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Cultures and Selves: A Cycle of Mutual Constitution

Hazel Rose Markus[1] and Shinobu Kitayama[2]

[1]Department of Psychology, Stanford University, CA and [2]Department of Psychology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Abstract

The study of culture and self casts psychology's understanding of the self, identity, or agency as central to the analysis and interpretation of behavior and demonstrates that cultures and selves define and build upon each other in an ongoing cycle of mutual constitution. In a selective review of theoretical and empirical work, we define self and what the self does, define culture and how it constitutes the self (and vice versa), define independence and interdependence and determine how they shape psychological functioning, and examine the continuing challenges and controversies in the study of culture and self. We propose that a self is the "me" at the center of experience—a continually developing sense of awareness and agency that guides actions and takes shape as the individual, both brain and body, becomes attuned to various environments. Selves incorporate the patterning of their various environments and thus confer particular and culture-specific form and function to the psychological processes they organize (e.g., attention, perception, cognition, emotion, motivation, interpersonal relationship, group). In turn, as selves engage with their sociocultural contexts, they reinforce and sometimes change the ideas, practices, and institutions of these environments.

Within psychology, the empirical study of the self as a cultural product and process is now almost three decades old (e.g., A. Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Triandis, 1989). Hundreds of surveys, laboratory experiments, and field studies have bolstered earlier theories and ethnographic observations, drawing attention to powerful variation in self and personhood. Researchers now have a good grasp of why the nail that sticks out is likely to be hammered down in Japan whereas the squeaky wheel attracts grease and attention in the United States (for reviews, see Heine, 2008; Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). They know, for example, that North American students can be expected to speak up in class more than their Korean American counterparts (Kim, 2002); that parental expectations can have opposite motivational effects in Asian American and European American families (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999); that Japanese Olympic gold medalists, in comparison with American medalists, likely discuss their failures and faults more than their successes and virtues (Markus, Uchida, Omoregie, Townsend, & Kitayama, 2006); that helping others is a moral obligation that holds whether or not one likes the person in Indian contexts, but not in American contexts (Miller & Bersoff, 1998); and that the medial prefrontal cortex of the brain is activated by judgments made about the self in the U.S., but by judgments made about both the self and about one's mother in China (Zhu, Zhang, Fan, & Han, 2007).

Moreover, in the last decade, the cultural comparisons studied are no longer just between people in North American and East Asian contexts; they now include comparisons across a variety of other significant social distinctions. Researchers also know, for example, that people in West African settings claim more enemies and fewer friends than those in North American settings (Adams, 2005); that Western Europeans are less likely than North Americans to associate happiness with personal achievement (Kitayama, Park, Sevincer, Karasawa, & Uskul, 2009); that Latino dyads talk, smile, and laugh more than do Black and White dyads (Holloway, Waldrip, & Ickes, 2009); that Protestants are more likely than Jews to believe that people have control over their thoughts (A.B. Cohen & Rozin, 2001); that people from the U.S. South respond with more anger to insults than do Northerners (Nisbett, 1993); and that working

Corresponding Author:
Hazel Rose Markus, Department of Psychology, Jordan Hall, Building 420, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305
E-mail: hmarkus@stanford.edu

class Americans react less strongly than middle-class Americans to having their choices denied (Snibbe & Markus, 2005).

These striking differences in behavior, as well as hundreds of others like them, are important in their own right. They markedly expand the range of the normal, or of the "good" or "right way to be," by revealing patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting that have not been part of mainstream psychology. Understanding these differences has significant practical applications for intergroup relations, education, health, well-being, business, and peaceful coexistence in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. The study of culture and self, however, has two other highly significant consequences for the field of psychology, and they are the focus here.

First, the study of culture and self has renewed and extended psychology's understanding of the self, identity, or agency and casts it as central to the analysis and interpretation of behavior. Experience is socioculturally patterned, and the self reflects the individual's engagement with the world that is the source of this patterning. The array of contrasting behavioral differences described in the opening paragraph can all be illuminated with a focus on what it means to be a self or agent in a particular sociocultural context.

Second, the study of culture and self has led to the realization that people and their sociocultural worlds are not separate from one another. Instead they require each other and complete one another. In an ongoing cycle of mutual constitution, people are socioculturally shaped shapers of their environments; they make each other up and are most productively analyzed together (Shweder, 2003). The comparative method of sociocultural psychology reveals that although feeling, thinking, and acting can take particular, culture-specific forms, the capacity to continually shape and to be shaped by the context is a powerful human universal.

In the sections below, we examine these two consequences of the study of culture and self in detail. In the course of a selective review of some of the major empirical and theoretical contributions, we will define self and what the self does, define culture and how it constitutes the self (and vice versa), define independence and interdependence and determine how they shape psychological functioning, and examine the continuing challenges and controversies in the study of culture and self.

