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Is the Western Conception of the Self "Peculiar" within the Context of the World Cultures?

Author(s): Melford E. Spiro

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# *Is the Western Conception of the Self “Peculiar” within the Context of the World Cultures?*

MELFORD E. SPIRO

## INTRODUCTION

The writing of this article was stimulated by an article on the self by two social psychologists (Markus and Kitayama 1991) who, after citing Clifford Geertz’s celebrated characterization of the Western conception of the person (Geertz 1984[1974]), quote, approvingly, his statement that this conception is “a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world cultures.”

This statement, and their approval of it, struck me as strange, for, seeing that the person (which Markus and Kitayama, like Geertz, conflate with the self) has hardly been a focus of anthropological inquiry, it is not inaccurate to say that the person or self has been studied in only a small fraction of human societies. That being so, on what grounds could anyone, whether psychologist or anthropologist, conjecture that within the context of the world cultures the Western concept of the person, as the latter is characterized by Geertz, is “peculiar”?

To be sure, because conceptions of virtually everything vary cross-culturally, it can be reliably presumed that conceptions of the self are also cross-culturally variable. And, it might be added, not

only *conceptions* of the self, but also the self *itself*, for if the self varies across individuals within one and the same society, then it surely can be presumed that it varies across societies.

To claim, however, that the Western conception of the self is different from that of the Indian or the Japanese or the Balinese conception is one thing, but to claim that in the context of the world cultures, the Western conception is “peculiar” is another, for the latter claim implies that typologically there are two conceptions of the self—a Western type, on the one hand, and a second type that is instantiated in all other societies. When I scrutinized Geertz’s characterization of the Western conception of the person, his claim for its peculiarity struck me as strange on two other grounds.

Geertz, it will be recalled, characterized the latter conception as that of “a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against its social and natural background” (Geertz 1984[1974]:126).

If this conception of the person is cross-culturally “peculiar,” then such a claim implies that according to the non-Western conception the person is *not* bounded, it is *not* a center of awareness, it is *not* contrasted relative to other selves or to its social and natural background; and this entailment struck me as strange on a priori grounds. Space being limited, consider only the bounded-unbounded (Western–non-Western) dichotomy. Because this dichotomy could not be intended as absolute, I take it rather as relative, the Western self being conceived as bounded by comparison with the non-Western conception.

Thus, as a Westerner, I use the word “I” *exclusively*, to denote only my own person (or my own self), alternatively to denote some psychic structure (an ego, a soul, whatever) within my person or self, but if I were a non-Westerner I would use the word “I” *inclusively*, to include other persons as well. Although Geertz does not explicitly address this issue, Markus and Kitayama do. In the case of the non-Western self, “others are included *within* the boundaries of the self” (Markus and Kitayama 1991:61, emphasis in original).

This proposition also struck me as strange, because it seemed incomprehensible—what could it mean to say that *others* are in-

cluded within the boundaries of *my* self?—and also because when applied to the three non-Western peoples whom I know personally, it did not ring true. Let us now briefly examine these grounds, beginning with the first.

If by the term “self” Markus and Kitayama denote the psychobiological organism—that which is bounded by the skin—then the belief in spirit possession (whether divine or demonic), as well as the belief that disease is caused by the intrusion of microorganisms into the person, entail the belief that the self is permeable. Those who subscribe to such beliefs clearly believe that “others” (of some kind) are included within the boundaries of the self, not permanently, but temporarily, and then only in abnormal conditions.

I think it highly unlikely, however, that for Markus and Kitayama the term “self” denotes the psychobiological organism, but if it does, then seeing that Western, as well as non-Western peoples subscribe to one or both of the above beliefs, it cannot be the case that only non-Westerners believe that “others are included within the self.”

If, however, for Markus and Kitayama the term “self” denotes (as it does for many psychoanalytic theorists) the individual’s mental representation of his own person (i.e., his “self-representation”), and if correspondingly the term “others” denotes his mental representation of other persons (i.e., his “other-representations”), then because both representations are located in the individual’s “representational world” (Sandler 1987:ch. 5), it can be said that both are included in the person (but not the self).

If, however, that is what Markus and Kitayama mean by “self” and “others,” then the statement that in non-Western societies “others are included within the boundaries of the self” would mean that an individual’s other-representations are located within his self-representation, and such a condition (according to modern psychiatry) is a sign of rather severe psychopathology. Hence, I would presume that by “self” and “others” Markus and Kitayama do not mean to denote the individual’s mental representations of self and others.

Finally, if for Markus and Kitayama the term “self” denotes (as I think is most likely the case) some psychological entity (an ego, a soul, an “I”) within the person, and “others” denotes such an entity within other persons, then non-Western peoples, for whom “others” are allegedly included within the boundaries of the self, would

be characterized by little, if any, self-other differentiation, and like William James and A. I. Hallowell, I find such a notion very difficult to comprehend.

Thus, both James and Hallowell, respectively the preeminent psychological and anthropological (cross-cultural) theorists of the self (in my view at any rate), construe self-other differentiation—the sense that one’s self, or one’s own person, is bounded, or separate from all other persons—as a distinguishing feature of the very notion of human nature.

James (1981[1890]:278) observed that although everyone splits up the world in different ways, depending on their interests, values, and what they wish to attend to, nonetheless,

one great splitting of the whole universe into two halves is made by each of us; and for each of us almost all of the interest attaches to one of the halves. . . . The altogether unique kind of interest which each human mind feels in those parts of creation which it calls *me* or *mine* may be a moral riddle, but it is a fundamental psychological fact. No mind can take the same interest in his neighbor’s *me* as in his own. [emphasis in original]

For Hallowell (1955:75):

One of the distinguishing features of human adjustment . . . rests upon the fact that the human adult, in the course of ontogenetic development, has learned to discriminate himself as an object in a world of objects other than himself. [This] is a psychological constant, one basic facet of *human nature* and of human personality. . . . At the same time, it seems necessary to assume self-awareness [by which Hallowell means self-other differentiation] as one of the prerequisite psychological conditions for the functioning of any human social order, *no matter what linguistic and culture patterns prevail*. . . . The phenomenon of self-awareness in our species is as integral a part of a human sociocultural mode of adaptation as it is of a distinctive human level of psychological structuralization. [emphasis added]

It is not surprising that whereas many contemporary anthropologists view the self itself, not only conceptions of the self, as *wholly* culturally constructed, Hallowell is much more constrained. “*Concepts of the self*” (not the self), he writes, are “*in part* culturally derived” (1955:80, emphasis added).<sup>1</sup>

Hallowell followed Boas in suggesting that the three personal pronouns *I*, *thou*, and *he/she* occur in all natural languages, so that universally there is, as Boas put it, a “clear distinction between the self as speaker, the person or object spoken to, and that spoken of” (Boas 1911, quoted in Hallowell 1955:89). This linguistic universal,

as Hallowell emphasized, not only reflects, but also facilitates a clear separation of self and other in all societies.

The importance of the first person pronoun both as a grammatical subject and a grammatical object (as “I” and as “me”) for facilitating self-other differentiation has been emphasized by other scholars, both past and present. James, for example, distinguished two “constituents” of the self: the “empirical self” (the “me”), which includes the “material,” “social,” and “spiritual” selves, and the “pure ego” (the “I”). The me is “the self as known,” whereas the I is “the self as knower.” Thus, the “I” is that “which at any moment is conscious, whereas the me is one of the things it is conscious of.” It is the I, James observes, to which philosophers have postulated a “permanent Substance or agent” called soul, transcendental Ego, Spirit, which is behind the passing state of consciousness” (1981[1890]:196).

On this issue, Erik Erikson (1968:217) is remarkably similar to James:

What the “I” reflects on when it sees or contemplates the body, the personality, and the roles to which it is attached for life—not knowing where it was before or will be after—are the various selves which make up our composite Self. There are constant and often shocklike transitions between these selves. . . . It takes, indeed, a healthy personality for the ‘I’ to be able to speak out of all these conditions in such a way that at any moment it can testify to a reasonably coherent Self.

In this regard, the views of Shweder, an articulate spokesman for the other alleged differences between the Western and non-Western self, are similar to those of James and Erikson. The “I,” or “the observing ego,” Shweder (1985:195) writes, it is

that ghostly but familiar transcendental ‘I’. It is transcendental because it is more than or other than a list of body parts or an assemblage of muscle and skin and bones. It is the ‘I’ that looks out at the world and out at the “me” in the mirror. . . . [That] ‘I,’ that dynamic center of initiative and free will, works in concert with one’s senses, reason, imagination, memory, and body.

The “I” in its relation both to the “me” and the “he” and “she” is brilliantly analyzed by the analytic philosopher Marcia Cavell (1987:12–13):

For a creature who has learned to use *I* appropriately must know at least the following: *I* is not my proper name, but refers to its speaker whoever he is, including you, when you are speaking for yourself; that you are not only a ‘you’ for ‘me’ but an ‘I’ for you; that I am a ‘me’ when I think of myself as the object of your intentions, though when I am speaking to you I am an ‘I’; that for you, I

am 'you,' when I am with you, though I am not when we are apart, and in fact somebody else may then be playing 'my' part for you; that for someone with whom I am not present, I am a 'she' or a 'her,' as the one or ones I wish to exclude or am excluding will be a third person of some singular or plural sort for me, and either male or female if singular; that two or more of us can form a 'we' *in which each of us is still an 'I,'* without losing, that is, our separate identities; and similarly for 'them' and 'they'; that one who can speak for himself can also speak to and about others; and that there is a point of view from which I, too, am a third person, one who can be spoken about. [emphasis added]

The remarkable conceptual achievement that is signified by these linguistic maneuvers, and which everywhere imply a fully conceptualized self-other differentiation, is indicated most dramatically by Erikson's poignant depiction of those few unfortunate individuals who have not achieved an understanding of "I":

No one who has worked with autistic children will ever forget the horror of observing how desperately they struggle to grasp the meaning of saying 'I' and 'you' and how impossible it is for them, for language presupposes the experience of a coherent 'I.' By the same token experience with deeply disturbed young people confronts the worker with the awful awareness of the patients' incapacity to *feel* the 'I' and the 'You' which are cognitively present and of the fear that life may run out before such feeling has been experienced—in love. . . . 'I' is nothing less than the verbal assurance according to which I feel that I am the center of awareness in a universe of experience in which I have a coherent identity, and that I am in possession of my wits and able to say what I see and think. [1968:217–219]

Let me turn now to the second reason that the notion of an "unbounded" non-Western self, even in a relative sense, struck me as strange: that notion is incompatible with my own experience with three non-Western peoples—the Ifaluk, Burmese, and Palestinians. Because I shall deal with the Ifaluk in a separate article and have not yet begun a systematic analysis of the Palestinian materials, I shall make reference to the Burmese materials exclusively. Here I shall refer to only one facet of these materials, but I shall examine other facets more extensively below.

