

CULTURE AND THE SELF: IMPLICATIONS FOR COGNITION, EMOTION, AND MOTIVATION

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ABSTRACT

Culture has a big impact on how people see themselves and how they relate to others in society. The way a culture is structured helps shape how people think about themselves, which then affects how they think, feel, and are motivated. People from different cultures have very different ideas about who they are, how they connect with others, and how much they depend on each other. These ideas can strongly influence, and in some cases determine, how people experience the world, including how they think, feel, and act. In many Asian cultures, there is a strong belief that people are connected and rely on each other. The focus is on caring about others, fitting in, and working together in harmony. Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama introduced the idea of independent and interdependent self-construals, which is now a key concept in cultural psychology. This paper looks at how cultural backgrounds shape thinking, emotions, and motivation through the idea of the self. On the other hand, people in individualistic cultures often try to be separate from others by focusing on themselves and expressing their unique qualities. The paper argues that these different ways of seeing the self are even more important than people might think. The paper brings together ideas from psychology and anthropology to clearly explain the difference between seeing the self as independent and seeing the self as connected to others. Each of these ways of seeing the self is expected to have specific effects on how people think, feel, and are motivated. These effects are explored, and existing research is reviewed. The findings show that people from individualistic cultures usually focus on independence, personal goals, and thinking in a logical way, while those from collectivistic cultures focus on relationships, thinking about the bigger picture, and working together for the group. Understanding these differences is important for better communication between cultures, for improving education systems, and for doing better psychological research. The paper ends by saying that looking at culture is essential for understanding why people think, feel, and act differently in different societies.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of the self is how people see, think about, and judge themselves compared to others and the world around them. Cultural psychology shows that the self is connected to the culture someone comes from. This culture shapes what people believe, what they value, and how they act. Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, two important researchers, said that culture creates two main ways people see themselves: independent and interdependent. Independent self means that people focus on being their own person, being unique, and achieving personal goals. This is common in places like the US and Canada. On the other hand, interdependent self means that people focus more on relationships, fitting in with groups, and helping others. This is more common in countries like Japan and China.

For example, American parents might tell their kids to think about hungry people in Ethiopia to make them appreciate what they have. Japanese parents might tell their kids to think about the

farmer who worked hard to grow the rice, so they understand the effort that goes into their food. Another example is how a US company told workers to say "I am beautiful" 100 times each day to boost confidence. A Japanese store in New Jersey told workers to hold hands and say "he or she is beautiful" to start the day. These examples show that people in America and Japan see themselves very differently. American culture often focuses on individuality, being different, and standing out. Japanese culture often focuses on getting along with others and working together. These views are part of what cultures expect from people. Researchers believe that these views affect how people experience life. Most psychology studies are based on the Western idea of the self as something separate, focused on personal qualities, and independent. But this view might not cover all cultures. Some cultures see the self as connected to others and the environment. This article suggests that how people see themselves, others, and their connection with others is very important. It compares the independent view of self, common in parts of the US and Europe, with the interdependent view, common in Japan and other parts of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Southern Europe. It shows how different views of the self can influence thinking, feelings, and actions. For people with an interdependent self, thinking is more influenced by others around them. They might see their actions as connected to situations and others. Their emotions and motivations are also shaped by how others react to them. For example, emotions like anger, which come from a strong sense of self, might be less common for people with interdependent self views. They might focus more on helping others rather than on themselves. Looking at differences in thinking, emotions, and actions across cultures can help scientists understand what is common in these areas. It might also offer new ideas about how these mental processes work. In this analysis, we look at recent research that explores the main differences between how people in America or the West see themselves compared to those in Eastern or Asian cultures. We take many important differences from these studies, looking at how the self is understood, structured, and works in different cultural groups. The differences we point out between seeing the self as independent versus interdependent are general patterns that appear when looking at a whole culture. For example, the typical American view of the self might best represent white, middle-class men with Western European backgrounds. It might not fit as well for women overall or for men and women from other ethnic groups or social classes.

We also know that there may be important differences even among the views we consider similar, and some views of the self and others might not fit neatly into the independent or interdependent categories. Our goal is not to list all types of self-views, but to bring attention to a self-view that is often thought to be universal but may actually be specific to certain parts of Western culture. We believe that how people see themselves plays a big role in managing different psychological processes. Understanding different self-views has two main effects. First, it helps us make sense of a number of conflicting findings and question the idea that many aspects of thinking, feeling, and motivation are the same across cultures. Second, it helps us better understand how the self-influences and controls behavior.

These cultural models affect three important areas of psychology:

- ✓ .Cognition – how people see and understand the world
- ✓ .Emotion – how people feel and show their emotions

- ✓ Motivation – what pushes people to reach their goals

Studies comparing different cultures have shown that cultural beliefs influence how people pay attention, manage their emotions, and set goals. So, understanding how culture and self interact offers a full picture of how human psychology works.

