is significantly lower for the New Age than for the Catholic and nonreligious groups.

^cThe proportion is significantly higher for the New Age than for the Catholic and nonreligious groups.

[$F(2, 152) = 277.31, p < 0.001$], Catholics had a significantly higher average score ($M = 4.66, SD = 0.65$) than New Age ($M = 2.54, SD = 1.37$) and nonreligious participants ($M = 0.28, SD = 0.31$). For New Age Practices, the New Age group had a significantly higher score ($M = 2.37, SD = 0.50$) than Catholics ($M = 1.26, SD = 0.28$) and nonreligious people ($M = 1.16, SD = 0.15$), [$F(2, 140) = 179.46, p < 0.001$]. Overall, these results support the baseline assumption that we are looking at groups with differing religious practices.

Self-Concepts

The coding reliability was assessed between two researchers for 40 subjects of the sample. The overall agreement on coding categories was 84.6 percent. Results were calculated based on the proportion of responses in a given category to the total number of statements found on each questionnaire. A between-subjects MANCOVA, with age as covariate, and Bonferroni *post hoc* tests were conducted for the main categories, and for all the subcategories, respectively. Table 2 presents the results for the main categories [$F(2, 152) = 6.46, p < 0.001$]. The Physical category was used more frequently by the nonreligious group and least frequently by the New Age participants, and the Social category was used more frequently by Catholics and least frequently by the New Age group. The nonreligious group also showed a significantly higher frequency of Social self-attributes than New Age individuals. Similar results were reported for the Attributes category, where the New Age respondents showed a lower frequency than nonreligious people. Finally, New Age individuals had a much higher frequency of Global self-concepts than the other groups. There were no differences between groups for the other category.

Table 3 presents the results for all the subcategories [$F(2, 152) = 4.06, p < 0.001$]. Within the Attributes category, the only significant difference is in the Preferences, Interests, and Attitudes subcategory, with Catholics showing the highest frequency and the New Age the lowest. Nonreligious individuals were also higher on this subcategory than the New Age group. It is however in the Global category that the most striking differences between groups are observed. With one exception, the New Age group used Global subcategories more often than the other groups. The Metaphorical and Universal-Holistic subcategories in particular were the most frequently employed by New Age individuals.

Vertical and Horizontal Individualism/Collectivism

Table 4 shows that this measure revealed only a moderate reliability on most scales and a very low alpha for Horizontal Collectivism. A between-subjects MANCOVA, with age as covariate,

TABLE 3
PROPORTION OF SUBCATEGORIES USE BY GROUP FOR SELF-CONCEPTS

Categories		New Age	Catholic	Nonreligious	F
A	Physical	0.041 ^a	0.053	0.077	3.94*
B	Social	0.159 ^b	0.343	0.254	9.54**
C1	Preference, interest, attitude	0.026 ^b	0.104	0.067	6.25*
C2	Wish, aspiration	0.014	0.010	0.021	0.51
C3	Activity, habit	0.029	0.043	0.050	1.78
C4	Qualified attribute	0.015	0.030	0.030	1.36
C5	Pure attribute	0.269	0.250	0.297	1.00
CM	Attributes miscellaneous	0.011	0.019	0.014	0.36
D1	Existential-individuating	0.071	0.037	0.078	0.70
D2	Universal-holistic	0.086 ^c	0.028	0.022	15.44**
D3	Metaphorical	0.126 ^c	0.003	0.007	14.01**
D4	Existential transformation	0.037 ^c	0.001	0.001	25.61**
DM	Global miscellaneous	0.053 ^d	0.004	0.033	5.70*
O	Other	0.063	0.058	0.029	1.47

N = 156.

*The mean difference is significant, $p < 0.05$.

**The mean difference is significant, $p < 0.001$.

^aThe proportion is significantly lower for the New Age than for the nonreligious group.

^bThe proportion is significantly lower for the New Age than for the Catholic and nonreligious groups.

^cThe proportion is significantly higher for the New Age than for the Catholic and nonreligious groups.

^dThe proportion is significantly higher for the New Age than for the Catholic group.