Burmese Buddhists (like Buddhists and Hindus everywhere) believe that every living person—indeed, every living creature—is the reincarnation of myriads of past selves, and (except for a small number of religious virtuosi) they aspire to a continuing and more pleasurable selfhood in succeeding reincarnations. Moreover, they believe that any person's current and future incarnations are the karmic consequences of the intentional acts (i.e., the moral and

immoral acts) of his or her, and only his or her, own person (Spiro 1982).

In short, even if it were the case that other selves are included within the boundary of the Burmese (non-Western) conception of the self, but that Western anthropologists have failed to understand that conception, how then would we explain the fact that the Burmese explicitly affirm that no actor bears any responsibility for the action of others, even though the latter are allegedly included within the boundary of the actor's own self.

Although none of the above observations constituted sufficient grounds for rejecting the claim that the Western conception of the self is "peculiar"—after all, these observations relate to only the "bounded" dimension of its alleged peculiarity<sup>2</sup>—still they were sufficient to arouse my considerable skepticism, which in turn stimulated my resolve to become better acquainted with the contemporary literature on the non-Western self.<sup>3</sup>

### CONFUSIONS

Although many of these studies are illuminating, and some break new ground, nevertheless, they did not reduce my skepticism regarding the peculiarity of the Western self, perhaps because of the lack of terminological and conceptual clarity in their use of the term "self."

Thus, typically, these studies leave that critical term undefined, often they conflate or confuse the concept of the self with other concepts, such as person, individual, personality, self-representation, and often, too, their techniques and methods of inquiry render their findings open to more than the ordinary degree of conflicting interpretations of anthropological data. Although these sources of confusion have already been addressed by Fogelson (1982) and Grace Harris (1989) among others,<sup>4</sup> nevertheless, I also will address them here, albeit briefly, beginning with the first.

Because these studies rarely define the term "self," it is difficult to assess the view that the Western self is "peculiar," especially because its meaning is hardly consensual. Thus, whether in theology, philosophy, psychology, or psychoanalysis, all of which entered the fray prior to anthropology, the term "self" is used in diverse ways, including (but not restricted to) the following:

1. The person, or the individual, including the package of biological, psychological, social, and cultural characteristics by which he or she is constituted.
2. The cultural conception of the person or individual.
3. The cultural conception of some psychic entity or structure within the person, variously designated as "pure ego," "transcendental ego," "soul," and the like.
4. The person's construal of such an entity as the center or locus of his or her initiative, sensations, perceptions, emotions, and the like.
5. The personality or the configuration of cognitive orientations, perceptual sets, and motivational dispositions that are uniquely characteristic of each person.
6. The sense of self or the person's awareness that he or she is both separate and different from other persons. The former is often referred to as "self-other differentiation," the latter as "personal individuation."
7. The self-representation or the mental representation of the attributes of one's own person as they are known, both consciously and unconsciously, to the person himself or herself.

Given these different meanings of the term "self," I could never be sure, as I proceeded from one anthropological study to the next, which of these meanings the author had in mind. The one thing I could be sure of was that different authors often seemed to mean very different things by this term.

Comparisons across these studies are also confusing because, as I have said, different investigators use different techniques and methods of research. Thus, some investigators ascertain the characteristics of the "self" and/or its cultural conception as an inference from classical texts, some from cultural symbols, some from behavioral observations, some by means of eliciting procedures, and so on.

Not being a methodological monist, I appreciate the usefulness of any or all of these investigatory techniques, but because different techniques may produce different kinds of data, at least some of the reported differences between the Western and non-Western self and/or their respective cultural conceptions of the self, may be a function of the differences in techniques of investigation.

Let us suppose, for example, that a study of group G reports that the self is individuated, and in this study (1) the implicit reference

is to the cultural conception of the self, (2) the self is construed as the intentional subject, and (3) this report is based on the analysis of cultural symbols; whereas a study of group G' reports that the self is *not* individuated, but in this study (1') the implicit reference is to the actors' self-representations, (2') the self is construed as the whole person, and (3') this claim is based on behavioral observations. I would now submit that the reliability of a conclusion to the effect that there are important differences—or, for that matter, important similarities—between G and G' in regard to self-individuation is problematic.<sup>5</sup>

Keeping these potential sources of confusion in mind, we may now consider the grounds on which anthropologists and comparative social psychologists, or a sample of them, claim that the Western self and/or its cultural conception, when compared with the non-Western self, is peculiar.

According to Dumont (1985:94) the Western conception of the self is characterized by "individualism" ("the individual is a paramount value") and the non-Western by "wholism" ("the paramount value lies in society as a whole"). In the former case, the individual is "absolute; there is nothing over and above his legitimate demands. . . . He is a monad" (Dumont 1970:4). Whereas in the case of holism "the stress is placed on the society as a whole, as collective Man," in the case of individualism "ontologically, the society no longer exists" (Dumont 1970:8).

According to Shweder and Bourne (1984:190) the Western self is "egocentric" ("society is imagined to have been created to serve the interests of some idealized autonomous, abstract individual existing free of society yet living in society"), while the self of other peoples (Indians, for example) is "sociocentric" ("individual interests" are subordinated "to the good of the collectivity").

For Marsella (1985:209) the contrast is between a Western self that is characterized by "independence, autonomy, and differentiation," and that is "separate, detached, and self-sufficient," and a non-Western self that is "extended to include a wide variety of significant others" and in which there is a "deemphasis on individual autonomy and independence." The former self is "individuated," the latter "unindividuated."

For Kirkpatrick and White (1985:11) the contrast is between a Western conception of the self that assumes that "all psychological matters pertain to the single person," and a non-Western concep-

tion in which some collectivity—"the family, the community, and even the land"—is "a cultural unit with experiential capacities."

For Sampson the contrast is between a Western self, characterized by "self-contained individualism," and a non-Western self characterized by "ensembled individualism." Whereas the former exhibits a firm self-other boundary, "personal control," and an "excluding" conception of person and self, the latter exhibits a fluid self-other boundary, "field control," and an "including" conception of person and self. In short, for the non-Western self the issue of "where the person ends and the world begins is less clearly a central feature" (Sampson 1988:15–16).

For Markus and Kitayama (1991) the contrast is between an "independent" Western view of the self and an "interdependent" non-Western view. The independent self is "an entity containing significant dispositional attributes . . . detached from context" (1991:4), which is "autonomous and independent" (1991:8). The interdependent self, on the other hand, is a "self-in-relation-to-other," so that, for example, "the expression and the experience of emotions and motives may be significantly shaped and governed by a consideration of the reactions of others" (1991:4–5). Thus, anger is less prevalent in the dependent than in the independent self, and "self-serving" motives are replaced by "other-serving" ones.

Although these authors are not unanimous in their formulations; nevertheless, they do seem to agree that whereas the Western self and/or its cultural conception is characterized by self-other differentiation, personal individuation, and autonomy, the non-Western self and/or its cultural conception is not differentiated, individuated, or autonomous, or not, at any rate, like anything approaching the same degree. Rather, the key characteristics of the non-Western self are interdependence, dependence, and fluid boundaries.

In what follows, I shall argue that these bipolar types of self—a Western and a non-Western—are wildly overdrawn. To be sure, some of the previously cited authors qualify these overly generalized types by saying that they only represent "tendencies"; or that one or another of these characteristics "is more likely" to be found in one type, rather than the other; or that one characteristic or another is "probably" found in both types, so that the difference between them is only one of degree. In effect, these qualifications

imply that they conceive of these types as (in the Weberian sense) “ideal” types.

Nevertheless, in my view a typology of the self and/or its cultural conception which consists of only two types, a Western and a non-Western, even if conceived as ideal types, is much too restrictive. Surely, some non-Western selves, at least, are as different from one another as each, in turn, is different from any Western self. In short, in my view, as I shall argue below, there is much more differentiation, individuation, and autonomy in the putative non-Western self, and much more dependence and interdependence in the putative Western self, than these binary opposite types allow.<sup>6</sup>

### THE NON-WESTERN SELF AND/OR ITS CONCEPTION

The claim that non-Western actors do not possess a strong sense of a differentiated, individuated, and autonomous self is problematic, in my view, on two grounds. In some cases, the techniques and/or methods employed in some of these studies do not warrant such a conclusion. In other cases, the validity of this claim has been placed in serious jeopardy by the contrary conclusions of other studies. Let us now examine each of these propositions in turn.

If, following Hartman (1964), we distinguish between “person” and “self”—“person” referring holistically to the psycho-socio-biological individual, “self” to the individual’s own person—then, typically, anthropologists (and comparative social psychologists) do not investigate the self or the individual’s conception of his self (the self-representation), but the cultural conception of the person.

They mostly arrive at this conception by investigating some set of cultural symbols of a social group, from which they infer its cultural conception of the person, although in a few instances they do so by means of various experimental tasks. Finally, most of these studies assume that cultural conceptions of the person are isomorphic with the actors’ conceptions of the self, and some also assume that they are isomorphic with the actors’ mental representations of their self, and with their self itself.

I now wish to assess the validity of these “cultural symbols” and “experimental task” approaches to the study of the self, and in order to keep it within reasonable bounds, I shall restrict this assessment to anthropological studies only—even then to only one

example of each of these approaches. For this purpose I have chosen what are arguably the most influential exemplars of each: Geertz's "cultural symbols" approach in his study of Java, Bali, and Morocco, and Shweder and Bourne's "experimental task" approach in their study of India. I shall begin with the former.

"I have been concerned," Geertz (1984[1974]:125–126) writes,

with attempting to determine how the [Javanese, Balinese, and Moroccans] define themselves as persons, what goes into the idea they have . . . of what a self, Javanese, Balinese, or Moroccan style, is. And in each case, I have tried to get at this most intimate of notions not by imagining myself someone else, a rice peasant or a tribal sheikh, and then seeing what I thought, but by searching out and analyzing symbolic forms—words, images, institutions, behaviors—in terms of which, in each place, people actually represent themselves to themselves and to one another.<sup>7</sup>

This "cultural symbols" approach raises, in my view, three methodological considerations. First, because neither "self" nor "person" is defined, by what criteria does the cultural analyst determine which of the hundreds, perhaps thousands of symbolic forms that comprise any culture are indexical of the conception of the self?

Second, granting that such criteria can be stipulated, how does the analyst determine that these symbolic forms convey the particular conception of the self that he attributes to them?

Third, assuming that both of these questions are resolved, then because inquiry is restricted to the analysis of cultural symbols, so that the actors' "subjectivities" (as Geertz says) are not explicitly investigated, the claim that "people actually represent themselves to themselves" in terms of these symbolic forms cannot be put to the empirical test.

