Cross-Cultural Perspectives in the Assessment of Personality

Personal Identity on Fáánakkar & A Collective Fear of the Collective

Identity

- Social Identity (lawyer, teacher, mother)
  - Rights & Duties
  - Rules of conduct
    (Bartender → customer, owner, server)
- Personal Identity (jealous, shy, aggressive)
  - What someone is like “as a person”
  - Personality itself, temperament, character

Research

- Micronesia, Trukese island of Fáánakkar
- Social organization
  - Districts
  - “Matrilineages”
  - Brothers over sisters, older over the young
  - Many social interactions organized based on district membership and lineage

Character Descriptors

- Mosonon vs. Namanam tekiya
  - “respectfulness” vs. “arrogance”
- Pwara vs. Nissimwa
  - “bravery” vs. “cowardice”
- Ekiyek pechekkun vs. Ekiyek pwoteete
  - “strong thought” vs. “weak thought”
Assumption in Trukese Culture

- Character is up for evaluation
  - All 3 + characteristics = best character
- Character is unstable
  - Maintenance of “good” character based on individual’s desire to be or appear “good”
  - Often improves with age
  - Character may be changed by outside forces (magic, medicine)
- Individuals may feign “good” character they do not possess

Understanding Character

- What are some of the implications for these assumptions of character?
- Do you think the English translations of Trukese terms are reliable or valid?
  - Hideaki Anno – nuances of “regret, sad”
- Even if these terms are reliable and valid, do we understand the rules regarding how they are applied?

Questioning Caughey’s Conclusions

- If another researcher were conducting this research, would he/she extract the same “Big Three” traits?
- Would another researcher’s experiences differ from those of Caughey?
- Assuming Caughey’s depiction of culture is accurate, in what ways is his concept of personality different from our own culture?

Markus & Kitayama: A Collective Fear of the Collective

- What fundamental Western assumption about personality does this article challenge?
  - Interdependence vs. Independence
  - Socialism
  - Conformity
  - Existentialism
  - “Another Brick in The Wall”
  - “The Borg”

Benefits to Identifying This Assumption

- Better understanding of collectivist cultures
- Better understanding of the assumptions underlying our own culture

Implications for Personality

- What is the normative role/task for the self in a collectivist culture?
- Can you see any particular advantages to this approach? Disadvantages?
More Implications

- Independent views of personality are adequate for Western cultures but tend to be inadequate for other cultures
- Independence is influential to our Western concept of personality, but fail to account for the changeable nature of personality or social contexts
- Marginalized groups in Western cultures are more collectivist than the privileged few

A Few More Implications

- Americans tend to conceptualize themselves in interdependent terms at the trait level, not the social level
  - Caring, responsible, loved vs. “My obligation...”
- Individual models of psychology likely fail to fully capture personality
  - Specifically, the social self
  - People tend to be less self-sufficient, self-reliant that a wholly individualistic understanding of self would suggest