TABLE 4
ALPHA COEFFICIENT AND MEAN SCORES FOR VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL INDIVIDUALISM/COLLECTIVISM

	Alpha	New Age		Catholic		Nonreligious		F
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Vertical individualism	0.76	3.71 ^a	1.36	4.54	1.01	4.84	1.49	9.40**
Vertical collectivism	0.67	4.24 ^a	0.90	6.02 ^b	0.95	4.85	1.13	32.18**
Horizontal individualism	0.62	6.96	1.07	6.98	1.09	7.28	1.01	1.25
Horizontal collectivism	0.24	6.71	0.95	6.97	1.00	6.43	0.99	1.36
Collectivism	0.69	5.03	0.51	5.33 ^c	0.56	4.75	0.80	5.17*
Hierarchy	0.71	5.26 ^a	0.69	6.04	0.53	5.76	0.61	18.29**

N = 135.

*The mean difference is significant, $p < 0.05$.

**The mean difference is significant, $p < 0.001$.

^aThe mean score is significantly lower for the New Age group than for the Catholic and nonreligious groups.

^bThe mean score is significantly higher for the Catholic than for the New Age and nonreligious groups.

^cThe mean score is significantly higher for the Catholic than for the nonreligious group.

and Bonferroni *post hoc* tests were conducted for the scales on Horizontal and Vertical I/C [$F(2, 135) = 9.40, p < 0.001$]; individual ANCOVAS were conducted for the scales of Collectivism [$F(2, 135) = 5.17, p < 0.01$] and Hierarchy [$F(2, 135) = 18.29, p < 0.001$]. Turning first to the general dimensions, notice that the Catholics had the higher score on Collectivism and the

nonreligious group the lowest. On the Hierarchy dimension, Catholics again had the highest score and the New Age group the lowest. In fact, New Age respondents had significantly lower scores than both other groups on the Hierarchy dimension.

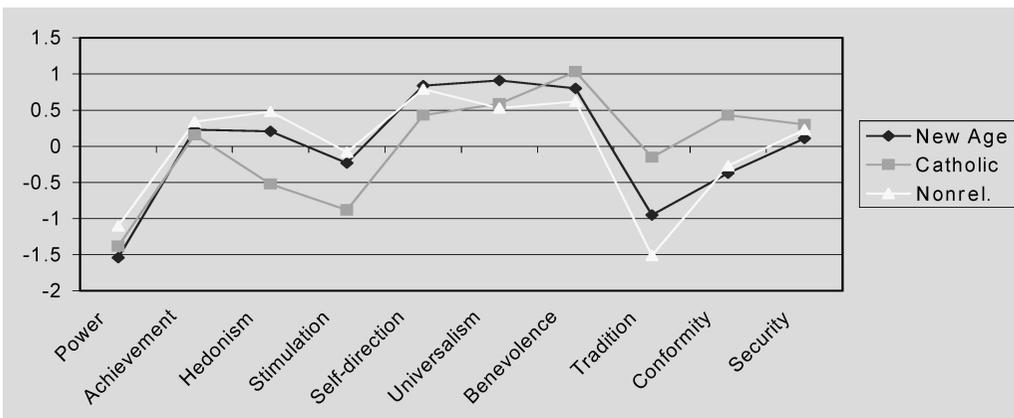
Further examination of the results for the Vertical and Horizontal I/C measures shows that New Age participants were significantly lower than both other groups on Vertical Individualism and Vertical Collectivism. Catholics also emphasized more Vertical Collectivism than the other groups. No significant differences between groups were found for Horizontal I/C. Overall, the results highlight that Catholics tend to be the most collectivist and that New Age individuals attribute less importance to Hierarchy and Vertical I/C than the other groups.