Wellencamp (1988:488) and Hollan (1993:6–7) express this same point all too well. Wellencamp does so by observing that cultural conceptions of the self not only may "not coincide neatly with personal experience," but worse yet they may "ignore, obscure, and even misrepresent aspects of experience." Hollan expresses this point when he observes that while "cultural and linguistic categories . . . provide one important means by which the self is conceptualized—and talked about—it is nevertheless the case that cultural models and conceptions of the self should not be conflated with the experiential self per se."

Many anthropologists, however, do not heed such warnings because, committed to the regnant theory of wholesale cultural

determinism, they take it as self-evident (as I noted above) that cultural conceptions of the self are isomorphic not only with the actors' conception of the self, but with their mental representation of their own self as well. There are good grounds, however, for not taking it as self-evident, as I myself learned from my study of Buddhism in Burma.

When I initially became interested in Theravada Buddhism, and began to study both the primary and secondary sources, one of the first things I learned was that one of its central doctrines is *Anatta*, the doctrine that there is no *Atman*, or soul, alternatively ego, or transcendental self. As the Singhalese monk, Walpola Rahula (1959:51), put it:

What in general is suggested by Soul, Self, Ego . . . is that in man there is a permanent, everlasting and absolute entity, which is the unchanging substance behind the changing phenomenal world. . . . This soul or self in man is the thinker of thoughts, feeler of sensations, and receiver of rewards and punishments for all its actions good and bad. . . . Buddhism stands unique in the history of human thought in denying the existence of such a Soul, Self, or *Atman*. According to the teaching of the Buddha, the idea of the self is an imaginary, false belief which has no corresponding reality. . . . [Moreover] to this false view can be traced all the evil in the world.<sup>8</sup>

Intrigued by this conception of the self, when I decided to conduct field work in Burma, a Theravada Buddhist society, I was determined to investigate at first hand what manner of people believe in this conception of the self—one that can truly be characterized as a “peculiar idea within the context of the world cultures”—and to discover how such a conception might affect their economic behavior, their social system, their political organization, and the like.

After a few months into field work, however, it became apparent that I would have to change my research plans because I discovered that the Burmese villagers with whom I lived and worked do not internalize the doctrine of *Anatta*. Instead, they strongly believe in the very ego or soul that this doctrine denies. They do so on two accounts, experiential and pragmatic. First, because they themselves experience a subjective sense of a self, the culturally normative concept of an ego-less person does not correspond to their personal experience. Second, and perhaps more important, they find the doctrine of a selfless person not congenial to their soteriological aspirations.

Not only does Buddhism teach, but also Burmese Buddhists (like Buddhists and Hindus everywhere) believe, that every living person (indeed, every living creature) is the reincarnation of myriads of previous persons and creatures, and (with the exception of a small number of religious virtuosi) they aspire to continuing, but more pleasurable, existences in succeeding reincarnations. For normative Buddhism, however, the form and quality of one's future (like one's present and past) existence are a function of meritorious and demeritorious acts performed both in this and in previous existences. That being so, if there is no permanent ego or self that constitutes one's persistent identity from one rebirth to the next, why, Burmese villagers ask, should they be concerned with any existence except the present one? In short, to summarize the comments expressed in numerous interviews:

If it is not *I* who am reborn, and if it is not *I* who enjoys the delights of heaven or who suffers the pains of hell, then to aspire to a happier rebirth . . . or to avoid a painful rebirth seems pointless. To be sure the being who will enjoy these delights or suffer these pains is produced by my karmic formations, but since that being is not *me*—'it is not my body'—then why should *I* be concerned with acquiring merit from which *he* will benefit? Conversely, if, with the death of my body, I die without residue, why should I fear the tortures of hell? Since it is not *my* body but *that* body which is tortured, why should I not enjoy all those forbidden pleasures from which I abstain from fear of karmic retribution? [As the Burmese couplet expresses it], *this* body will enjoy, *that* body will suffer. [Spiro 1982:86, emphasis in original]

Having learned the hard way that one cannot validly infer actors' conception of the self, let alone their mental representations of their own self, from the normative cultural conception, it is not surprising that I was rather skeptical of Geertz's claim that from a study of symbolic cultural forms alone, one can validly infer the manner in which people "actually represent themselves to themselves." My skepticism was not diminished by his descriptions of the self, based on the analysis of symbolic forms, in Java, Bali, and Morocco. Because of space limitations, and because his description of the Balinese self is very different from other descriptions based on different techniques of inquiry, I shall confine my comments to the Balinese self.

In Bali (as in Java) every attempt is made, according to Geertz, to "stylize" all "expression" and to extinguish all "individuality" (1984[1974]:128). Thus, in Bali:

It is dramatic personae, not actors that endure; indeed, it is *dramatis personae*, not actors, that in the proper sense really exist. Physically men come and go, mere incidents in a happenstance of history, of no genuine importance even to themselves. But the masks they wear, the stage they occupy, the parts they play, and, most important, the spectacle they mount remain and comprise not the facade but the substance of things, not least the self. . . . Of course players perish, but the play doesn't, and it is the latter, the performed rather than the performer, that really matters. (1984[1974]:129)

Although the referent of this paragraph is not entirely clear, I presume that it refers to the cultural concept of the self. If that is the case, then based on my Burmese experience it seems appropriate to ask whether this normative concept corresponds to the way in which typical Balinese actors "represent themselves" not only to others, but also the way in which "they represent themselves to themselves."

In short, does the typical Balinese actor really perceive himself as in some "proper sense" not to "really exist," and not to "really matter"? If so, then what is the evidence for such a self-representation, or for that matter such a cultural concept of the self?

The evidence for the latter, Geertz reports, consists of "a set of readily observable symbolic forms: an elaborate repertoire of designations and titles," from which this concept may be deduced. Thus, when one applies these labels to someone, "one therefore defines him as a determinate point in a fixed pattern, as the temporary occupant of a particular, quite untemporary, cultural locus" (1984[1974]:129). That being so, "the terminological systems conduce to a view of the human person as an appropriate representative of a generic type, not a unique creature with a private fate" (1984[1974]:129). Again, these designations and titles "represent the most time-saturated aspects of the human condition as but ingredients in an eternal, footlight present" (1984[1974]:130).

In some respects, it may be said that we do the same thing that the Balinese do. Thus, we may identify one person as "a University of Illinois assistant professor of anthropology, and an expert on the Chinese middle Paleolithic," and some other person as "a Park Avenue doctor, specializing in gastroenterology." Does this mean, however, that the anthropologist and doctor do not perceive themselves as "unique creature[s] with a private fate?" I doubt it. Hence, if we are to be convinced that Balinese, unlike Americans, truly

perceive themselves as not possessing a unique and private identity, then I would suggest that in addition to cultural designations and titles, we must have other evidence in support of this alleged self-representation (one that truly makes the Western conception “peculiar”).

I would also suggest, however, that there is at least some evidence for the contrary presumption that the Balinese do have a clear sense of a private identity. Thus, Geertz’s contention that the person in Bali is no more than the statuses he occupies and the roles that he plays in a scripted drama seem to be contradicted by the emphasis he places on the critical Balinese emotion of *lek*. Glossing this term as “stage-fright,” *lek*, Geertz says, consists of “the fear that the actor . . . will show through his part . . . that the personality—as we would call it but the Balinese, of course, not believing in such a thing, would not—of the individual will break through to dissolve his standardized public identity” (1984[1974]:130).

I would infer from this that in addition to a “standardized public identity,” the Balinese actor also possesses an individual and private identity, which when its surfaces, becomes, as Geertz says, a “disruptive threat.” Although Geertz contends that this threat consists of “the fear of faux pas”—the fear that “an aesthetic illusion will not be maintained” (1984[1974]:130)—and although this contention may well be correct, still it might be conjectured that it consists instead of the fear of the emergence of the repressed and antisocial tendencies of the actor’s “personality.”

Of course, it would be chutzpah for a non-Balinese specialist like myself to press this conjecture, but because it is supported by Uni Wikan’s Balinese data, which we shall examine in the next section, it is a conjecture that I would not reject out of hand. First, however, I wish to draw some general conclusions regarding the “cultural symbols” approach to the study of the self, and then examine the “experimental task” approach.

Although Geertz contends that in his studies of Bali, Java, and Morocco he has employed “symbolic forms” to describe the actors’ own “sense of self” (1984[1974]:134), in my judgment he has employed them to describe the ways in which actors are often designated and identified by others, and in which they often present themselves to others. In other words, although he has described the actors’ *self-presentation*, he has not described their “sense of self,” or their *self-representation*.

That Geertz contends that an analysis of symbolic forms alone can accomplish both rests on the assumption that the meanings they have for social actors are clear and unequivocal, so that in analyzing these forms one ipso facto has access to the actor's "subjectivities." Thus:

Accounts of other people's subjectivities can be built up without recourse to pretensions to more-than-normal capacities for ego effacement and fellow feeling. . . . Whatever accurate or half-accurate sense one gets of what one's informants are . . . really like . . . comes from the ability to construe their modes of expression, what I would call their symbol systems. (Geertz 1984[1974]:135)

But what if someone disagrees with an investigator's construal of the meanings of these symbol systems? Or what if, though agreeing, he disagrees with the contention that cultural symbols self-evidently describe the actors' subjectivities? In the event, it becomes necessary to study their subjectivities more directly (dare I say "clinically"?)—by probing interviews, behavioral observations, projective tests, dreams, and other personal productions—but this Geertz believes to be unnecessary. That being so, he fails to convince those who do not share his conviction that if only an investigator possesses "the ability to construe . . . their symbol systems," that is sufficient to access a people's "subjectivities," including (what is perhaps the most subjective of subjectivities) their mental representation of themselves.

Let us now turn from the foregoing assessment of the "cultural symbols" approach to the study of the self and proceed to an assessment of the "experimental task" approach. As the exemplar of this approach, I have chosen Shweder and Bourne's (1984) comparative study of the Indian and Western self.

Based on a sample of Indian (Oriyan) and Western (American) subjects who were instructed to describe their close acquaintances, Shweder and Bourne report that whereas Oriyas, more than Americans, describe them in "concrete" and "context-dependent" ways (e.g., "he supports his mother"), Americans, more than Oriyas, describe them in "abstract" and "context-independent" ways (e.g., "he is a good person"). From these differences they conclude that unlike Americans, who conceive of the person as an "autonomous, abstract individual" (Shweder and Bourne 1984:190), Oriyas conceive of the person as "not differentiated from the role" (Shweder and Bourne 1984:168).

This conclusion, I would suggest, is not all that clear cut. In the first place, on all these dimensions the differences between the Orissa and American samples, as their table indicates (Shweder and Bourne 1984:181, Table 6.1), only represent tendencies. More important, with respect to the context-independent and context-dependent dimensions, while the American sample is overwhelmingly context-independent (71% to 28%), the Orissa sample is evenly divided (50.4% to 49.6%).