What Is a Self?

A self is the "me" at the center of experience—a continually developing sense of awareness and agency that guides action and takes shape as the individual, both brain and body, becomes attuned to the various environments it inhabits. Selves are thus psychological realities that are both biologically (LeDoux, 1996; Northoff et al., 2006) and socioculturally (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) rooted. Selves develop as individuals attune themselves to contexts that provide different solutions to the universal questions of "Who or what am I?", "What should I be doing?", and "How do I relate to others?" (Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Markus & Hamedani, 2007). They are simultaneously schemas of past behavior and patterns for

current and future behavior (Banaji & Prentice, 1994; Carver & Scheier, 1998; S.T. Fiske & Taylor, 1994). Selves are always situated and, as a consequence, they always reflect their contexts in significant ways.

Just as one cannot be an unsituated or general self, one also cannot be a self by one's self. Selves develop through symbolically mediated, collaborative interaction with others and the social environment (Kitayama, Duffy, & Uchida, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 2003). The question of cultural influence or constitution of the self then is not one of "if," instead, it is of "how" and "when." Cultural variation across selves arises from differences in the images, ideas (including beliefs, values, and stereotypes), norms, tasks, practices, and social interactions that characterize various social environments and reflects differences in how to attune to these environments.

Theorists use a family of overlapping terms for the nexus of the biological, psychological, and sociocultural: self, self-concept, self-schema, self-construal, selfway, self-narrative, ego, psyche, mind, identity, personal identity, social identity, and agency. *Agency* is the most general or global term and refers to acting in the world. Self is usually interchangeable with agency but is sometimes used to refer more specifically to how the person thinks or believes him or herself to be. Identity is typically used when the emphasis is on how others, be they individuals or groups, influence the person. All of the terms are similar in purpose. They attempt to index the dynamic and recursive process of organizing and integrating through which the individual, the biological entity, becomes a meaningful entity—that is, a person.

What Does a Self Do?

Selves are implicitly and explicitly at work in all aspects of behavior: attention, perception, cognition, emotion, motivation, relationships, and group processes. More specifically, one's ongoing sense of self functions as a foundational schema that recruits and organizes more specific self-regulatory schemas, including cognitive, emotional, motivational, somatic, and behavioral schemas. Some of the compelling evidence for selves at work can be seen in studies in U.S. contexts with American participants. People hear their own name across a noisy crowded room (Wood & Cowan, 1995), remember their own contributions to a project better than they remember the contributions of their coworkers (Ross & Sicoly, 1979), and are motivated by self-interest and self-concern across a wide variety of domains (Greenwald, 1980). In broad strokes, people in North American contexts are smarter, kinder, healthier, and happier when their selves are affirmed or when situations are self or identity congruent than when selves are threatened or when situations are identity incongruent (e.g., Oyserman, 2008; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002; Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003).

