Intracultural variations in the concept of self: A comparison of educated and less educated Filipino women

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Abstract

This study examined the concept of self among 48 educated and 50 less educated Filipino women. Participants completed the Concept of Self Scale that contained 12 items describing collectivistic and individualistic perspectives on self. Educated women rated themselves as significantly higher than less educated women on two individualistic descriptors, while the less educated rated themselves significantly higher on seven collectivistic descriptors. Low SES women rated themselves higher on collectivistic descriptors than middle SES women. These findings are discussed in relation to the growing literature on cultural perspectives on the self, and suggest a need to examine factors that may explain intracultural differences in the concept of self.

The concept of self has been considered by many social scientists as an important variable that influences a person's perceptions, emotions, and behaviours (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Sampson, 1991). The concept of self has been defined as "the totality of personal experiences" (Moghaddam, 1998, pp. 58), and "your perceptions, positive or negative, of your unique traits or attributes" (Sigelman, 1999, p. 268). Numerous social scientists have argued that these perceptions of one's self and of the world vary significantly among people in different cultures, and that these variations can explain cross-cultural variations in social cognition and behaviours (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Marsella, DeVos, & Hsu, 1985; Triandis, 1995).

Two prominent constructs that have been used to explain cultural variations in the concept of self include "individualism" and "collectivism" (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1995, 1996). According to Triandis (1995), members of more individualistic cultures tend to view the self as a distinct entity and, in these cultures, a person's independence and autonomy are emphasised. In contrast, members of more collectivistic cultures tend to emphasise interdependence, and the group's interests override the goals of the individual. These two constructs are similar to other constructs that have been hypothesised to account for cultural variations in behaviours including: independent vs. interdependent self-construals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), the egocentric versus sociocentric concept of person (Shweder & Bourne, 1982), the self-contained versus the ensembled self (Sampson, 1989), and the individual-centered versus situation-centered person (Hsu, 1953). Empirical findings among several Asian and Pacific Island groups including Indians (Dhawan, Roseman, Naidu, Thapa, & Rettek, 1995; Miller, 1982; Shweder & Bourne, 1982), Indo-Canadians (Hart & Poole, 1995), Balinese (Connor, 1982; Geertz, 1973), Japanese (DeVos, 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994), and Solomon Islanders (White, 1992), indicate that members of Western cultures tend to be individualistic in their self-construals, and those in non-Western cultures tend to be more collectivistic. It is important to note, however, that the individualistic and collectivistic aspects of self are not mutually exclusive, as both aspects can be found in an individual (Singelis, 1994). Thus, these two aspects may represent two distinct dimensions.

While these between-culture differences have been reported consistently in the literature, the concept of self may also vary within a particular culture. Differences in individualistic and collectivistic self-construals within a culture have been attributed to demographic variables such as socioeconomic status (SES); as individuals within a culture become more affluent, they are more likely to become individualistic (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1989, 1994; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). Variations within cultures may also be attributed to other demographic variables such as education, and living in urban versus rural environments. For example, in collectivistic cultures, higher levels of formal education and living in urban areas have been found to be associated with greater individualism (Altrocchi & Altrocchi, 1995; Triandis, 1989, 1995; Watkins & Regmi, 1996), and individuals residing in agricultural communities have been found to be highly collectivistic in their concept of self (Berry, 1979).

Thus, the above findings suggest that while the concept of self may vary between cultures, it may also vary *within* a culture. The purpose of this study was to investigate intra-cultural variations in the concept of self among two samples of Filipino women.

The Filipino concept of Self

The Filipino concept of self reflects a collectivistic perspective, as Filipinos tend to emphasise values and traits that promote interpersonal cooperation, reciprocity, and social acceptance, rather than individualistic values such as autonomy and uniqueness (Church, 1987; Lynch, 1973). Obedience and respect of parents and elders are highly valued, and individual interests are secondary to those of the family (Andres & Ilada-Andres,

1987; Bulatao, 1962; Church, 1987). According to Enriquez (1992), "kapwa" or "shared identity" best characterises the Filipino personality. This term implies that others should be treated as equals and with dignity. A person without this shared identity ceases to be "human."

The Philippines is a diverse nation in terms of ethnicity and degree of modernisation and, as such, the concept of self may likely differ among various Filipino subgroups. While studies contrasting subgroups of Filipinos are limited, a few studies have suggested that individuals from urban areas, and those from higher socioeconomic classes, tend to be more individualistic in their self concept than those from rural or lower class backgrounds (Church, 1987). Findings from a recent study suggested that the concept of self among Filipino college students is not highly collectivistic, as very few students described themselves in terms of social roles (Watson & Gerong, 1997). Thus, it is possible that post secondary education may have an impact on the concept of self.