In any event, these differences in their subjects' descriptions of close acquaintances can be attributed, so Shweder and Bourne maintain, to differences between Indian and Western cultural conceptions of the individual-society relationship. In India this relationship is conceived as "sociocentric organic," so that "individual interests [are subordinated] to the good of the collectivity," whereas in the West, it is conceived as "egocentric reductionist," so that "society is imagined to have been created to serve the interests" of the autonomous individual conceived as "existing free of society yet living in society" (Shweder and Bourne 1984:190).

Although these descriptions are based on the work of distinguished Indological scholars, such as Dumont (1970) and Marriott (1976), and although I do not doubt that these descriptions accurately represent culturally normative conceptions, nevertheless Shweder and Bourne present no evidence that they are also the operative conceptions of Indian and Western actors, more particularly those of their Oriyan and American subjects.

Clearly, for example, the Indian cultural ("sociocentric" and "context dependent") conception of the person is not the operative conception of virtually half the Orissa sample who describe their close acquaintances as the majority of the American sample do; nor is the Western cultural ("egocentric" and "autonomous") conception the operative conception of more than a quarter of the American sample. Even those subjects for whom the cultural conception of the person is their operative conception, it does not necessarily follow, *pace* Shweder and Bourne, that the differences between their respective cultural conceptions account for the differences in their descriptions of close acquaintances. The latter differences are susceptible to other explanations, as we shall see below.

Even granting, however, that these cultural differences account for the differences in the Oriyan and American descriptions of *other*

persons (close acquaintances), nevertheless these descriptions, I submit, would not tell us how these subjects view their *own* person (i.e., how they represent themselves to themselves), as Shweder and Bourne contend that they do. Hence, although they say that cultural conceptions of the person are reflected in “ego’s view of its-‘self’” (Shweder and Bourne 1984:172), I would suggest that this view cannot be ascertained from their “experimental task” approach to the study of the self alone.

Thus, while it may well be the case that for Indians (and other “members of sociocentric organic cultures”) “the [allegedly Western] concept of an autonomous individual . . . must feel alien, a bizarre idea cutting the self off from the interdependent whole, dooming it to a life of isolation and loneliness” (Shweder and Bourne 1984:194), still Shweder and Bourne produce no empirical support for this contention, nor can I see anything in their Orissa findings that might provide such support.

That also holds for their American findings. Thus, if as Riesman (1953) reported 40 years ago, most Americans are “outer-directed,” then although the alleged Western cultural concept of the “autonomous individual” may have been manifested by Americans in the distant past, today, however, it is manifested by only the small minority of Americans who Riesman describes as “inner directed.” Riesman’s findings, it might be added, are supported by the work of social historians, like Lasch (1978), and psychoanalytic self-psychologists, like Kohut (1977).

To return, however, to the Orissa sample, if, following Ewing (1991), “interpersonal” autonomy is distinguished from “intrapsychic,” then (as she argues) there is no convincing reason to believe that Indians are any less characterized by intrapsychic autonomy than Americans are.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, even in respect to interpersonal autonomy, it is not clear that Shweder and Bourne’s Oriyan and American subjects are all that different, for the characteristics of these respective samples and also the differences in their experimental tasks raise some critical questions about the validity of such a conclusion.

The American sample, which consisted of 17 subjects, all from Chicago, was divided into 3 groups: a group of 5 (3 females and 2 males) counseling psychologists, a group of 6 female nursery school teachers, and a group of 6 members of a college fraternity. The Orissa sample, which represented all local castes, consisted of

70 subjects (all, but 2 were males), of whom half were either illiterate or had no formal education.

For both samples, the task, as I have already noted, was to describe a close acquaintance, but whereas the Oriyas were instructed to describe up to three friends, neighbors or workmates, the three groups of Americans were instructed to describe their fellow psychologists, nursery school teachers, and fraternity members, respectively. Moreover, while the Oriyas were instructed to describe the personality, nature (character), and behavior of their acquaintances, the Americans were instructed to describe their personalities alone.

I would now suggest that the differences between the Oriyan and American descriptions—the former giving more context-dependent and concrete descriptions, the latter descriptions more context-independent and abstract—may perhaps be more a reflection of the differences in these samples and their instructions than in their respective cultural conceptions of the person.

In the first place, two of the three categories of “acquaintances” that the Oriyas were instructed to describe consist of friends and neighbors, in short, persons with whom they interact in a variety of contexts. On the other hand the one category that each group comprising the American sample were instructed to describe (their fellow psychologists, or nursery teachers, or fraternity members) consists of persons with whom they interact in a single context. I would suggest, then, this difference alone may have encouraged the Oriyas to be more concrete in their descriptions and the Americans to be more abstract in theirs.

Second, it is hardly surprising that the American sample, in contrast to the Oriyan, concentrated on personality descriptions; for given the categories of acquaintances each was instructed to describe, that is precisely where any differences between these samples would be expected to lie. More important, because the Americans were instructed to describe the personalities of their acquaintances, whereas the Oriyans were instructed to describe not only their personalities, but their behavior as well, it is hardly surprising that the Americans, much more than the Oriyas, stress personality characteristics in their descriptions.

Perhaps even more important, however, is the fact that two of the three groups comprising the American sample (counseling psychologists and nursery teachers) are specialized by training and

interest to have more than an ordinary concern with personality. I would suggest that this alone could perhaps explain the emphasis they place on personality in their descriptions of their acquaintances.

Taking all these methodological considerations into account, I believe they offer strong support for my suggestion that the differences in the Oriyan and American descriptions of close acquaintances may not reflect the differences in the Indian and Western cultural conceptions of the person so much as they reflect differences in the composition of the respective samples and in the instructions they were given.<sup>10</sup>

Most important, however, even granting that it is the differences in their respective cultural conceptions of the person that most importantly account for the differences in the Oriyan and American descriptions of close acquaintances, still there are no grounds for believing that these differences in their representation of *other* persons constitute evidence for such differences in their representation of their *own* person (i.e., in their representation of themselves). In short, this “experiential task” approach to the study of the self raises the same questions that are raised by the “cultural symbols” approach.

### EMPIRICAL CHALLENGES

Having raised some theoretical and methodological objections to the contention that compared to the non-Western self, the Western self is “peculiar,” I now wish to turn to some empirical challenges that have been raised by ethnographers who study the non-Western self by means other than the “cultural symbols” and “experiential task” approaches. I shall begin with challenges first to Geertz’s description of the Balinese self, then to Shweder and Bourne’s description of the Indian self, and finally to Markus and Kitayama’s description of the East Asian (especially Japanese) self.

Based on interviews with and behavioral observations of Balinese actors, Wikan (1987, 1989) has taken critical issue with Geertz’s fundamental claims regarding the Balinese self and its cultural conception. As Wikan describes them, the Balinese have a constant concern with health, which is hardly surprising given that half of all deaths are attributed either to black magic perpetrated by “intimate others,” or to poison administered by them (Wikan

1989:295). Moreover, for the Balinese, she writes, the self is experienced as “steadily exposed to myriad health-endangering forces. . . . Fellow beings, deities, demons, sundry (super) natural spirits, and the souls of the dead can strike a person sick or dead” (Wikan 1989:298). Again, “the Balinese live in a world where murder or attempted murder resulting in sickness from sorcery is the order of the day” (Wikan 1989:300).

All of these experiences, Wikan (1987:348–349) argues, account for the Balinese view that there is a “fundamental difference between the outer forms of conduct and the inner life of experience.” More specifically, Balinese “assume people to be graceful, tactful, and polite, but susceptible to the most hideous feelings and impulses in secret” (Wikan 1987:355). Hence, “behind a surface of astheticism, grace, and gaiety,” there is “social uneasiness, great concern with the individual thoughts and intentions of others, and ubiquitous fear” especially of particular and known associates (Wikan 1987:338). Moreover:

Since no limit exists to the evil fellow beings are presumed to be capable of, if angered or offended, . . . it is necessary to take precautions to protect oneself, observing stringent rules of propriety and etiquette, and keeping a bright, smiling face—a social prestation that makes a moral claim on another to be well-disciplined in turn. [Wikan 1987:306]

That being the case, Balinese poise, Wikan (1989:296) argues is not, *pace* Geertz, motivated by aestheticism and stage fright, but by the attempt to suppress “hearts full of passions and desires, fears and despair, and, at times, boundless, consuming fury.” In short, because any untoward word or deed might cause anger in, or offend, others (thereby provoking them to sorcery as retaliation), Balinese actors exhibit outward poise, gaiety, and friendliness, not for aesthetic reasons, but as a defense against retaliation (Wikan 1987:339). Hence, it is understandable that

anger in Bali is a dreaded and morally deprecable emotion. Many Balinese deny that they have ever felt anger in themselves. Persistent or uncontrollable anger is likely to be diagnosed by the afflicted or her family as caused by black magic, thus relieving the person of responsibility. The Balian [therapist] whose help they seek will validate this diagnosis and proclaim: “this (the anger) is not you, it is so and so.” [Wikan 1989:305]

In sum:

Grace and composure do not come effortlessly to the Balinese. The complaint that 'there is so much to care about' resounds through everyday life, and their 'refined aestheticism' should be seen as the outcome of deliberate, in part desperate efforts to secure health and esteem by managing one's heart. "Did you see how I made my face look bright? I was so angry inside, but I was afraid . . . she might do something to me," said a woman teacher after her guest had left. [Wikan 1989:307]

But the politeness and conviviality of others "is an aura that does not deceive the Balinese" (Wikan 1989:338), for others are viewed "as covertly moved by passions, hates, and insults behind [their] more or less opaque surface of polite manners" (Wikan 1989:355). That being so, it is not the case, *pace* Geertz, that Balinese view others as stereotyped, abstract, and anonymous. Rather, they "center on idiosyncratic features of the person, however much the grace and etiquette may give a semblance of individuality erased" (Wikan 1989:362).

Wikan's depiction of the Balinese is duplicated and strengthened by that of Howe. In Bali, Howe (1984:212) writes, there is

avoidance of certain types of abhorred emotions, namely those thoughts, feelings and dispositions associated with the appearance of [evil] spirits and largely indicative of social discord. Quarrels, in truth, do not build, they are left to simmer. [On the other hand, such emotions as] mirth, merriment, joviality, sportiveness and other actions conducive to social harmony are all allowed to be expressed without any restraint whatsoever.

If Howe is correct, then it is not *all* emotions that the Balinese (as Geertz claims) suppress, but only those particular emotions that are expected to arouse hostility in others. Hence, because they lead the actor to imagine a retaliatory, punitive response, only the latter emotions are subjected to suppression (or perhaps repression).

These data suggest that while it may be the case, as ethnopsychological theorists of the self such as Rosaldo (1984) contend, that non-Western cultural conceptions of the self, unlike the Western conception, make no reference to unconscious motives and repressed wishes, it does not follow that such motives and wishes are not present in the non-Western self, for, as Wikan and Howe demonstrate in the case of the Balinese self, they are present nonetheless. Moreover, they not only are present, but their psychodynamic processes are no different from those described for the Western self, as Wikan's data regarding unconscious anger in Bali demonstrate.