Researchers have now moved beyond the traditional confine of research within North America and have observed contexts like those in East Asia and South Asia. These contexts are quite differently arranged than North American ones and are animated by different ontological understandings of what a person
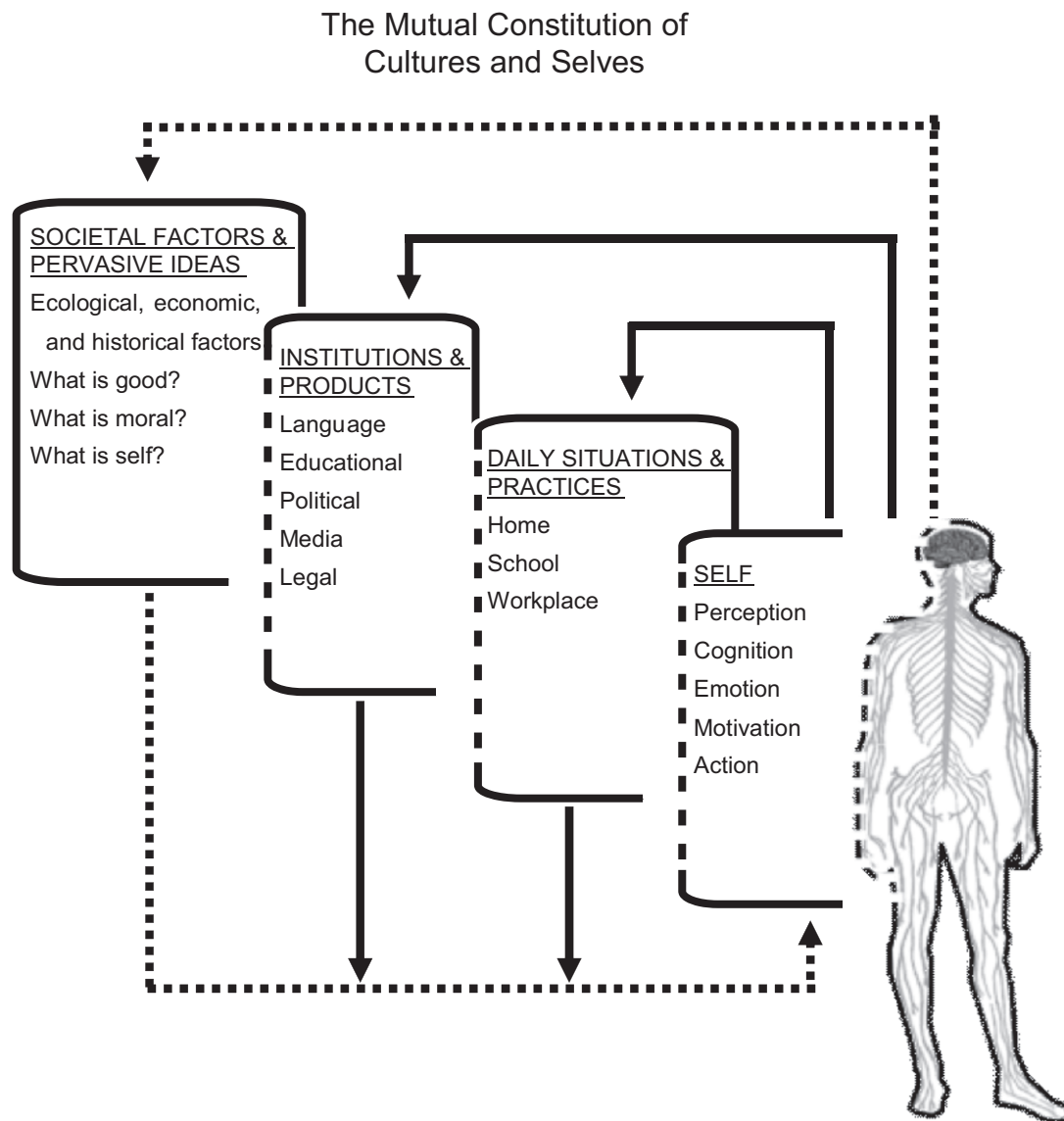
The Mutual Constitution of
Cultures and Selves

Fig. 1. The mutual constitution of cultures and selves. Figure adapted from Markus and Kitayama (1994) and Fiske et al. (1998).

is. These comparisons among people in different regions of the world have revealed differences in selves, or differences in patterns of attuning to contexts, that were not otherwise obvious. As a result, many processes—perception, cognition, emotion, motivation, relational and intergroup behavior—previously thought to be basic, universal, and natural to human functioning, have been found to vary dramatically. Through these comparisons, the influence of the self's influence on behavior becomes even more apparent.

What Is Culture and How Does It Constitute the Self (and Vice-Versa)?

Just as the word *self* is used to index a family of overlapping but not identical terms, the word *culture* is a stand-in for a similarly untidy and expansive set of material and symbolic concepts,

such as world, environment, contexts, cultural systems, social systems, social structures, institutions, practices, policies, meanings, norms, and values, that give form and direction to behavior. Culture is not a stable set of beliefs or values that reside inside people. Instead, culture is located in the world, in patterns of ideas, practices, institutions, products, and artifacts (e.g., Adams & Markus, 2004; Atran, Medin, & Ross, 2005; Chui & Hong, 2006; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Shweder, 2003).

With this definition, the emphasis in the study of culture and self is not on studying culture as collections of people—the Japanese, the Americans, the Whites, the Latinos—but is instead on how psychological processes may be implicitly and explicitly shaped by the worlds, contexts, or sociocultural systems that people inhabit. As illustrated in Figure 1, the self (i.e., body, brain, and psychological tendencies) and the sociocultural

content (i.e., ideas, practices, institutions, products, and artifacts) continually constitute one another. As cultural content changes, the mediating self and psychological functioning change in turn. As indicated in Figure 1, culture is not separate from the individual; it is a product of human activity—each individual person's activity as well as the thoughts, feelings, and actions of those individuals who have come before that person. The sociocultural context shapes the self through four nested, interacting, and often tacit categories of culture. Being a person—a self—requires input from sociocultural meanings and practices, and the self is the center of awareness and agency that incorporates and reflects these sociocultural patterns. In turn, peoples' thoughts, feelings, and actions (i.e., the self) reinforce, and sometimes change, the sociocultural forms that shape their lives. This is the cycle of mutual constitution.