Present study

The present data were collected in the Western Visayan region of the Philippines, and the participants were members of the Kinaray-a cultural group. Although no empirical study has been conducted on the concept of self among the Kinaray-a, Jocano (1983) examined cultural values of the Hiligayon Filipinos (a closely related cultural group in the Western Visayan region), and found that the most important cultural values among Hiligayons related to a collectivistic view of the self. These values included "abiabi" (to be friendly), "amlig" (to respect family honour), "kabalaka" (deep concern for the welfare of others), and "amona" (hospitality). It is

important to note that none of the values described by Jocano were individualistic.

In the present study, we examined the concept of self among educated and less educated Filipino women. We predicted that educated Filipino women would rate themselves higher on individualistic descriptors, and lower on collectivistic descriptors, in comparison to less educated Filipino women. In light of the previous studies described above, we also explored the effect of socioeconomic status (SES) on the concept of self.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study included 98 Kinaray-a speaking Filipino women residing in Tigbauan, Iloilo, Philippines, and consisted of two subgroups - an educated group of women who had at least one year of post-secondary education ($n = 48$), and a less educated group of women who had no post-secondary education ($n = 50$). The mean age of the educated Filipino women was in the low 30s, while the mean age of the less educated women was 41. The lower age of the educated Filipino group reflects a recent increase in opportunities for younger Filipinos to attend post-secondary educational institutions. Participants were asked to identify their SES (high, medium, low) based on self-reports of personal income, ownership of property, and income from relatives working abroad. Women in the educated group classified themselves as predominantly middle class (73%), and only 14% classified themselves in the low SES category. In contrast, 40% of the less educated women classified themselves in the middle SES category, while the majority (60%) classified themselves in the low SES category.

The data were collected in the Philippines by a Kinaray-a research assistant who resided in a barrio of Tigbauan. Because of political instability in this region during the data collection period, most participants in the Filipino sample consisted of individuals familiar to the research assistant. The research assistant interviewed all participants alone in their homes.

Measure

We developed the Concept of Self Scale (CSS) to assess how an individual characterises herself as a person. The scale contains 12 descriptors or items that describe either a collectivistic or individualistic perspective on self. The interviewer read the following directions to each participant:

> The following is a list of words that might describe a person. Some of these words might describe you very well, while other words might not describe you at all. Next to each word are the numbers from 1 to 5. Please state the number 1 if you believe this word does not describe you at all, 2 if it describes you a little, 3 if it somewhat describes you, 4 if it describes you quite well, and 5 if it is a very accurate description of you.

Nine of the descriptors in the CSS were selected from Jocano's (1983) ethnographic study of cultural values among the Hiligayons, and included the following descriptors: "Conforming," "reserved," "obey older people with respect," "rely on others (trusting)," "cooperative," "devoted to family," "friendly," "hospitable," and "take care of family honour." Based on Triandis' (1995) definition, these descriptors characterise a collectivistic construal of

self. The remaining items in the CSS represent an individualistic orientation, and include "competitive," "independent," and "unique." The CSS was translated and back-translated to ensure proper translation.

Procedure

The CSS was administered in individual interview sessions. We used the interview format because Kinaray-a is a spoken language not ordinarily used in written form, and because of lower reading abilities among the less-educated women.

Results

Mean scores on the 12 CSS items for the educated and the less educated groups of women appear in Table 1. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on the group means to test our first hypothesis regarding educational differences in the concept of self. Using Wilk's criterion, significant differences were found between the educated and less educated groups. The two groups differed significantly in the predicted direction on two of the three individualistic items, with the educated women rating themselves more "competitive" and "unique" than the less educated women. The less educated Filipino women rated themselves significantly higher than the educated women on the following collectivistic descriptors: "Conforming," "reserved," "obey elders," "rely on others," "friendly," "devoted to family," and "hospitable." As shown in the table, collectivistic items received higher ratings than the individualistic items.

To explore the effects of SES on the concept of self among Filipino women, we compared mean item ratings of medium and low SES women in the combined sample of educated and less educated groups. We did not include high SES women in this comparison, because there were only six women in the high SES group. Results of the MANOVA conducted on item means showed significant between-group differences in self-ratings. Middle SES women rated themselves significantly more "competitive" than the low SES women, $F(1,88) = 8.65$, $p<.01$. Low SES women also rated themselves significantly higher than middle SES women on collectivistic items including "conforming," $F(1,88) = 8.65$, $p<.001$, "reserved," $F(1,88) = 5.88$, $p<.01$, "obey elders," $F(1,88) = 14.35$, $p<.001$, "rely on others," $F(1,88) = 3.82$, $p<.05$, "devoted to family," $F(1,88) = 5.35$, $p<.01$, and "friendly," $F(1,88) = 11.20$, $p<.001$. These findings demonstrate within-culture variations in the concept of self, and they suggest that this intra-cultural variation may be attributed to education and SES among Filipino women.

