Cross-Cultural Perspectives in the Assessment of Personality

Personal Identity on Fáánakkar

&

A Collective Fear of the Collective
Caughey:
Personal Identity on Fáánakkar

- Caughey is an anthropologist by training
- Participant observation
  - Immersion in the target culture
- Detailed depiction of life in another culture
- Subjective
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character 1</th>
<th>Character 2</th>
<th>Descriptor 1</th>
<th>vs.</th>
<th>Descriptor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mosonoson</td>
<td>Namanam tekiya</td>
<td>“respectfulness”</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>“arrogance”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pwara</td>
<td>Nissimwa</td>
<td>“bravery”</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>“cowardice”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekiyek pechekkun</td>
<td>Ekiyek pwoteete</td>
<td>“strong thought”</td>
<td>vs.</td>
<td>“weak thought”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 41.1 Dimensions of character on Pánakkar
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?
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