As a consequence of this cycle, both culture and self are dynamic (Kashima, 2000; Kitayama et al., 2007). Culture is dynamic in that the sociocultural ideas, practices, institutions, products, artifacts, economic factors, and ecological factors that comprise it are constantly invented, accumulated, and changed over time. Selves are dynamic in that they change as the various cultural contexts they engage in change. In addition, a focus on the sociocultural grounding of the self does not deny the individuality and idiosyncrasy that can be observed in even the most tight-knit and coherent collectives. Every individual participates in a variety of significant sociocultural contexts that constitute the self. In the United States, these contexts might include specific collectives in addition to nation of origin, such as the family or workgroup, as well as contexts defined by gender, ethnicity, race, religion, profession, social class, birth cohort, and sexual orientation. Even those inhabiting similar configurations of cultural contexts or similar social spaces will obviously diverge in the specifics of their everyday experiences and will differentially attend to features of these experiences (e.g., Markus & Moya, 2010).

What Is Independence and Interdependence?

One particularly powerful and important set of patterns is that which prescribe the normatively appropriate relations between the self (the individual) and others (other individuals). Social scientists in various fields (e.g., Dumont, 1977; Marx, 1857-1858/1973; Mead, 1934; Triandis, 1995) have repeatedly theorized two distinct types of sociality or social relations that can be linked to divergent modes of being or senses of self. One type of sociality assumes that social relations are formed on the basis of instrumental interests and goals of participating individuals. Labels for such social relations include *gessellschaft*, independent, egocentric, and individualist. Another type of sociality assumes that individuals are inherently connected and made meaningful through relationships with others. Labels for such social relations include *gemeinschaft*, interdependent, sociocentric, communal, and collectivist (see A. Fiske et al., 1998; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Tönnies, 1887/1988, for reviews).

The origins of these two forms of sociality are multiple and contested. Some researchers and theorists locate the origin and proliferation of these forms of sociality in economic and ecological factors, whereas others emphasize the powerful role of philosophy, religion, and historically specific narratives. Notably, the ideas, values, and practices of what we call here independence and interdependence are universally available. Every context recognizes both and legitimates some aspects of both. In all contexts, some types of relations (e.g., business transactions) will be guided relatively more by personal preferences and goals, whereas other social relations (e.g., family and friend relations) will be guided relatively more by communal and relationship concerns. Moreover, every individual self also carries elements of independence and interdependence to varying degrees (A. Fiske et al., 1998; Greenfield, 2009; Triandis, 1995). Nevertheless, cultures also vary systematically in how these two schemas are developed, utilized, balanced, and considered dominant or foundational.

In an early paper on culture and the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), we proposed that if one of these schemas becomes foundational—guiding how cultural ideas, practices, institutions, and products of a culture are evaluated, selected, and deselected or weeded out—there will be widespread and important differences in the nature and functioning of the self and in the psychological processes that are rooted in these schemas. Figure 2 is an adaptation and amplification of an earlier figure representing independent and interdependent selves (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The diagram reflects theorizing and empirical work since this time (see Heine, 2008; Markus & Kitayama, 2003) and depicts two different patterns of attuning to the social world and two different senses of self or agency.

As shown Figure 2, when an independent schema of self organizes behavior, the primary referent is the individual's own thoughts, feelings, and actions. Alternatively, when an interdependent schema of self organizes behavior, the immediate referent is the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others with whom the person is in relationship. With an independent self (i.e., an independent way of attuning to the social environment or independent mode of being), interaction with others (actual, imagined, or implied) produces a sense of self as separate, distinct, or independent from others. These interactions are guided by culturally prescribed tasks that require and encourage the development and reification of individual preferences, goals, beliefs, and abilities (as indicated by the *X*s in the independent self-schema) and the use of these attributes as referents and guides for action. The large dotted circle separates close relations from more distant relations, suggesting that people have a sense that they can move between ingroup and outgroup relatively easily.

