CULTURE AND THE CONCEPT OF SELF

Defining the Concept of Self
- Idea or images that one has about oneself and how and why one behaves
- Influences how we understand the world around us and our relationships with others in that world
- Influences our thoughts, actions, and feelings

Where does self come from?
- The concept of self is part of one's cultural worldviews because how one sees oneself in relation to the rest of the world is part of one's culture
- Terror management theory
  - Humans create concepts of self as reaction to terror humans feel because of awareness of mortality

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN SELF-CONCEPT
The Independent versus Interdependent Self-Construal Theory

- Markus and Kitayama’s two fundamentally different senses of self

- Independent self-construal: Western or individualistic construal of self as an independent, separate entity

- Interdependent self-construal: Non-western or collectivistic construal of self as inherently connected or interdependent with others and inseparable from a social context

An Example of the Independent versus Interdependent Self: Consequences for Self-Perception

- Self-perception

  - Independent self-construals: one’s internal attributes such as abilities and personality traits are the most salient self-relevant information

  - Interdependent self-construals: self in particular social relationships or specific contexts are more salient

An Empirical Assessment of the Independent versus Interdependent Self-Construal Theory

- Data Regarding Assumptions Concerning Culture and Self

  - The theory starts with the idea that American culture is individualistic and Asian cultures (especially Japan) are collectivistic

  - Studies show that this is not the case
Matsumoto, Kudoh, & Takeuchi (1996) found that European Americans were not less collectivistic than Japanese or Koreans.

Kleinknecht and colleagues found that Americans were more interdependent than the Japanese (they did not differ in their independent scores).

Levine and colleagues' meta-analysis of self-construals found weak, inconsistent, or non-existent predicted cultural differences.

An Empirical Assessment of the Independent versus Interdependent Self-Construal Theory

- Methodological Issues?
  - Previous studies on self-perception may be due to way data collected (i.e., in a noncontextualized, general task)

Going beyond Independent and Interdependent Self-Construals: Multiple Selves in Cultural Contexts

- Independent and interdependent self-construals coexist simultaneously within individuals
  - Thus the notion that cultures are associated with a single sense of self is based on the erroneous assumption that cultures are homogenous

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Cultural Identity

- Individuals' psychological membership in a distinct culture
  - Fulfills a universal need to belong to social groups

- Nonattribution of being American for Asian Americans
  - Identity denial: an individual is not recognized as a member of a group with which he/she identifies
Multicultural Identities

- Research documents the existence of multiple psychological systems in multicultural individuals
- Cultural frame switching: Biculturals have multiple cultural systems in their minds, and access one or the other depending on the context
- Cultural reaffirmation effect: Biculturals endorse even more traditional values associated with their native culture than native monocultural individuals in those native cultures
  - May be because immigrants bring with them the culture of their native group at that time

SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-ENHANCEMENT

What Are These, and Where Do They Come From?

- Self-esteem: cognitive and affective evaluations we make about ourselves
  - Cultural worldview so that meaning can be drawn from life
- Self-Enhancement: collection of psychological processes by which we bolster our self-esteem
  - According to Terror Management Theory, self-enhancement is a universal psychological process

Cultural Differences in Self-Esteem and Self-Enhancement

- Early cross-cultural research reported that members of individualistic cultures had higher self-esteem, self-enhanced more, and showed false uniqueness effect compared to members of collectivistic cultures
- Collectivistic Asians engaged in self-effacement

Cultural Differences in Self-Esteem and Self-Enhancement

- Most recent research suggests that people of all cultures self-enhance, but they do so in different ways
  - Cultural trade-off
  - Implicit self-esteem
  - Tactical self-enhancement
- All humans have the tendency to enhance their sense of self because of their unique cognitive abilities, including the need to seek meaning, and knowledge of themselves
What Are Attributions, and Where Do They Come From?

- **Attributions**: inferences people make about the causes of events and their own and others' behaviors
- Based on the unique human cognitive ability to understand that oneself and others are intentional agents
- The process of making attributions is a universal psychological process

Dispositional Attributions: specify the cause of behavior within a person

Situational dispositions: specify the cause of behavior outside a person, such as other people, nature, or acts of God

Cultural Differences in Attributional Styles

- **Self-serving bias**: attributing one's success to personal factors but one's failures to situational factors
- **Fundamental attribution error**: tendency to attribute causes of others' behavior to disposition or personality rather than situational
- Americans make the above attributions, whereas other cultures do not

Many studies show that cultures differ in their attributional styles

Universal and Culture-Specific Features of Attributional Styles

- Self-serving biases in attributions is universal
- Cultures vary in the specific ways in which they use the attributional process