Values

Alpha reliability coefficients for each type of value scale were considered adequate: Power (0.72), Achievement (0.65), Hedonism (0.61), Stimulation (0.79), Self-Direction (0.65), Universalism (0.81), Benevolence (0.76), Tradition (0.67), Conformity (0.75), and Security (0.69). Following Schwartz’s (1992) recommendation, individual scores were standardized (see Figure 1) and a between-subjects MANCOVA, with age as covariate, and Bonferroni *post hoc* tests were conducted for the 10 types of values [F(2, 137) = 6.56, *p* < 0.001]. On the Openness to Change versus Conservation dimension, New Age and nonreligious participants tended toward the first pole and the Catholics toward the opposite. Thus, for the value types of Hedonism [F(2, 137) = 14.80, *p* < 0.001], Stimulation [F(2, 137) = 6.99, *p* = 0.001], and Self Direction [F(2, 137) = 9.08, *p* < 0.001], the New Age and nonreligious groups scored higher than Catholics. On the other hand, for the value types of Tradition [F(2, 137) = 35.66, *p* < 0.001] and Conformity [F(2, 137) = 15.85, *p* < 0.001] Catholics scored higher than the New Age and nonreligious groups. However, no differences were found between groups for Security [F(2, 137) = 1.47, n.s.]. Overall, few differences were reported between New Age and nonreligious participants for this dimension, with the exception of Tradition, on which the New Age group scored higher than nonreligious respondents.

On the other general dimension, which opposes Self-Enhancement to Self-Transcendence, the results were more ambiguous than for the previous dimension, though Catholics seemed to lean more toward Self-Transcendence than the nonreligious group, and the nonreligious group tended more toward Self-Enhancement. Thus, for Power values [F(2, 137) = 6.51, *p* = 0.002] the nonreligious group scored higher than Catholics, and Catholics emphasized more Benevolence values than nonreligious people [(F(2, 137) = 4.21, *p* < 0.05]. For Universalism values

**FIGURE 1
MEAN STANDARDIZED SCORES FOR TYPES OF VALUES BY GROUP**



[$F(2, 137) = 7.17, p = 0.001$] the New Age group scored higher than the other groups. There were no differences between groups on values of achievement [$F(2, 137) = 0.26, n.s.$].

Overall, the results highlight important differences between groups and a similarity between the New Age and nonreligious group on the dimension of Openness to Change versus Conservation. Thus, as New Age and nonreligious groups tended toward the Openness to Change pole, the Catholic group was higher on the Conservation side. Results for the other dimension showed that Catholics were more inclined toward Self-Transcendence than the nonreligious group, which tended more toward Self-Enhancement. As for the New Age group, the most significant result on this dimension was its higher stress on Universalism values.

DISCUSSION

The main results of this study suggest that the New Age is clearly distinct on self-concepts, values, and structure of social goals from a more traditionally oriented form of religion, such as Catholicism. Furthermore, it also shows features, that differentiate New Age from a secularized nonreligious orientation. The results for the self-concepts show that New Age individuals used more abstract self-concepts, particularly of a universal-holistic (e.g., "I'm a drop in the ocean") and a metaphoric (e.g., "I'm a bridge") character than Catholics and nonreligious people. On the other hand, nonreligious people reported a higher frequency of physical, social, and attributes categories than the New Age group, and Catholics were also higher on social self-concepts. For the scales of Vertical and Horizontal Individualism/Collectivism, Catholics proved to be more collectivist than the nonreligious group in the general dimension of Collectivism and to have a higher score on Vertical Collectivism than both other groups. Altogether, Catholics emphasized more collectivist goal structures than the other groups. Let us recall that Vertical Collectivism is deemed to be the central element of collectivism (Singelis et al. 1995) and it entails self-sacrifice and the performance of duties for the benefit of the group, which the individual may dislike. The other significant finding using these scales was that for both Vertical I/C scores and for Hierarchy, New Age individuals showed significantly lower scores than the Catholic and nonreligious groups. This suggests that this group deemphasizes both competitive and self-sacrificing goals.

The results for the values scale showed that New Age and nonreligious individuals were higher on values of Hedonism, Self-Direction, and Stimulation, which emphasize the autonomy of the individual, while Catholics stressed more values of Tradition and Conformity, which are related to embeddedness in the collective. Results for this dimension are in harmony with those previously reported in which New Age participants were found to be more morally individualistic—as much as nonreligious people—than Christians (Houtman and Mascini 2002). The results for the second dimension of this scale, though not as clear as for the previous one, nonetheless show Catholics to tend more toward the Self-Transcendent pole and nonreligious people toward Self-Enhancement. The New Age group had a higher score on Universalism than the other groups. Universalism emphasizes values of harmony and egalitarianism, which again seem to reinforce the suggestion that New Age individuals deemphasize hierarchy and inequality.