With an interdependent self (i.e., an interdependent way of attuning to the social environment or interdependent mode of being), interaction with others produces a sense of self as connected to, related to, or interdependent with others. These interactions are guided by culturally prescribed tasks that require and encourage fitting in with others (as indicated by the *X*s in the overlap between self and others in the interdependent self-schema in Fig. 2), taking the perspective of others, reading the expectations of others, adjusting to others, and using others
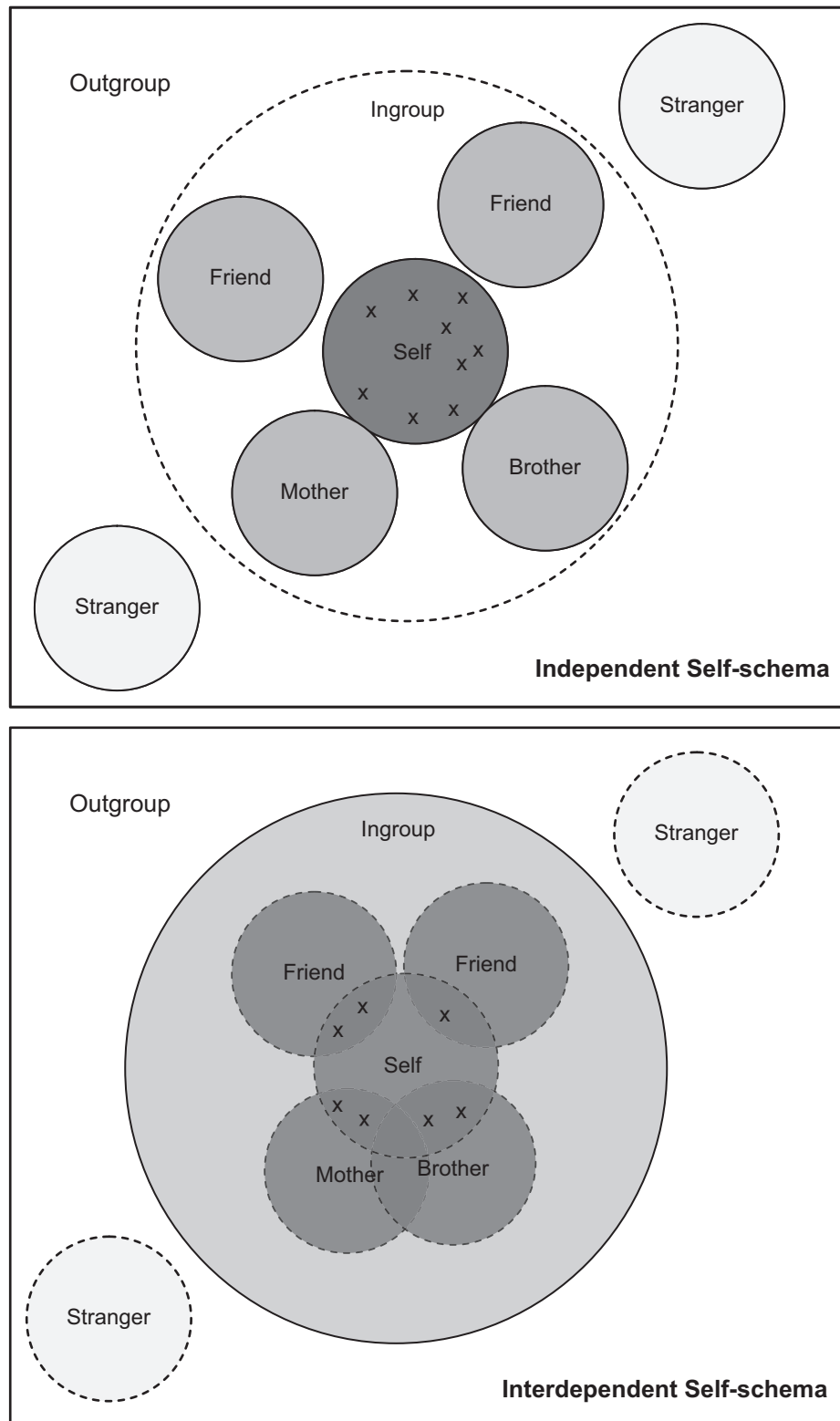
Fig. 2. Independent and interdependent self-schemas. Figure adapted from Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Heine (2008).

as referents for action. The lines delineating the self and others are dotted (those delineating the independent self-schema are solid), and they represent the idea that the self includes others.

Further, the line that separates ingroup and outgroup is drawn with a solid line to indicate that the ingroup–outgroup distinction is significant and that people do not move easily across this

line, frequently resulting in different behavior toward ingroup and outgroup members (see Heine, 2008).

It is important to note that independence entails a particular form of sociality or of interdependence itself—one in which relationships are understood as voluntary and as a matter of choice. Likewise, interdependence can also promote certain types of independence in which personal selves are defined by identification with or rebellion against significant others in a relationship. Although interdependence ensures that people are likely to be responsive to others, this does not imply harmony or affection among the people engaged in interdependent relationships (Kitayama et al., 2007).

How Do Independence and Interdependence Shape Psychological Functioning?

The distinction between independence and interdependence as foundational schemas for the self has proved to be a powerful heuristic for demonstrating how sociocultural contexts can shape self-functioning and psychological functioning (for detailed reviews, see A. Fiske et al., 1998; Heine, 2008; Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). Returning to the selection of findings described in the opening paragraphs of this article, all of the differences cited can be explained in some important part by the independent and interdependent patterns of sociality. Across all of these examples, the ideas and/or practices in one setting place relatively more emphasis on the attributes of the individual and their expression as the form of agency, whereas the ideas and practices of the comparison setting place relatively more emphasis on relationships and social responsiveness and the maintenance of these relationships as the form of agency.