Thus, Balinese actors fear their own anger, according to Wikan, because of their belief that should they offend others, the latter will use sorcery and poison to make them ill, and they will suffer supernatural punishment, as well. In addition, if Balinese actors “deny” (repress?) their anger, as Wikan reports they do, then this suggests (from a psychodynamic perspective, at any rate) that the anger they fear from others, both human and supernatural, is at least in part anger that they unconsciously project onto them. If this admittedly conjectural suggestion is correct, it may then be inferred that Balinese (like Western) actors possess both conscious and unconscious self-representations, and although consciously they do not represent themselves as hostile or angry, unconsciously (so I infer from Wikan’s and Howe’s data) they do.

While this psychodynamic explanation for the existence of unconscious hostile motives in the Balinese self is admittedly conjectural, that is not the case, however, for similar interpretations of the self of other non-Western peoples, in regard to whom such psychodynamic processes are not merely presumed, but also demonstrated. Consider, for example, Thomas Hay’s (1977) study of the Ojibwa self. Not only is the logic of such a psychodynamic interpretation explicated in Hay’s analysis, but the interpretation itself is based on robust evidence.

Hay begins his analysis with Hallowell’s description of the Ojibwa self, whose “core characteristics” (Hallowell says) include strong, emotional constraint (especially in regard to anger), a tendency to become angry at slight provocation, repression of anger, and dependence on supernatural beings, or “dream visitors.” Based on Hallowell’s field work, as well as his own, Hay (1977:74–75) then identifies two contradictory Ojibwa “self concepts,” or (as I prefer) self-representations, one conscious, the other unconscious. Consciously, he says, Ojibwa represent themselves as bereft of abilities or “powers,” both natural and magical, and as lacking the capacity for anger.

“Complementary” to this conscious self-representation are “dream visitors,” upon whom the Ojibwa depend, and who punish violations of taboos with illness; in short, these supernatural beings possess that very power (for good and for evil) that Ojibwa consciously believe that they themselves lack. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Hay then postulated that these characteristics of the dream visitors represent characteristics of the Ojibwa self, which

however the Ojibwa repress and attribute instead to the dream visitors. If this hypothesis is correct, then unconsciously, so Hay (1977) reasoned, Ojibwa represent themselves as capable of becoming enraged on slight provocation, and as possessing great magical power (and the motivation to use it) which can make others ill and cause them to die.

Hay then argued that in principle the Ojibwa pattern of not expressing anger can be equally well explained by either of these self-representations. Thus, consistent with their conscious self-representation, it can be inferred that Ojibwa actors suppress their anger from fear that its targets will enlist supernatural help to harm them. Consistent, however, with their unconscious self-representation, it can be inferred that Ojibwa actors unconsciously perceive themselves as causing the targets of their anger to become ill, and because typically they are close relatives, they repress their anger because they don't want to make them ill, let alone cause their death.

In order to evaluate these competing hypotheses, Hay reasoned as follows. Seeing that magical power is acquired during the puberty fast (hence children are not believed to possess such power), if A is angry at B, and B is a child, then if the *conscious* self-representation is "primary," A should have no reason to fear B, and consequently he should express his anger, rather than suppress it. If, however, the *unconscious* self-representation is "primary," then even if B is a child, A's anger should be repressed from fear that he will harm B. Employing a mathematical model and basing his analysis on 600 cases of adult-child interactions in which (by Ojibwa norms) adults might be expected to become angry at the children, Hay was able to confirm the hypothesis that it is the unconscious self-representation that is primary.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Hay's study demonstrates not only that the cultural conception of the person may be an invalid measure of the actors' representations of their self, but also that exclusive attention to the conscious self-representation may be misleading because it may conflict with an unconscious representation, whose motivational force may be just as powerful as the conscious representation, if not more so.

In short, Hay's findings provide an empirical instantiation of my previous suggestion that important aspects of Balinese behavior, which Geertz explained by reference to their cultural conception

of the person, are better explained, especially when the findings of Wikan and Howe are taken into account, by reference to the unconscious anger of Balinese actors, and their unconscious psychodynamic processes.

Having described Wikan's and Howe's empirical challenges to Geertz's view of the Balinese self, let us turn to some challenges to the dominant anthropological view of the South Asian self, as represented by Shweder and Bourne, Dumont, Marriott, and others. According to this view, the South Asian self is context-dependent, sociocentric, lacking in autonomy, and the like. The studies summarized below paint a rather different picture.

In an ethnographic study of Pakistani women, utilizing both psychodynamically oriented interviews and behavioral observations, Ewing (1990) found that although "firmly embedded in interpersonal dependency relationships," nonetheless these women display a clear awareness of a separation between their self-representations and their representations of others. For while they possess little "interpersonal autonomy," they do, however, possess "intrapsychic autonomy" (Ewing 1990:137). Moreover, if (as sometimes happens) they do not achieve the intrapsychic autonomy, then the psychological consequence, Ewing reports, is severe psychopathology, including depression, serious impairment of self-esteem, and conflictual dependency.

Similarly, based on a cultural, behavioral, and psychological study of the Newari of Nepal, Parish (1987) concluded that the Newari, also, possess a firm sense of self. Although "a moral identity," Parish writes, "is founded on group loyalty, on the sense of belonging, of owing others," nevertheless "this does not require that a person lack a firm sense of personal identity (or self boundaries), but only that individual existence apart from belonging to a particular family or caste is not salient as a moral theme" (Parish 1987:51). Moreover, "although the [cultural] value of individuality is not emphasized, the condition of being an individual is as real (and problematic) in South Asia as elsewhere" (Parish 1987:52). Hence, he comments:

Rather than assuming that Hindus have 'permeable' self boundaries . . . [just] because cultural beliefs and practices suggest persons can ingest or emit moral parts of themselves in food or other media, one could argue that the cultural depiction of self-boundaries and the psychological status of self-boundaries are not isomorphic. One could assume Hindus have firm, adaptive self-boundaries,

that they can and do successfully discriminate for the most part between what they are and what they are not. Believing, however, what the cultural depiction suggests, that self boundaries are vulnerable to contamination, Hindus may experience anxiety. [Parish 1987:114]

Likewise, in her culturally contextualized psychological study of the Gurung of Nepal, McHugh (1989:83) found that though the Gurung emphasize and value "interrelationship," nevertheless they recognize "a self-contained individual entity, one that is distinct and private." Indeed, she continues, Geertz's characterization of the Western conception of the person "would serve nicely to characterize the Gurung conception of the person as expressed in beliefs about the *sae* [soul]" (McHugh 1989). Hence, although "relatedness is stressed and the assertion of individual needs and desires is disapproved," the Gurung, like "most people in most places," believe that "persons are embodied, that the boundary of the person is the skin, and that while people can be separated from each other, the person is not divisible" (McHugh 1989).

The Rudolphs (1976), based on a study of a multivolume personal diary of the late 19th century Rajput nobleman, Amar Singh, arrive at a similar conclusion. Thus:

For Amar Singh, being a mature adult meant creating and maintaining individuality and initiative in an interdependent, corporate setting [extended family]. Being individualistic in the extended family and the big house was disruptive and costly, but articulating and expressing a distinct self was not. [Rudolph and Rudolph 1976:146]

Again:

We do not find that the extended family induces dependency, at least no more than the nuclear family. The belief that it does arise from taking cultural norms that call for compliant behavior as descriptive of, or identical with, intentions, motives, and inner states. . . . The evidence from the diary makes it clear that if Rajput males, instead of unraveling themselves from the family, are obliged to knit themselves into it, they do not thereby lose the psychic capacity to free themselves from their parents in ways that enable them to cease to be children and to become adults. [Rudolph and Rudolph 1976:153]

And again:

We do not mean to suggest that becoming an adult in an extended family is just like becoming an adult in a nuclear family, but we do find that it is not so different, not so dichotomous, not so mirror-like, as much of the literature dealing with it depicts it to be. [Rudolph and Rudolph 1976:163]<sup>12</sup>

All of these studies demonstrate very clearly that though the sociocentric and context-dependent South Asian self, whose self-boundaries are at best fuzzy, may well represent the normative cultural conception of the self, it is not a wholly accurate description of the self as it is experienced by South Asian actors. Put differently, from these studies, it would appear that the Western self is not all that “peculiar.”

A similar picture emerges from some few studies of the self in East Asia, which as described by Markus and Kitayama and others, is little different from Shweder and Bourne’s description of the South Asian self. Beginning with ancient China (presumably much more traditional than contemporary China), and relying on the work of the Sinologist Mark Elvin, we obtain a description of a self that in many of its characteristics echoes Geertz’s description of the Western self. As Elvin observes:

The ancient Chinese everyday view of the self, when it first becomes clear to us during the second quarter of the first millenium B.C., is neither strange nor inaccessible to the modern Western imagination. [After quoting some lines from a long autobiographic poem, Elvin continues.] These lines show a feeling for the individual self not far removed from that which we have today in the non-philosophical and non-devotional parts of our lives. The speaker has a clear inward vision of herself as a relatively coherent, enduring, and self-contained entity that makes decisions, carries responsibilities, is possessed by feelings, and in general has a fate, a fortune, and a history. [Elvin 1985:59]

Turning to Japan, Eiko Tada’s study of a northern Japanese village (Tada 1991) demonstrates once again the pitfalls of relying on normative cultural conceptions for achieving a veridical picture of actors’ conceptions of the self, let alone their own selves. A few examples will perhaps suffice.

Consider, first, the Japanese ideology, which stresses the importance of group interest over that of the individual. Some writers, like Markus and Kitayama (1991), take this ideology as an accurate reflection of psychological reality, but Tada (1991:136–137) observes that although ostensibly village actors work hard in order to make their extended family household (the *ie*) wealthier than others, in actuality they are motivated not so much by “group-oriented” goals as by “self-oriented” goals, including self-esteem, pride, and—even more so—power. Self-interest is also the motive for outmigration, despite the fact that it breaks up the supremely important *ie* (Tada 1991:205). These are only two instances of

“independent” motivations in a society whose actors, according to Markus and Kitayama, are characterized by “interdependent” selves.

Similarly, although village women typically explain their behavior in culturally normative terms—their behavior is performed, they say, for the sake of their households and their children, or from consideration of their status (e.g., that of mother), or because of a social obligation—nevertheless, these claims, Tada writes, cannot “be taken at face value,” for often their behavior is motivated instead by self-serving personal desire (1991:255).

Hence, because the suppression of “their own wishes and feelings,” Tada observes, “has not been successively [achieved] by many people . . . there is a tension between what the individual wants to do . . . and what the person must do . . . [and this] disparity between roles and individual inclinations often becomes an intra-personal conflict” (1991:261). One resolution of such conflict is “to believe the action is motivated for welfare of children or *ie*, though consciously or unconsciously it is motivated by self-interest” (Tada 1991:277).