What do these results tell us in particular of the New Age individual and how does it relate to previous findings? First, when compared to a traditional religion, the New Age's individualistic nature stands out. But there are other important characteristics that provide us with a more complete picture of how New Age individualism is perhaps unique, and also differs from that of nonreligious individuals. There seem to be two central aspects to this form of individualism. One, which pertains more to the cognitive domain, concerns the abstract types of self-definition used by the New Age group, where the individual tends to see her- or himself as integrated in and connected to a larger whole. The nature of this connection is highly personal and abstract, rather than socially embedded. The second characteristic, which pertains to the motivational domain, is related to the emphasis on values of universalism and the avoidance of hierarchical structuring of in-group goals, whether of a competitive individualistic type or a dutiful collectivist one. These results confirm our "holistic

individualism” hypothesis following from previous academic characterizations of the New Age as a holistic form of religiosity (see Woodhead and Heelas 2000), which is nonetheless marked by clear individualistic goals and self-perceptions. This pattern may explain why, notwithstanding the self-transcendent ideals, the New Age shows a very low level of engagement in social work or in being able to establish long-lasting communities (see Heelas 1996).

Woodhead (1993) has provided an interesting sociological explanation for the rise of the belief in holism and cosmological interconnectedness in the New Age. She argues that these are in fact the outcome of a radical egalitarian motivation, which finds its roots in modern social and economic changes, and in ideologies like Marxism. Thus, “connectedness” and “wholeness” would be ethical notions that highlight the ideal of equal treatment. With regard to this, it is curious to note that the New Age belief in reincarnation, which became popularized in the West through 19th-century spiritualism, was in harmony with the egalitarian tendencies of the period, and was used by influential socialists who saw in it a way of accounting for the inequality of social conditions (Guénon [1921]1975; Hanegraaff 1996). Still, this would not explain why this radical egalitarian motivation becomes associated with religious ideas in some people and not in others and why it would lead individuals to describe themselves using such abstract global concepts (instead of more social ones). Finally, it is also reasonable to ask why individualism—and not collectivism—would be associated with such radical egalitarianism, as it happens in the New Age.

A different, more psychological explanation for New Age holism is suggested by recent studies linking New Age practices and beliefs, including belief in alternative medicine, and magical thinking, cognitive looseness, and paranormal beliefs and experiences (Farias, Claridge, and Lalljee 2005; Saher and Lindeman 2005). This research argues that the main predictor of New Age beliefs is magical thinking—a disposition to report unusual perceptions and ideations, also associated with a greater capacity to make loose associations between events. On the cognitive level, magical thinking is characterized by a holistic worldview where entities and events are connected in a way that defies modern rationalistic notions of causality (see Lévi-Bruhl 1926). The capacity to engage in magical thinking is a universal one but can be culturally emphasized, as the New Age does through its practices and ideas. Holism for the New Age is something to be lived and experienced, not necessarily as a social reality but as an individual experience, aided by various techniques, where one’s ordinary sense of self is expanded or connected with certain abstract powers or nonphysical entities—the type of experience characteristic of magical thinking. At the social level, this subjective holism is of a fundamentally different nature from that found in collectivist settings, for it is built upon weak social ties and it features a universalistic stance that shifts the typically collectivist in-group relatedness toward an abstract form of loose (magical) connectedness with the larger cosmos. The construct of holistic individualism has been identified in relation to the New Age but it is plausible to find it applied elsewhere. An obvious example is the growing interest in spirituality within modern societies, a concept that overlaps in many ways with New Age ideas in the way it emphasizes non-ordinary experiences at the individual level and distances itself from communal forms of religion. It may be the case that holistic individualism is a social-cultural phenomenon of which the New Age is merely a precursor.

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