When the schema for self is independent from others and this schema organizes agency, people will have a sense of themselves as separate and will be relatively likely to focus on, reference, and express their own thoughts, feeling, and goals. For example, people in North American settings are likely to speak out and emphasize their good qualities, because in doing so they can express their defining preferences or attributes (Kim, 2002). Highlighting one's successes after a performance functions similarly by drawing attention to one's positive, defining attributes (Markus et al., 2006). In addition, people in North American settings decide whether or not to help someone based on their preferences, and normatively good actions follow from the expression of these preferences (Miller & Bersoff, 1998). Similarly, choice enhances the performance of middle-class Americans, and they seek out and construct their actions in terms of choice because choice allows the expression of these preferences and thus serves to affirm the self (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Snibbe & Markus, 2005). Lastly, individual achievement and success are associated with happiness in independent settings because achievement signals positive internal attributes (Kitayama et al., 2009). In all cases, these actions reflect settings that foster the sense that the individual is the source of thought, feeling, and action.

In contrast, when the schema for self is interdependent with others and this schema organizes agency, people will have a sense of themselves as part of encompassing social relationships. People are likely to reference others, and to understand their individual actions as contingent on or organized by the actions of others and their relations with these others. Actions rooted in this schema will have different meanings and consequences than actions rooted in a independent schema. Thus, a lack of speech does not imply a lack of thinking, performing well on a task selected by one's mother does not imply a preference for having choices usurped or a lack of self-efficacy, and attending to one's shortcomings does not imply low self-esteem or depression (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Kim, 2002; Markus et al., 2006). Such tendencies instead can reflect an acknowledgement of one's role or obligations in a particular situation and an awareness of the significant others with whom one is interdependent and who define the self. Similarly, fostering good relations (Holloway et al., 2009), having concerns about one's enemies (Adams, 2005), experiencing a heightened sensitivity to others' evaluations (Nisbett, 1993), having greater concern for others' actions than for thoughts (A.B. Cohen & Rozin, 2001), and exhibiting relatively little concern with getting to choose (Snibbe & Markus, 2005) are also consistent with a sense of one's self as being related to others and with an awareness of the relatively larger role of others in influencing who you are and what you should be doing. Moreover, even the same region of the brain is activated by both significant others (mother) and the self for people in Chinese contexts (Zhu et al., 2007), which serves as yet another type of evidence for the psychological reality of this interdependent sense of agency.

Together these findings, and hundreds more like them, powerfully demonstrate that independence and interdependence have significant psychological consequences—for cognition, emotion, motivation, morality, relationships, intergroup processes, health, and well-being—and the field's view of these concepts is broadening. For example, viewing aspects of the world and one's self as distinct objects and attributes that are separate from their contexts (e.g., Masuda et al., 2005), perceiving one's self to be consistent across situations (e.g., Suh, 2002), and experiencing well-being in the pursuit of fun and enjoyment (e.g., Oishi & Diener, 2001) derive from and contribute to a sense of independence. Alternatively, paying attention to the context, others, role obligations, and duties; taking the other's perspective; and cultivating feelings of balance or calm in relations with others derive from and serve to further realize a sense of interdependence (e.g., D. Cohen & Hoshino-Browne, 2005; Mesquita, 2001; Tsai, Louie, Chen, & Uchida, 2007).

What Are the Continuing Challenges and Controversies in the Study of Culture and Self?

We now know considerably more about cultural variation in the self and, further, have gained numerous insights into the

ways in which the self is shaped by culture and, at the same time, shapes culture. A number of issues, however, remain unresolved, unaddressed, or otherwise controversial and intensely debated.

Measurement of Culture

Numerous researchers have assumed that at least some elements of culture should be measurable in a self-report format and have administered a variety of cultural value questionnaires. One most prominent example is a large-scale cross-cultural survey Hofstede administered on IBM employees across the world (Hofstede, 1980). Schwartz and colleagues have tested cultural variations in self-reported value priorities (e.g., Schwartz, 1992). Also notable are some scales assessing individualism and collectivism, tightness and looseness, or independent and interdependent self-construal (e.g., Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1995). One strength of this approach is that measurement is relatively straightforward and involves evaluating attributes or items along rating scales. Cultures can be quantified on different dimensions and can be readily compared. One potential problem is that it is not always obvious whether and to what extent culture can be reduced to each individual's beliefs, values, or behavioral observations. Another important challenge stems from the fact that it is not known whether one's beliefs or values are always accessible to one's conscious reflection. If not, the validity of self-report questionnaires may be called into question.

Other researchers have, instead, taken the fact that culture is actually quite tacit and taken for granted as a starting point (Markus & Hamedani, 2007). These researchers also assume that beliefs and values such as individualism and collectivism are important components of culture. How they differ from the first group of researchers stems from an observation that cultural beliefs and values—especially those that are important and, thus, have constituted each culture's practices, institutions, and its ways of life—are, by definition, inscribed into these practices, institutions, and ways of life. These beliefs and values are externalized and materialized in the world (D'Andrade, 1995) and, thus, no longer need to be packed in the head of each individual member of the cultural group. For example, contemporary American society as a whole may be described as individualistic, not so much because many members of this society strongly endorse individualistic values (although this could also be true), but rather because this society is composed of interpersonal routines, situations, practices, social institutions, and social systems that are fundamentally individualistic.