Let us turn now to yet another discrepancy between cultural ideology and psychological reality in the Japanese self. According to Markus and Kitayama (1991:33), Japanese emotions (like those of other peoples with “interdependent” selves) are “other-focused”—that is, they “have another person, rather than one’s own internal attributes, as the primary referent.” Hence, they argue, compared to people with “independent” selves, they are much more sensitive to others, more often take the perspective of others, and are concerned to “further cooperative or altruistic social behavior.”

According to Tada, however, Japanese villagers (despite their sociocentric cultural ideology) say that people are “fundamentally individual-centered, or non-social, and envious.” Hence, because their true motives must be carefully censored before they are expressed (Tada 1991:265), there is, despite a surface harmony, much tension, especially rivalry and envy, beneath the surface (Tada 1991:266–267). Indeed, it is a characteristic of people, so the villagers say, “to gloat over a misfortune of one’s neighbor.”

Consequently, because villagers, as Tada says, “are aware of the competitive and envious elements in human nature, they have emphasized the importance of the *appearance* of harmony,” so that

should conflict surface, they handle it “without being confrontational” (emphasis in original). It might be noted that had we not known that Tada is describing Japanese, we might have thought that it was Balinese or Ojibwa (or a host of other allegedly “socio-centric” peoples) that she is describing.<sup>13</sup>

### THE WESTERN SELF: STUDIES AND THEORIES

From the above studies, it is evident that descriptions of the self in South and East Asia, which are based on behavioral observations and psychological explorations, are critically different from, when not opposed to the findings of those investigators who rely on interpretations of cultural symbols and experimental tasks. This is so, it might perhaps be suggested, because the latter investigators, who describe the South and East Asian self as sociocentric, interdependent, context-dependent, conflate cultural concepts (such as “holism”) and political and legal concepts (such as “interdependence”) with actors’ conceptions and/or experience of the self, and also with the self itself.

Correspondingly, I would suggest that in describing the Western self as autonomous, egocentric, context-independent, and the like, they again conflate cultural concepts (such as autonomy) and political and legal concepts (such as “individualism”) with the actors’ conception and experience of the self. Moreover, having described the Western self as a “monad,” independent of society and social ties, with no

larger framework within which to locate [it]self . . . lack[ing] a meaningful orientation to the past . . . coming from nowhere, the product of a random genetic accident . . . lack[ing] a meaningful orientation to the future . . . going nowhere—at best view[ing itself like] ‘machines’ that will someday run down . . . [whose] gods [are] personal success and wealth. . . . Cut adrift from any larger whole, the self has become the measure of all things, clutching to a faith that some ‘invisible hand’ will by sleight of hand right things in the end. [Shweder and Bourne 1984:195]

it is no wonder that they then characterize such an idea of the self as “peculiar within the context of the world cultures.”

This putative Western self and/or conception of the self is, however, a straw man. No major Western student of the self, none at any rate that I am aware of, holds the view that the self, Western or otherwise, is not interdependent. Such a view is held neither by

William James, G. H. Mead or Charles Cooley; neither by Freud, Erik Erikson, or Heinz Kohut; neither by Gordon Allport, Piaget, or Gardner Murphy; neither by Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin, or Marcia Cavell—to name only a few representative figures from very different theoretical and intellectual traditions. In support of this claim, let us briefly consider the views of the self held by some of these representative figures all of whom, as we shall see, stress the social embeddedness and interdependence of the self.

James, it will be recalled, distinguished the “empirical self” (the “me”)—which includes the “material,” the “social,” and the “spiritual” selves—from “the pure ego” (the “I”). All of these “constituents of the self” arouse “self feelings” (including “self-esteem,” “self-love,” and “self-dissatisfaction,” i.e., shame and despair). Hence, so far as the empirical self is concerned, it is difficult, James writes, to draw a line between what a person calls “me” and what he calls “mine”:

We feel and act about certain things that are ours very much as we feel and act about ourselves. Our fame, our children, the work of our hands, may be as dear to us as our bodies are, and arouse the same feelings, and the same acts of reprisal if attacked. And our bodies themselves, are they simply ours, or are they *us*? . . . [In] its widest possible sense a man’s self [me] is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his land and horses, his yacht and bank-account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down,—not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all. [James 1981:279–280]

The first constituent of this empirical self is the “material” self, whose “innermost part” is the body, and its second constituent is the social self (i.e., “the recognition” one gets from “one’s mates”), which, according to James, is one of the strongest of human needs. Hence, a person “has as many social selves as there are distinct *groups* of persons about whose opinions he cares,” and because “fame” and “honor” are crucial dimensions of the social self, each person “shows a different side of himself” to each of these groups (James 1981:282, emphasis added). Moreover, in addition to the actual social self, there is also the “ideal” social self, one that is worthy of “approving recognition by the highest possible judging companion. . . . This self is the true, the intimate, the ultimate, the permanent Me which I seek” (James 1981:301).

In short, if the Western conception of the self is that of a monad, isolated from and independent of society, then such a conception surely is not shared by James.

According to G. H. Mead, the founder of the symbolic interactionist theory of the self:

We cannot be ourselves unless we are also members [of a community] in whom there is a community of attitudes which control the attitudes of all. . . . That which we have acquired as self-conscious persons makes us such members of society and gives us selves. *Selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves.* No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between our own selves and the selves of others, because our own selves exist and enter as such into our experiences only in so far as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience also. *The individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group;* and the structure of his self expresses or reflects the general behavior pattern of this social group to which he belongs, just as does the structure of the self of every other individual belonging to this social group. [Mead 1934:163–164, emphasis added]

Again, if the Western self is conceived as a monad, then that conception is obviously not shared by Mead.

For Erik Erikson, arguably the most influential psychoanalytic ego psychologist, the self, conceived as “I,” is the person’s “center of awareness,” but in addition to this “inner” self, there is also “the outerworld of the ego [self],” which

is made up of the *egos of others* significant to it. They are significant because on many levels of crude or subtle communication my whole being perceives in them a hospitality for the way in which my inner world is ordered and includes them, which makes me, in turn, hospitable to the way they order their world and include me—a mutual confirmation, then, which can be depended upon to activate my being as I can be depended upon to activate theirs. . . . [The opposite, “reciprocal negation”] is the denial on the part of others to take their place in my order and to let me take mine in theirs. Nothing . . . resembles the hate which this arouses, and nothing the ambivalence which makes us uncertain where in these respects we stand in relation to one another. [Erikson 1968:219–220, emphasis in original]

But this is not all. For Erikson, the notion of “identity” is as much social as personal. Thus:

The conscious feeling of having a personal identity [self] is based on two simultaneous observations: the perception of the selfsameness and continuity of one’s existence in time and space and the perception of the fact that others recognize one’s sameness and continuity. . . . ‘Ego identity’ is “the awareness of the fact that there is a selfsameness and continuity to the ego’s synthesizing methods, *the style of one’s individuality*, and that this style coincides with the

sameness and continuity of *one's meaning for significant others* in the immediate community. [Erickson 1968:50, emphasis in original]

In sum, for Erikson, as for James and Mead, the self is relational through and through. To be sure, it is sometimes claimed that having been influenced by Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, Erikson emphasized the social dimension of the self *despite* the fact that he is a psychoanalyst. This claim, however, reflects either misunderstanding or ignorance of standard psychoanalytic theory. Based on the intensive study of individuals—and in an era when academic psychology, during its long behaviorist phase, rejected the very notion of the self<sup>14</sup>—psychoanalytic theory insisted that the self develops in interaction with others.

Thus, given certain specifiable characteristics of its interaction with parents and other psychologically salient persons (“objects”) in its social environment, the infant, according to psychoanalytic theory, gradually comes to distinguish the mental representation of its self from the mental representation of the mother and other “objects”; in short, it achieves self-object differentiation. If it is not achieved, or if following its achievement, there is a blurring of the boundaries between these self- and object-representations (let alone their fusion or merging), then such a condition, according to the findings of clinical psychoanalysis, is associated with severe mental illness.

In normal development, however, the formation of self-identity takes place by means of identification, a process that begins in early childhood and continues throughout life. In its psychoanalytic meaning, “identification” refers to a process, both conscious and unconscious, by which the individual takes an “object”-representation as a model and attempts to modify his self (as he perceives it) to correspond to one or more attributes of the model. If the attempt is successful, then, consciously or unconsciously, the individual modifies his self-representation to correspond to his modified self (Sandler 1987:chs. 5–6). Because the self now corresponds, in respect to these attributes, to the emulated object-representation, then as a consequence of this process the individual may be said to have identified with the “object” (e.g., Freud 1921:ch. 7, 1932:ch. 31).<sup>15</sup>

The concept of identification, however, is not sufficient to describe the socially embedded and interrelated self of psychoanalytic theory. For just as individuals forge their identity by identifying with

certain of their “objects,” or psychologically salient persons, so too they become social beings, committed to the cultural norms and values of their group, by introjecting these “objects.” “Introjection” refers to the process by which the child’s (but not only the child’s) mental representations of some few “objects, first of all parents, are ‘internalized’ to form a ‘superego,’ and as a consequence their norms and values (mostly, but not exclusively, cultural norms and values) are ‘internalized’ as the ego ideal” (Freud 1923:ch. 3; Sandler 1987:chs. 3 and 5).

In sum, if standard psychoanalytic theory, as some practitioners of ethnopsychology (such as White and Lutz) and of cultural psychology (such as Shweder) have claimed, is merely Western folk psychology in scientific (or pseudoscientific) garb, then the Western conception of the self, though not exclusively a cultural product—there is always the id!—is no less so than most non-Western conceptions—the Buddhist, for example. And if that is the case for the standard psychoanalytic theory of the self, then it is even more so for the self as conceived by psychoanalytic “self psychology” (e.g., Kohut 1977; Stepansky and Goldberg 1984). It might be noted, however, that whereas for the former version of Western “folk psychology,” “self” refers to the individual’s own person, for the latter it refers to a psychic structure in the mind.

Although some proponents of the peculiarity of the Western conception of the self construe its emphasis on “independence” as deeming anything short of total independence a sign of pathology (e.g., Marsella 1985:290), this is surely not the case for standard psychoanalysis, much less for psychoanalytic self psychology. Indeed, the latter, with its emphasis on “selfobjects” (object-representations that function as sources of emotional support and self-esteem), explicitly maintains that the very opposite is the case. Thus, psychoanalytic self psychology, as construed by two of its advocates (Galatzer-Levy and Cohler 1990:13), holds that:

Psychological health does not mean giving up others as sources of solace and support. Psychopathology is reflected [only] in the continuing use of others as archaic, urgently required selfobjects, in feelings of fragmentation when there is physical separation from the object, and in the compulsive need to seek recognition of others.