CULTURE AND SELF-CONSTRUAL

Self-construal is how people think about themselves in relation to others. The culture someone grows up in shapes how they see themselves and their place in society.

Independent Self

This type of self-construal has these traits:

- ✓ Focusing on personal freedom
- ✓ Expressing individuality
- ✓ Valuing achievement
- ✓ Thinking in a logical, analytical way

Interdependent Self

This type of self-construal includes these traits:

- ✓ Wanting to get along with others
- ✓ Valuing family and community ties
- ✓ Feeling responsible for roles they play
- ✓ Thinking about things based on the situation

Both ways of seeing oneself affect how people act in social situations and how they think, feel, and are motivated.

Culture and Cognition

Cognitive processes like how we see things, focus our attention, and think through problems can be different depending on the culture someone comes from. Studies show that people from Western cultures usually think in a way that focuses on individual objects and separates them from their surroundings. On the other hand, people from East Asian cultures tend to think in a more connected way, considering how things relate to each other and the bigger picture. For example, research shows that people from East Asian backgrounds are more likely to understand situations by looking at the context and the circumstances around an event. Meanwhile, people from Western backgrounds are more likely to explain someone's behavior by looking at their personal characteristics. These differences show how culture plays a big role in shaping how we think and process information.

Culture and Emotion

Emotions are influenced by the cultural rules and expectations that people follow. The way a culture views emotions helps decide which feelings are considered good or bad, how they should

be shown, and how people control them. Studies show that in Western cultures, emotions like excitement and enthusiasm are often seen as positive and valued. On the other hand, in East Asian cultures, emotions like calmness and harmony are more highly regarded. In cultures that focus on groups, emotions such as empathy and shame are more important because they help people connect with others. In cultures that focus on individual goals, emotions like pride and anger are more common because they are connected to personal achievements.

Culture also affects what motivates people.

In individualistic societies, people are often motivated by their own goals and desire to feel good about themselves. In collectivistic societies, people are often motivated by what is expected by others, like family and the group they belong to. For example, students in collectivistic cultures might work hard in school to make their family or community proud, while students in individualistic cultures might study hard to reach their own personal ambitions.

RELATED WORK

The following studies contributed significantly to the understanding of culture and the self.

1. Kitayama & Uskul (2011)

Explored how culture shapes cognitive processes and social behavior.

2. Stephens, Markus & Phillips (2012)

Examined cultural differences in motivation and educational achievement.

3. Heine (2012)

Discussed cultural influences on self-enhancement and self-esteem.

4. Oyserman (2011)

Studied cultural identity and motivation.

5. Chiu, Gelfand & Yamagishi (2013)

Examined cultural influences on social cognition.

6. Markus & Kitayama (2013)

Expanded the theory of culture and the self.

7. Park & Huang (2012)

Investigated cultural differences in emotional processing.

8. Cohen & Varnum (2014)

Studied cultural differences in perception and reasoning.

9. Mesquita & Walker (2013)

Explored cultural construction of emotions.

10. Na et al. (2014)

Studied cultural differences in self-concept and behavior.

COMPARISON TABLE OF RESEARCH STUDIES

Study	Year	Research Focus	Methodology	Key Findings
Kitayama & Uskul	2011	Culture and cognition	Review study	Culture shapes perception and reasoning
Oyserman	2011	Cultural identity	Experimental	Identity influences motivation
Stephens et al.	2012	Education and motivation	Survey & experiments	Cultural mismatch affects achievement
Heine	2012	Self-esteem	Cross-cultural studies	Self-enhancement stronger in Western cultures
Park & Huang	2012	Emotion	Psychological experiments	Cultural norms influence emotional regulation
Chiu et al.	2013	Social cognition	Cultural comparison	Cultural schemas influence thinking
Markus & Kitayama	2013	Cultural self	Theoretical framework	Self-construal shapes behavior
Mesquita & Walker	2013	Emotion	Cultural analysis	Emotions are socially constructed
Cohen & Varnum	2014	Cultural perception	Experimental	Culture influences reasoning patterns
Na et al.	2014	Self-concept	Survey research	Cultural values shape identity

APPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Understanding cultural influences on the self has practical implications in many fields:

Education

Culturally responsive teaching improves learning outcomes.

Organizational Behavior

Understanding cultural differences improves teamwork and leadership.

Mental Health

Therapists must consider cultural values when treating psychological disorders.

Cross-Cultural Communication

Cultural awareness reduces misunderstandings in global interactions.