On the basis of this reasoning, some researchers have assessed collective artifacts of culture, such as ads in TV or popular magazines, children's books, religious texts, and news coverage of sporting events (Kim & Markus, 1999; Markus et al., 2006; Tsai et al., 2007; Tsai, Miao, & Seppala, 2007). An extensive review of this literature has concluded that cultures do differ in terms of collective artifacts and, moreover,

that cultural variation assessed in terms of collective artifacts is bound to be far greater than the corresponding cultural variation as assessed in terms of self-reported beliefs and values (Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008). Another approach to assessing culture is a situation sampling method in which participants generate situations that are associated with particular thoughts and feelings (i.e., feeling good, feeling in control). Researchers then give these situations to another group of respondents to see if envisioning these particular situations produces the psychological tendencies that gave rise to them (e.g., Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997).

Both the personal, explicit aspects and the more collective, tacit aspects are important in understanding and, thus, measuring culture. One important step for the field is, on the one hand, to articulate exactly how the two aspects of culture might be dynamically related and, on the other, to specify how collective cultural environments that structure a person's life might interact with the person's personal beliefs and values to determine his or her psychological behaviors (D. Cohen, 2007). Effort along this line would require simultaneous examinations of groups that vary systematically in terms of collective artifacts and individuals within each group who vary systematically in terms of their personal beliefs and values.

Measurement of Self

Parallel issues of measurement can be raised for the self as well. In recent decades, research and theorizing about the self has been anchored on particular methods that assess how people consciously think about themselves. This is necessary and important work because in settings like those in North America, which focus on and encourage an explicit understanding of the self, the explicit self-concept can be shown to mediate and regulate much of behavior (e.g., Oyserman, 2008). Within this tradition of work, the most face-valid measure of self is how people describe themselves. One most commonly used research tool in this school of thought is the 20 statements test, wherein participants are asked to describe themselves in 20 different ways (e.g., Cousins, 1989).

An equally robust and time-honored tradition of research on the self has emphasized the crucial role of unconscious self-regulation. The self, as we have noted, encompasses not only what the person regards himself or herself to be, but also how people regulate their behavior in somewhat specific and characteristic fashions. This view suggests that there are many ways of being or senses of the self that are not represented in one's explicit beliefs. Such aspects are likely to be implicit in the sense that they do not directly index thoughts and feelings about the self, but instead reflect differences in attending, perceiving, feeling, thinking, and acting that arise as people attune themselves to contexts that provide different solutions to the existential questions of who or what am I and what should I be doing. These implicit psychological tendencies are most likely to be unconscious and may be equally consequential in organizing one's psychological behaviors. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that the explicit and the implicit aspects

of the self are closely linked with one another (Kitayama et al., 2009).

What Does Cultural Priming Mean?

One important development of cultural psychological work in the last decade was the proliferation of priming work. This literature highlights two related, but theoretically distinct, methodologies. One approach assumes that cultures carry icons that are associated with commonly available meanings and practices. These icons may then be used to "call out" mental representations of relevant cultural meanings and practices. For example, one set of pioneering studies tested bicultural Hong Kong Chinese and showed that they either exhibit a prototypically East Asian response or a prototypically Western response depending on the cultural icons used in the priming manipulation (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). When participants were exposed to Chinese scenes, such as dragons and the Great Wall, bicultural Hong Kong Chinese showed more prototypically interdependent behaviors, but when exposed to American scenes, such as the Statue of Liberty or Liberty Bell, they showed prototypically independent behaviors. Because the pertinent cultural knowledge is considered to construct psychological experience in dynamic interaction with certain personality characteristics of the actor, such as the need for cognitive closure, this approach is called the *dynamic social constructivist approach*.

Another approach is based on the assumption that the schemas of independence and interdependence are, in large part, universal and shared across cultures (Oyserman & Lee, 2007). With this assumption, one might suppose that cultures are very different in terms of availability of cues that call out one or the other schema. Within this theoretical framework, a number of researchers have investigated potential effects of a variety of priming manipulations designed to call out either independence or interdependence. For example, participants may be presented with a paragraph describing the behaviors of a single individual who was referred to as "I" or a paragraph in which the same set of behaviors was attributed to a group described as "we" (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Frequent reference to the personal self ("I") may be assumed to call out independence, whereas frequent reference to the relational self ("we") may be assumed to call out interdependence. Because this approach implies that the generic schemas of independence and interdependence are embedded in specific social situations that carry different sets of cues that call out the generic schemas, it is called the *situated cognition approach*.