Now if, as psychoanalytic theorists claim, their description of the self is empirically derived from clinical practice, and if (as ethnopsychologists and cultural psychologists claim) that description is

nothing more than the Western cultural model, then the self that psychoanalytic theorists describe corresponds to the cultural model. If, however, the Western model is the one described by Geertz, Markus, Shweder, et al. (though elsewhere Shweder says that the psychoanalytic model is the cultural model), then the Western self, like the South and East Asian self, is markedly different from the cultural model. If the latter is the case, then, just as it cannot be presumed that the self of Asian actors is isomorphic with their cultural model of the self (as the studies described above demonstrate), so also it cannot be presumed that the self of Western actors is isomorphic with *their* cultural model.

I shall return to this point below, but first it is perhaps desirable to turn our attention to the Western philosophical tradition, which according to the proponents of the “peculiar” Western conception of the self, has persistently conceived of the self as asocial, autonomous, a psychological monad, and the like. In that regard, consider the views of perhaps the preeminent contemporary product of that tradition. “I am a social being,” writes Sir Isaiah Berlin (1958:40),

in a deeper sense than that of interaction with others. For am I not what I am, to some degree, in virtue of what others think and feel me to be? When I ask myself what I am, and answer: an Englishman, a Chinese, a merchant, a man of no importance, a millionaire, a convict—I find upon analysis that to possess these attributes entails being recognized as belonging to a particular group or class by other persons in my society, and that this recognition is part of the meaning of most of the terms that denote some of my most personal and permanent characteristics. I am not disembodied reason, nor am I Robinson Crusoe, alone upon his island. It is not only that my material life depends upon interaction with other men, or that I am what I am as a result of social forces, but that some, perhaps all, of my ideas about myself, in particular my sense of my own moral and social identity, are intelligible only in terms of the social network in which I am (the metaphor must not be pressed too far) an element.

Before bringing this review of the Western conception of the self to a close, it is only fair to note that though none of these highly influential Western *theorists* conceives of the self as autonomous, unrelated, and the like, nonetheless the *folk model* (as distinguished, now, from the allegedly psychoanalytic folk model) admittedly does, according at least to many investigators; hence it is surely important to ascertain whether the actual Western self corresponds to this folk model. Because, however, social science unlike psychoanalytic investigations of the actual self, are sparse, that question cannot be answered with any certainty. Nevertheless, what little

social science evidence exists demonstrates that the Western self, like the South and East Asian self, does not correspond to the folk model.

Thus, Wellencamp and Hollan, based on open-ended interviews with University of California, San Diego, undergraduates who had recently experienced a death in their families, report that their folk model stresses that the self “should be ‘strong’ and independent and should not be compromised by the deaths of other people,” and moreover, all of these subjects “had actively sought to comply with such expectations when faced with a death in their own families” (Wellencamp and Hollan 1981, as cited in Hollan 1993:12–13).

On the other hand, these same subjects also “experience themselves to be more intertwined with one another, and so less impermeable, than the cultural model would suggest . . . [so that, for example] the death of a significant other involved a partial ‘death’ of one’s own self” (Hollan 1993:13). More broadly, certain aspects of their “experiential self”

are only poorly accounted for, if not actually denied, by the ideal cultural model: namely, that the self is at least partly constituted by the ‘others’ with whom it interacts, and that the boundaries between self and other may remain somewhat fluid and indistinct. [Hollan 1993:14]

This finding of these two anthropologists is consistent with the findings of a number of social psychologists. Thus, as derived from differences between Western and non-Westerns cultural concepts of the self, Markus and Kitayama delineate in detail the differences (cognitive, motivational, and emotional) between the “independent” Western self and the “interdependent” non-Western self. However, near the end of their long, and influential article, they observe that:

Social psychologists report that people are enormously influenced by others, often to an extent that investigators and certainly individuals themselves, find unbelievable. People conform, obey, diffuse responsibility in a group, allow themselves to be easily persuaded about all manner of things, and become hopelessly committed to others on the basis of minimal action. *Even within highly individualistic Western culture, most people are still much less self-reliant, self-contained, or self-sufficient than the prevailing cultural ideology suggests that they should be.* [Markus and Kitayama 1991:246–247, emphasis added]

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I have attempted in this article to evaluate the currently regnant view among anthropologists and comparative social psychologists that the Western self and/or cultural conception of the self is, as Geertz put it, “a peculiar idea within the context of the world cultures.” In the process, I raised a number of objections—conceptual, methodological, theoretical, and empirical—to that view.

In the first place because the critical term “self” is virtually never defined in these studies, and because, moreover, it is often conflated or confused with such concepts as self-representation, individual, person, personality, it is often difficult to apprehend the entity to which this term refers. Because of this lack of conceptual clarity, it is difficult to assess the claim for the peculiarity of the Western conception of the “self” because, often, it is apples and oranges that are being compared.

In the second place, most of these studies of the self of non-Western peoples do so by investigating the cultural conceptions of the self, which they derive either from the analysis of some set of cultural symbols or from the findings of experimental tasks, usually of the paper-and-pencil variety.

From these cultural conceptions, so derived, and by presuming an isomorphic relationship among cultural conceptions of the self, the self conceptions of social actors, and the actors’ self-representations, these studies have claimed that there are only two types of self and self-conceptions (and often self-representations), a Western and a non-Western, and that compared to the latter type, which obviously has many more exemplars, the former is “peculiar.” Such a conclusion, I argued, is unwarranted not only because of its dubious premises, but also because of the procedures on which it is based.

Though taking its point of departure from methodological and theoretical considerations, this argument, however, was supported by the following empirical considerations.

First, investigators who have studied the self of non-Western peoples by means of behavioral observation and psychological exploration (some with, some without any special attention to their cultural symbol systems) give evidence that the Western self and/or its conception is not all that “peculiar,” for the alleged “egocentric,” “independent,” and “autonomous” Western self is perhaps just as

prevalent among non-Western, more particularly some Asian, peoples.

Second, some few distinguished Western theorists conceive of the self as importantly “sociocentric” and “interdependent,” and if their conceptions can be taken as representing the Western cultural concept of the self, then it can be concluded that the latter concept is not so egocentric, independent, and the like, as many anthropologists and comparative social psychologists make it out to be.

If it is claimed, however, that these theorists are inadequate representatives of the Western cultural concept of the self, and that it is better represented by the Western folk model, then this model also does not correspond very well to the actual Western self, not at any rate according to empirical findings that indicate that it is more interdependent and less autonomous than many have inferred from the cultural model.

Having now summarized the main points of this article, I wish to conclude with two *caveats*. First, nothing in the article should be construed as suggesting that there are no differences in the self either between (broadly conceived) Western and non-Western societies, or across these societies. Seeing that such differences exist within one and the same society, it can be presumed that they exist across societies, and I myself am convinced that this presumption is valid.

Moreover, distinguishing, as I believe we must, between self and personality, nothing in this article should be construed as suggesting that there are no differences either between Western and non-Western personalities (both broadly conceived), or among the various ethnic personalities (“national character?” “modal personality?”) within the Western and non-Western worlds, respectively. I am convinced (from a host of currently discredited Culture and Personality studies) that there are significant, and often very wide, differences between and among both.

On the other hand, this article can legitimately be construed as suggesting, or more accurately as contending, that a typology of the self (or of personality) that consists of only two types—a Western and a non-Western—is much too restrictive to accurately describe either, and only serves to distort both. Thus, there is evidence for the proposition that many putative characteristics of the Western self, which allegedly make it “peculiar,” are to a greater

or lesser degree also found in the non-Western self; conversely, many putative characteristics of the non-Western self, which allegedly are its distinguishing features, are to a greater or lesser degree also found in the Western self.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, it is most likely the case that both sets of dichotomous characteristics—those attributed to the Western self and those attributed to the non-Western—are found, albeit in varying degrees, in the Western and non-Western self alike, however conflictual that might make both of them. Indeed, from my theoretical perspective the single most important reason for viewing both types of self with the utmost skepticism is the absence of intrapsychic conflict from either type. Such a self, at least from my theoretical perspective, is simply not credible.

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MELFORD E. SPIRO is Professor of Anthropology, University of California, San Diego.

## NOTES

1. It is ironic, and perhaps somewhat disingenuous, for ethnopsychological theorists of the self to claim Hallowell as the apical ancestor of their radical relativistic lineage when, in fact, his theoretical stance places him in the opposite moiety, as the previous passages indicate. Moreover, although he admittedly stressed the cultural influence on the self in his celebrated article, nevertheless the bulk of the article deals with cultural influences that are universal, as a consequence of which certain characteristics of the self—what he called “basic orientations”—are also universal. Hallowell accounts for their universality by arguing that, without them, no human being “can act intelligibly in the world he apprehends” (Hallowell 1955:89). These universal orientations include self-orientation, object orientation, spatiotemporal orientation, motivational orientation, and normative orientation.

Other articles reprinted in this book also stress the universal dimensions of the self. Consider, for example, the following passages from only the first article:

It seems reasonable to suppose that the emergence of culture as a prime attribute of *human* societies must be somehow connected with a novel psychological structure rooted in the social behavior of the gregarious primate that gave rise to man. [Hallowell 1955:5, emphasis in original]

Again:

In terms of psychodynamic adjustment man is characterized by a unique psychic structure the generic form of which we have only begun to discern in the *common* features that underlie the range and variation of personality structure that have been empirically investigated in recent years. [Hallowell 1955:5, emphasis added]

And again:

When we have more knowledge of the range and variation in the *human* personality structure in relation to major provincial determinants we shall be able to state with more precision what is *common to man everywhere*. By that time we may be able to construct a better

picture of the psychobiological structure of man as an evolving primate. [Hallowell 1955:13, emphasis added]

2. Alan Howard, though a thoroughgoing epistemological relativist in such matters, for whom "scientific" psychology is merely Western ethnopsychology, is also skeptical of the claim that non-Western actors do not possess a sense of self-other differentiation. Thus, in commenting on a collection of articles dealing with the ethnopsychology of Pacific peoples, Howard (1985:414) writes:

Despite compelling evidence that most Pacific islanders do not normally distinguish themselves as individualized entities in ordinary discourse, does this mean they do not have a clear conception of themselves as unique individuals? If so, how do they deal with the corporeal reality of the body—the fact that it urinates and defecates and experiences hunger, thirst, and sexual urges?

3. Because there is a long hiatus between Hallowell's seminal paper on the self, and the relatively recent flurry of interest in that concept, one might wonder at what may have motivated this interest. Hallowell was not only the pioneer of the anthropological study of the self, but also one of the founders of the Culture and Personality school. Most contemporary anthropological students of the self, however, reject such studies, allegedly because of their methodological flaws. George and Louise Spindler (1993:9), however, have proposed a different explanation for their rejection, one that also explains the recent interest in the self.