Two Construal's of the Self: Independent and Interdependent

In many Western cultures, people believe that individuals are separate from each other. The main idea in these cultures is to become independent and to find and show what makes each person unique. To reach this goal, people see themselves as individuals whose actions and thoughts are mainly based on their own feelings, ideas, and behaviors, rather than those of others. A person is seen as a complete, unique, and organized unit of thoughts, emotions, and actions. This person is considered a center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action, different from others and the world around them. This idea comes from the belief that each person has a special mix of internal qualities. It leads to things like "self-actualization," "realizing one's true self," or "developing one's unique potential." The main idea here is that the self is seen as independent and self-sufficient. Other terms used are individualist, egocentric, separate, autonomous, idiocentric, and self-contained. We think that more people in Western cultures have this idea than people in non-Western cultures. However, within a culture, people may not all think exactly the same way. The independent self still needs to act in response to the social environment. But this response is more about showing or proving the self's inner qualities. Others or situations are important, but mainly as a way to check or support the inner self. The independent view of the self is shown in Figure 1A. The large circle represents the self, and the smaller circles are specific people. The Xs show the different parts of the self or others. When the large and small circles overlap, the X means the self in relation to others or a specific relationship. An X inside the self circle, but outside the overlap, shows something about the self that doesn't depend on others and stays the same over time and situations. These are usually about personal desires, likes, abilities, or traits. For people who see themselves as independent, these inner qualities are most important in influencing their actions. Both the person and others believe these qualities are key to understanding the person. These inner qualities are also the most remembered and most easily brought to mind when thinking about oneself.

Consequences for Emotion

In psychology, emotions are usually seen as basic, built-in processes that help people take care of themselves and manage their feelings. But this doesn't mean that everyone feels emotions the same way. In fact, culture plays a big role in how people experience emotions. Like thinking, if an emotion involves the self, how that emotion feels depends on how someone sees themselves. Most emotions are tied to how people see themselves. So, feelings aren't just something inside us; they're shaped by the stories we tell and share with others. They come from the way we understand the world, especially how we see ourselves. Some thinkers say that emotions aren't really natural; they're created through how people talk, justify, and persuade each other.

Emotional meaning comes from social life, not just from individuals. Many emotion theorists believe that emotions are deeply connected to how people see their social situations. The way someone feels depends on how they understand their surroundings, and those feelings can change how they see the situation and what actions they take. The way people understand their social

world is shaped by how they see themselves, others, and their relationship. Because of that, emotional experiences can change depending on how someone sees themselves. There are different ways emotional processes can be affected by the nature of the self. First, the situations that bring out certain emotions can differ based on how someone sees themselves. Second, which emotions are felt and how strong or often they are can also change. For example, some emotions are focused on the self, like anger, frustration, or pride. These emotions are about personal qualities like needs, goals, or abilities. They usually come from when someone feels their internal qualities are blocked, achieved, or confirmed. These emotions help people show off and confirm who they are. For people who see themselves as independent, being good at showing and feeling these emotions helps them stay true to their identity. But showing these emotions can hurt relationships because they might seem selfish or aggressive. However, this isn't as bad for people who see themselves as part of a group, since showing off internal qualities is more accepted for independent people. Other emotions, like sympathy, feeling connected to others, or shame, are more about other people. These emotions come from being aware of others, seeing things from their point of view, and trying to be cooperative. These feelings help people stay connected and work together, which gives a sense of self-worth to those who see themselves as part of a group. For people with that kind of self-view, being good at showing and feeling these emotions helps them feel connected and supported. These emotions highlight the value of relationships and encourage teamwork, which is important for people who see themselves as interdependent. Other-focused emotions can make it harder for people to express their own feelings openly, and they may cause hesitation or mixed feelings. While people with independent selves usually see these consequences as negative (like being shy) and they can actually have a bad effect, people with interdependent selves accept them because the main goal in their lives is to keep and build relationships with others. So, in short, this shows that people with interdependent selves are more likely to express and feel other-focused emotions compared to those with independent selves. Ego-focused emotions are feelings that help and support independence.

In a study comparing American and Japanese university students, Matsumoto, Kudoh, Scherer, and Wallbott found that Americans felt their emotions longer than Japanese students, even though both groups ranked the emotions in the same order (joy and sadness were felt longest, followed by anger and guilt, then fear, shame, and disgust). Americans also said they felt these emotions more strongly and had more physical reactions, like a lump in the throat or changes in breathing, compared to Japanese students. Additionally, when asked what they would do after emotional events, more Japanese students said they didn't need to take any action. One possible explanation for these findings is that most of the emotions studied, except for shame and possibly guilt, are ego-focused emotions.