These priming methods have been highly instrumental in advancing our understanding about a proximate mechanism by which culturally specific behaviors may be induced. Once culturally relevant knowledge is activated, this knowledge mediates the effect of culture on behavior. The two approaches vary in the nature of this knowledge. Whereas the dynamic social constructivist approach assumes that culture-specific knowledge is closely linked to cultural icons, the situated cognition approach hypothesizes that generic knowledge of

independence or interdependence is associated with different cues (such as singular vs. plural pronouns).

One crucial question for the dynamic social constructivist view is to specify what particular knowledge might be lined to different cultural icons. For example, Chinese icons may well call out behaviors that are common in China. Although this might be true in a general, abstract sense, it might also be the case that within any given cultural context, specific icons might be associated with, and could thus be used to call out, particular aspects of Chinese culture. A parallel question can be raised for the situated cognition approach. Although the general concepts of independence and interdependence are likely to be commonly available across many, and perhaps all, cultures, it is far from clear whether independence and interdependence mean the same thing across cultures—most theorizing on the topic suggests that they do not. Think about a Chinese adult who regards himself as very independent and self-reliant because he is capable of providing financial assistance for his ailing parents. Even though this behavior is regarded as an instance of independence in one cultural community, the same behavior may easily be reconstrued as an instance of interdependence in another. It seems quite clear that the priming approaches will be enriched substantially when supplemented with an in-depth analysis of the nature of cultural knowledge that is called out by specific priming stimuli.

Another important question that must be addressed is whether knowledge is always a mediating element in all forms of cultural influence. That is to say, can culture's influences be most fully understood in terms of the ability of cultural contexts to activate key psychological constructs such as independence and interdependence? An alternative perspective, and the one we have assumed here, is that that sociocultural contexts afford cultural practices that become incorporated into the behavioral routines of daily life (see Fig. 1). These practices often reflect and foster orientations toward and values of independence and interdependence. From the very beginning of one's life, then, individuals are encouraged to be engaged in such practices, initially only passively but gradually more and more actively. Repeated and continuous engagement in some select set of practices or situations involving certain features, such as self-expression in an independent cultural context or adjustment or conformity in an interdependent cultural context, may lead to some characteristic patterns of psychological responses. These responses may be initially deliberate and effortful, but they will eventually be highly practiced and thus automatized. In fact, recent neuroscience evidence suggests that repeated engagement in certain tasks, including cultural tasks such as self-expression or conformity, is likely to cause corresponding changes in brain pathways (see Han & Northoff, 2008; Kitayama & Park, 2009, for reviews). It is evident, then, that culture may influence psychological processes not only by providing priming stimuli that bias one's responses in one way or another, but also by affording a systematic context for development in general and the establishment of systematic response tendencies in particular.

Concluding Remarks

In the last three decades of examining culture and self, most cultural psychological studies have been done by middle-class North Americans, and they have used middle-class North Americans as one of the major comparison groups. The upside of this Euro-American centrism is that psychologists have learned a great deal about one particular category of humans—those from middle-class North American and Western European contexts (Arnett, 2008; Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1997). People engaging in these contexts are likely to reveal relatively high levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, optimism, or intrinsic motivation and express a desire for mastery, control, achievement, choice, self-expression, or uniqueness. They also like to feel happy, upbeat, and successful, and their agency often takes the form of influencing others or the world. We can now confidently say that this robust set of psychological tendencies—with its many world-making and world-maintaining consequences—is not, however, an expression of a universal human nature. Instead, it reflects the particular worlds in which these people engage. These well-documented self-serving and self-interested tendencies are created, fostered, and maintained by widely distributed ideas, such as the importance of individual achievement, that have been reinforced and instituted by dense networks of everyday practices, such as complimenting and praising one another for individual performance, frequently distributing awards and honors in classrooms and workplaces, and promoting the self in situations like applying for jobs. These tendencies for self-expression, feeling good about the self, and controlling the environment are further encouraged by products such as coffee mugs, bumper stickers, self-help books, automobile advertisements, medications, perfume, and cleaning products that exhort people to "Be a star," "Take control," "Never follow," and "Get happy." Notably, when people inhabit many other kinds of worlds that are configured with ideas, practices, and institutions that do not construct the self as the primary source of action, strikingly different psychological tendencies are revealed.

Although a vast amount of both theoretical and empirical work remains before researchers can more fully specify the cycles of mutual constitution between cultures and selves, this work is steadily changing the way psychology understands the person. Psychologists and all behavioral scientists are less certain about what can be designated as basic or universal psychological process and more certain that it is not possible to develop a comprehensive human psychology by focusing solely on the individual and on what is inside that individual (e.g., Barrett, Mesquita, & Smith, in press; Bruner, 1990). Such a psychology will require a focus on humans' remarkable capacity to create cultures and then to be shaped by them.

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