Most anthropologists, the Spindlers say, are "uncomfortable with anything remotely resembling a psychoanalytic approach [or for that matter, any other that attends to the intrapsychic]." Hence, because Culture and Personality studies investigated (among other things) the intrapsychic, or the personality, it was convenient, the Spindlers argue, for anthropologists to reject these studies by claiming that personality is a "reductionist if not irrelevant" concept, and to replace it with such concepts as person or self, which are typically conceived in cultural terms exclusively. Hence, the Spindlers continue, this enables anthropological students of the self to claim to be studying individuals, when in fact they are merely "anthropomorphizing the culture concept or reifying it."

4. Thus, in what is arguably the most incisive review of the anthropological studies of the self, Fogelson (1982:97) commenting on their use of the concept of individualism, makes the following observation:

Discussions of conceptual issues concerning 'the individual' and 'individualism' continue to generate much heat, but little light. . . . [T]hree separable issues have become hopelessly confused in these recent discussions: 1) the 'reality' of the individual in society and culture; 2) the analytic utility of such a concept for comparative research; and 3) the nature of individualism as an ideological doctrine or value emphasis in different cultures.

Harris (1989:599), similarly, complains about the terminological confusion in the treatment of the self. A "common feature," she writes, "is that "concepts of person, self, and, also, individual are often conflated. . . . [Consequently] various ethnographies do not lend themselves easily to comparison. Potential cross-disciplinary work is also hampered."

5. For a model ethnographic description of the person, one that does not confuse person with self, and is based not only on an analysis of cultural symbols, but also on careful interviewing and meticulous behavioral observations, see Fortes's study of the Tallensi (Fortes 1973). For a wise and also witty demonstration of the discrepancy between high cultural conceptions of the self, and the conceptions of actual actors, see Bharati's analysis of the situation in Hindu India (Bharati 1985).

6. This typology not only is oversimplified, but often the characteristics attributed to each type reflects, it has been suggested a perhaps unintended anti-Western bias. Consider, for

example, only a few of the following differences between the “interdependent” non-Western and the “independent” Western self, which, though reported in only one article, are typical.

Item: For non-Western, in contrast to Western actors, the expression and experience of emotions is shaped and governed by “a consideration of the reactions of others.” Hence, not only is anger, for example, less prevalent, but the “self-serving” motives of Western actors are replaced by “other-serving” motives. (Markus and Kitayama 1991:225)

Item: Although Western actors, albeit less frequently than non-Western actors, may also be responsive to others, but when they are, then they are typically motivated by “the need to strategically determine the best way to express or assert the internal attributes of the self” (Markus and Kitayama 1991:226)

Item: The Chinese concept of *jen* “implies the person’s capability to interact with his fellow human beings in a sincere, polite, and decent fashion,” just like the Hispanic concept of *simpatico* refers to “the ability to both respect and share others’ feelings” (Markus and Kitayama 1991:228), whereas analogous concepts, presumably, are not found in the West.

Item: Non-Western, as opposed to Western actors, display a “willingness and ability to feel and think what others are feeling and thinking . . . and then to help others satisfy their wishes and realize their goals” (Markus and Kitayama 1991:18).

Admittedly, these and the other invidious contrasts found in this and most other articles that employ this typology, rest on data reported either by others or by the authors themselves. In my judgment, however, few of these data are evidential. For example, I know of no evidence that Chinese and Hispanics, despite *jen* and *simpatico*, treat other persons in a more “sincere” or “decent” fashion than, say, Italians and Canadians do, or that they “respect” and “share” the feelings of others more than Italians and Canadians do. Moreover, so far as *jen* and *simpatico* are concerned, there can be little doubt, surely, that these concepts can also be expressed in Italian and English.

7. This view is echoed by Rosaldo: “I would insist that we will never learn why people feel or act the way they do until, suspending everyday assumptions about the human psyche, we fix our gaze upon the symbols actors use in understanding social life—symbols that make our minds the minds of social beings” (Rosaldo 1984:141). As Wellenkamp (1988:487), however, rhetorically asks, “when an Ilongot says, ‘since I couldn’t kill my wife, I just decided to forget my anger’, are we to conclude that their emotional lives are very different from our own?”

8. It is perhaps of more than passing interest that the views expressed by the founder of Buddhism in the 5th century B.C. were echoed by a Scotch philosopher in the 18th century A.D. There is no psychological entity, David Hume insisted, to which the term “self” refers; instead there are only diverse perceptions, emotions and sensations “in perpetual flux and movement” (Hume 1978:252).

9. The notion even of intrapsychic autonomy, however, must be qualified, for as Rapaport (1967), writing within the psychoanalytic tradition, observed, the most that is ever achieved, even in the ideal case, is only “relative” autonomy. Thus, given a strong “ego” (in the psychoanalytic sense of that term), then the individual can achieve relative autonomy from the id (biological instincts), the superego (the internalized demands of the culture), and the pressures of society.

10. In a replication of Shweder and Bourne’s American study, Noricks, et al. (1987) studied a sample of 83 subjects from Chico, California, ranging in age from 24 to 89. (The 17 subjects in the former study ranged in age from 19 to 47). Moreover, the Chico sample, unlike the Chicago sample, was selected randomly. Also, the instructions given the subjects (like those given the Oriyan subjects in the former study) included reference not only to the personality of their acquaintances, but also to their behavior. We may now describe their findings, which as they relate to the Chicago study, are ambiguous.

On the one hand, the descriptions of others given by the Chico subjects, like those given by the Chicago subjects, are more “abstract” and “context free” than “concrete” and “context

dependent,” but on the other hand, rather than duplicating the findings of the Chicago study on these dimensions, they instead fall somewhere between the Chicago and the Oriyan studies. Moreover, when the Chico sample is stratified by age (under 49 and over 50), then the older group, though not identical with the Indian sample, is very similar to it.

Thus, the percentages of “content-dependent” and “context-free” descriptions of the older Chico subjects are 43.2% and 56.8%, respectively, which though similar to the 49.6% and 50.4% of the Oriyan sample, is dissimilar, however, from the 28.3% and 71.7% of the Chicago sample. Similarly, for the older Chico subjects, the percentages of “abstract” and “concrete” descriptions are 42.6% and 57.4%, respectively, which again are similar to the 35.2% and 64.8% of the Oriyan sample, and dissimilar from the 74.6% and 25.4% of the Chicago sample. In short, on all four dimensions the older Chico sample is more similar to the Oriyan, than to the Chicago sample; moreover, on the latter two dimensions their ratio is in the same direction as the Oriyan, but in the reverse direction from the Chicago sample.

What these numbers would look like if the Chico and Oriyan samples were to consist (as the Chicago sample did) of separate groups of psychological counselors, nursery school teachers, and fraternity brothers, and each group were instructed to describe their fellow group members only, remains an unanswered but surely critical question. Moreover, what they would like if the subjects in all three samples were asked to describe not their acquaintances, but themselves, is perhaps even more crucial in its implications for the relationship between cultural and personal conceptions of the self.

11. Given the contemporary *Zeitgeist*, according to which culture is the cause of most everything, social experience of very few things, it is perhaps not surprising that Hay's study is not so much as mentioned in the anthropological literature on the self. In my judgment, however, this study is arguably one of the superior empirical studies of a non-Western self. Moreover, it convincingly refutes the current orthodoxy, best expressed in a much-quoted article of Rosaldo (1983:175), that the Western “view of persons as embodiments of continuing and conflictual inner drives and needs is one which, in all likelihood, reflects important aspects of the ‘individualism’ famous in the modern West, along with the experiences of Western ‘individuals’ suppressed by modern forms of social inequality.” Is that perhaps the reason for the neglect of Hay's Ojibwa findings?

12. See also in this connection Mines (1988).

13. If these ethnographic studies cast doubt on the claim that the non-Western self is characterized by minimal self-other differentiation and personal autonomy, then recent infant studies render it unlikely that such a self—psychopathology excepted—is theoretically possible.

Thus, based on a variety of ingenious studies of psychological development in infancy, his own and others, Daniel Stern (a developmental psychiatrist and psychologist) argues that what we usually think of as a “sense of self” is not, contrary to standard psychological and psychoanalytic theory, a late developmental achievement, but instead is present from earliest infancy (and hence is most probably not cross-culturally variable).

There is never a period of total self/other undifferentiation. There is no confusion between self and other [either] in the beginning or at any point during infancy. . . . [Rather, infants are] pre-designed to be aware of self-organizing processes . . . and never experience an autistic-like phase (Stern 1985:10).

From these developmental studies Stern argues that the sense of self includes at least seven characteristics: a single, discrete, and integrated body, the agent of actions, the experiencer of feelings, the maker of intentions, the transposer of experience into knowledge, the architect of plans, and the communicator and sharer of personal knowledge. (For a somewhat different schema, see Neisser 1988). From these (and other) findings, Stern concludes that we

process our experiences in such a way that they appear to belong to some kind of unique subjective organization that we commonly call the sense of self. [This sense] stands as an important subjective reality. . . . How we experience ourselves in relation to others [note the crucial emphasis on relationship] provides a basic organizing perspective for all interpersonal events. [Neisser 1988:5–6]

An organized sense of a “core self” is formed, according to these studies, by the infant’s sixth month, and it is based on the following, chronologically ordered, preverbal (hence precultural, but *not* presocial) subjective experiences: self-agency, self-coherence, self-affectivity, and self-history (Neisser 1988:7).

The only important preverbal (i.e., precultural) characteristic of the core self that is formed, not during the first 6 months, but rather between 7 and 15 months, is the sense of a “subjective self”, which consists of the awareness that one can create an “intersubjective union” with another person; in short, the awareness that “one’s subjective life—the contents of one’s mind and the qualities of one’s feelings—can be shared with another” (Neisser 1988:10). In short, the “sociocentric” self (as it is called by many anthropologists) is a later developmental achievement than the “autonomous” self.

It need only be added that an impairment in, or lack of achievement of a sense of an autonomous self, results (according to these findings) in severe pathology, including (but not restricted to) psychological paralysis, depersonalization and derealization, temporal dissociation, fugue states and amnesias, anhedonia, a feeling of “cosmic loneliness,” and psychic chaos. (Neisser 1988:7–8). Would anyone characterize a normal, allegedly sociocentric, South or East Asian self in these terms?

14. So far as I have been able to discover, it was not until the 1940s that the concept of the self was reintroduced into academic psychology, first by Gordon Allport (1943), and then by Ernest Hilgard (1949).

15. In some few cases, identification, or the modification of the self-representation to correspond with an object-representation, occurs without a corresponding modification of the self. In that case, because there is now a gross discrepancy between the self and the self-representation, it is a mark of psychopathology.

16. Poole (1991:55–56) puts this very well:

A more or less rigid dichotomy between individualism . . . as a historical peculiarity of the West and holism or sociocentrism . . . as characteristic of the non-Western world, usually framed as mutually exclusive, monothetic categories, unduly inhibits cross-cultural comparison, blunts the subtlety of single-case analysis, and distorts sensitivity in ethnopsychological ethnography.

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