People with independent selves are more likely to pay attention to these feelings and act according to them, because these feelings are seen as important for understanding themselves. Not paying attention to your feelings might feel inauthentic or like you're ignoring your real self. However, for people with interdependent selves, their inner feelings are not as important in deciding how they act. Ego-focused feelings might be seen as coming from relationships, but not as the main thing that tells people what to do. For those with interdependent selves, the situation with others

is more important than their own feelings, and they might need to control or downplay their feelings to fit in better with others.

Because of these differences in how emotions work, people with different kinds of selves might have very different ideas about why people show their emotions. For those with independent selves, showing emotions like anger, sadness, or fear might mean they're revealing their true feelings. For those with interdependent selves, however, showing emotions might be seen more as a public action that might not be directly connected to their feelings.

This idea is supported by Matsumoto, who used data from 15 cultures and found that people from more hierarchical cultures gave lower intensity ratings when they saw someone showing anger, sadness, or fear in a photo, compared to people from less hierarchical cultures. However, while the level of hierarchy in a culture was strongly linked to how intense the emotions were rated, it didn't affect whether people could accurately recognize those emotions. The only exception to this finding was that people from more hierarchical cultures, where individuals are more connected to others than to themselves, were less likely to correctly recognize happy facial expressions. In these cultures, showing happiness is often a way to maintain good relationships and keep groups peaceful, so it's not seen as a clear sign of how someone really feels inside. For people from these cultures, it's important to avoid feeling too much about personal emotions, especially negative ones like anger. Anger can harm relationships and is considered harmful. Some researchers argue that not everyone experiences the same emotions in the same way. In Tahiti, for example, anger is very feared, and some studies suggest that people don't express it at all. It's not that they stop feeling anger, but they focus more on others and act calmly, so anger doesn't happen much. The same idea is said to apply to the Utku Eskimos, who don't feel or talk about anger, even in situations that would make others very angry. They use a word that means "childish" to describe angry behavior from outsiders. In Japan, there's a similar belief that anger should be avoided to keep harmony. A study comparing 11-month-old Japanese and American babies supports this. The babies watched a toy and a mother showing happy, angry, or fearful expressions. Both groups reacted the same to happy and fearful faces. But when the mother showed anger, Japanese babies took longer to go back to the toy than American babies. This might be because Japanese babies are more affected by angry expressions since they are rare.

Consequences for Social Psychological Phenomena

Other social behaviors can also depend on how a person sees themselves. So, for someone who sees themselves as connected to others, following the group's way of thinking might not show that they can't stand up for their own ideas or beliefs. Instead, following certain people they are close to can be something they really value. It can show that they are willing to listen and change their own needs or wants so they can keep the important relationship. When such people are around others who are part of a key group, they might follow the group more than usual. But they might not care much about what people outside that group or the group they identify with want. So, in a typical experiment where people are shown a group of strangers, those who see themselves as connected might not follow the group as much as people from Western cultures usually do. Similar things might happen with other social behavior studies, like when people work together or feel more or less motivated in a group. Do those who see themselves as connected act more or less

influenced by the group? Or are they more likely to not care about working together? Our thoughts also apply to two big problems in Western psychology: the gap between what people think and what they do, and the gap between their personality and their actions. Since people who see themselves as connected don't need to match their inner feelings with their behavior, there's less pressure to have that match. In fact, being the same all the time from this point of view might mean being too rigid or not flexible enough. Studying how different ways of seeing oneself affect people could help answer some big questions in social psychology. Social psychologists say that people are greatly affected by others, often more than even the researchers or the people themselves expect. People follow the crowd, obey orders, take responsibility less seriously in groups, are easily convinced of many things, and get very attached to others with very little effort. Even in Western cultures that value independence, most people are still not as self-reliant, self-contained, or self-sufficient as the culture suggests. Maybe Western ideas about the self don't match real social behavior and could be changed to show how much people are connected, even those who value individualism. The fact that the world is getting smaller and more connected will push for such a change in how we think about the individual.

CONCLUSION

Culture is very important in how people see themselves and how they think, feel, and act. There are two main ways people see themselves: one that focuses on being separate and another that focuses on being connected with others. These two ways help explain differences in how people from different cultures think and behave. In the first way, people see themselves as separate from others. In the second, people see themselves as part of a group and their relationships with others are key to who they are. For someone with this second view, being part of a group or fitting into a social setting makes them feel complete. This way of seeing oneself includes being aware of and responding to others, knowing that others will also respond in return. It also means being careful about how you feel or act towards others to keep or improve relationships. Studies have shown that cultural values strongly affect how people see the world, manage emotions, and set goals. These studies show that to understand human behavior, we need to look at cultural backgrounds. Future research should continue looking at cultural differences and how they affect people's behavior to create more inclusive ways of understanding and helping people.

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