We also conducted an exploratory factor analysis of the CSS items, to explore the dimensionality underlying the measure. We found two factors underlying the CSS using the maximum likelihood method, with the 'eigenvalue of one' criterion for number of factors, and promax rotation. One factor was loaded by the three items indicative of an individualistic orientation (i.e., competitive, independent, and unique). The other factor was loaded by variables representing a collectivistic orientation (i.e., conforming, reserved, obey elders, cooperative, devoted to family, friendly, hospitable, and take care of family honour). This finding indicates that collectivism and individualism, as assessed by the CSS, are two distinct dimensions rather than end-points of a uni-dimensional construct.

Table 1

Mean ratings on the Concept of Self Scale for educated and less educated Filipino women

Item	Educated ($n = 48$)	Less educated ($n = 50$)		F
Competitive	1.76 (1.00)	1.27 (.64)	1/96	8.20**
Conforming	3.24 (.98)	4.35 (.86)	1/96	35.55***
Reserved	3.04 (1.19)	4.27 (.92)	1/96	32.56***
Obey elders	4.12 (.87)	4.69 (.69)	1/96	12.71***
Rely on others	2.92 (1.21)	3.48 (.94)	1/96	6.47**
Cooperative	4.56 (.67)	4.77 (.75)	1/96	NS
Independent	2.22 (1.11)	2.14 (.75)	1/96	NS
Devoted to family	4.54 (.73)	4.90 (.31)	1/96	9.63***
Friendly	4.64 (.69)	4.90 (.42)	1/96	4.81*
Hospitable	4.44 (.86)	4.89 (.42)	1/96	10.90**
Unique	2.00 (1.34)	1.46 (1.03)	1/96	5.00*
Take care of family honor	4.72 (0.64)	4.79 (0.54)	1/96	NS

Note. Wilk's Lambda = .5898. $F(12,85) = 4.93$; $p < .0001$. Standard deviations appear in ( ).
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Discussion

The results of our study support previous findings suggesting that the concept of self varies within a culture. As predicted, educated Filipino women characterised themselves as more individualistic than less educated Filipino women, while the less educated characterised themselves as more collectivistic. Also, we found that socioeconomic status was a significant factor that accounted for variations in self-ratings among the women. Middle class Filipino women rated themselves as more "competitive" than those in the lower socioeconomic group, and lower class women rated themselves higher on collectivistic descriptors, including "conforming," "obey elders," "devoted to family," and "friendly." According to Baumeister (1987), increase in individualism within a country is due to increased social mobility, that allows a person to become detached from his or her social position. During the past 30 years, social mobility has increased substantially in the Philippines, as reflected by the growth of a middle class, and increased educational opportunities. In the light of this continuing growth, it will be of great interest to examine longitudinally the evolution of the concept of self within this community of women, as a function of socioeconomic changes.

It is important to note that both our educated and less educated samples were highly collectivistic in their responses, and that all collectivistic items were rated higher than

any individualistic item. This highly collectivistic response pattern fails to support Watson and Gerong's (1997) recent findings of low levels of collectivism among Filipino college students. The difference is possibly due, in part, to differences in our sample characteristics. Our participants resided in a rural area, and were older than those sampled in Watson and Gerong's (1997) study. Also, while Watson and Gerong (1997) used an English instrument in their study, we developed an instrument in the Kinaray-a language based on traditional Filipino values. Because of these factors, it is possible that the present sample was less likely to accommodate their responses to reflect Western norms and values (Ralston, Cunniff, & Gustafson, 1995; Watson & Gerong, 1997).

Our findings contribute to the growing literature on cultural perspectives on the self, specifically as these perspectives relate to women. Previous studies among Americans suggested that women are more collectivistic, and less individualistic, than are men (Gilligan, 1982; Josephs, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992; Lyons, 1983). In contrast, Nepalese males were found to be no more individualistic than Nepalese females (Watkins & Regimi, 1996). Furthermore, Malaysian and Indian males were found to consider collectivistic characteristics, such as family loyalty and family obligation, to be socially desirable for both males and females (Ward & Sethi, 1986). A future study should examine whether Filipino men follow a similar collectivistic pattern as found among other Asian males.

We also explored the effect of SES on the concept of self among Filipino women. Unfortunately, since there were only a few women in our sample who were categorised in the upper SES group, we were unable to compare self ratings of women across upper, middle, and lower SES groups. In a recent study in Sri Lanka, Freeman (1997) found that while high SES was associated with decreased collectivism, SES was not related to increased individualism. Freeman's sample of wealthy, highly educated, high caste individuals, provided some of the lowest ratings on individualism. According to Freeman, individualistic values such as independence and self-determination may be rejected by the elite, because these values "represent a threat to a social system that supports the high status of this group" (Freeman, 1997, p. 333). It would be of great interest to explore the generality of Freeman's finding, by examining the concept of self among the social and economic elite of the Philippines.

In summary, the results of our study support previous findings indicating that the concept of self varies within a non-Western culture. Educated Filipino women rated themselves as more individualistic, and less collectivistic, than less educated women. Also, low SES women rated themselves as more collectivistic than middle SES women. Our findings suggest the need to examine factors that contribute to variations in the concept of self within cultural groups.

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