

Who Do You See in a Mirror?

Cultural Differences in Identity Perspectives

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Abstract

Self-categorization theory explains that our process of self-relevant information is more context-dependent rather than a reflection of our self-schema. This theory proposes two types of identities (a personal identity and a social identity), and a salience of the identity can void the effect of self-schema. Those two identities are thought to show antagonism, but because the levels of both identities vary depending on the population and on the degree of self-awareness, the hypothesis is questionable. The current study focuses on different characteristics between an individualistic culture (the U.S.) and a collectivistic culture (Japan) in order to test the validity of antagonism. The experiment is conducted via the Internet using a carefully designed computer mediated communication (CMC) to deal with the minority ethnicity effect and a false identity construction. The result showed that in a self-focused condition with a web-cam, American participants decreased the social identity; conversely, Japanese participants increased the social identity. This contrast successfully showed the cultural differences in identity perspectives. However, unlike many past studies with a mirror, both American and Japanese participants decreased the personal identity in the condition with a web-cam. The implication and future research will be discussed in this paper.

Who Do You See in a Mirror?

Cultural Differences in Identity Perspectives

Self-concept has been an important term in social psychology. It has been said that people possess a set of stable self-concepts of themselves as a self-schema, which contains concepts like personality, skills, and physical characteristics (Markus, 1977). The schema is gradually formed throughout their lives through interactions with others, perceptions about own behaviors, autobiographical memory, culture, and introspection. Self-schema was thought to be directly connected to the way people process self-relative information. However, recent studies show that the process is more context-dependent. One perspective that makes this point is self-categorization theory.

Self-categorization theory: personal identity and social identity

Self-categorization theory points out that the self cannot be a 100% reflection of the self-schema because the schema is a relatively stable concept and cannot explain the inconsistency of behavior depending on a salience of context. This theory supposes the existence of two distinct identities: a personal identity and a social identity. According to Onorato and Turner (2004), personal identity is a product of the process of 'me' or 'not me' categorization, and the identity is heightened by focusing on how he or she is different from others in his or her group. On the other hand, social identity is a product of the process of 'us' or 'them' categorization, and the identity is heightened by focusing on the belongingness or similarities to members of his or her group contrasted with other groups. An experiment conducted by Onorato and Turner (2004) shows that the salience of identity that is opposite to the self-schema voids the effect of the self-schema in terms of self-relevant information processing, and they indicate the indirect

connection between the self-schema and the way people think and process self-relevant information.

Many studies show that the strength of both personal identity and social identity varies from population to population. According to Tiliopoulos and McVittie (2010), the higher degree of an intrinsic orientation toward religion indicates a higher level of personal identity and less importance of social aspect of identity. Conversely, a higher level of an extrinsic orientation toward religion, seeing religion as a tool to provide a comfort or support, indicates a higher level of social identity and a lower level of the personal identity.

In addition to this population difference, it has been known that self-awareness and self-focused attention greatly influence the both identities as well. Objective self-awareness theory proposed by Duval and Silvia (2002) supposed that people's self-awareness can be either subjective or objective. People with an objective self-awareness become more aware of their internal characteristics (Silvia & Duval, 2001), which would be strongly related to salience of identities. It has been also known that heightened self-awareness enhance people's consistency to their own self-concept (Kernis & Grannemann, 1988), it is expected that people tend to exhibit more individualistic traits.

Mullen, Migdal, and Rozell (2003) successfully show that, with European American students, a change in their self-focused attention results in a change in their identities. The researchers used three different ways to manipulate the participants' self-awareness, either by exposing them to a mirror, asking them to wear a mask, or presenting them with a family tree. The results show that in the mirror condition, participants' personal identity increased while their social identity decreased. Conversely, in the condition with presence of a family tree, their personal identity decreased while their social identity increased due to the feeling of

belongingness to a group of family. Also, in the condition with a mask, both personal and social identity salience tended to decrease because of heightened anonymity. These studies support the hypothesis of self-categorization theory proposed by Turner (1982) that states a salience of the personal identity and the social identity inhibit each other and cannot co-exist.

However, further studies reveal that the results vary depending on the combinations of contexts and different self-focused situations. For example, Swann, Gomez, Seyle, Morales, and Huici (2009) show that within a population where people are emotionally merged into a group, their personal identities and social identities can be raised together at a time. This result questioned the validity of the antagonism between personal identity and social identity. Additionally, Baray, Postmes, and Jetten (2009) conducted an identity study with members of an extreme right-wing political party in Turkey and found that in a self-focused situation with mirror exposure, participants increased social identity while they decreased personal identity, which is opposite to the previous findings. Eidelman and Silvia (2010) conducted an experiment in a similar context with American students and also found that the students with high identification with their nationality tend to increase their social identity when they are self-focused. These results indicate that the self-focused situation may not always result in heightening of personal identity of people, and this opens up questions to be answered in this field of study.

Collectivistic Culture and Individualistic Culture

One interesting possibility is a study comparing different types of cultures. Similar to the way personal identity and social identity are sometimes called personal self and collectivistic self, many research studies show that Eastern cultures tend to be described as collectivistic cultures while many Western cultures are described as individualistic cultures. Some researchers find that

American culture is also marginally collectivistic (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002); however, according to Yuki (2003), while East Asian collectivism focuses on an intragroup relationship, American collectivism focuses on intergroup comparison. Therefore, that difference between East Asian culture and American culture is even more similar to the distinction between private and social identity in self-categorization theory.

There have already been many studies over the differences between these collectivistic cultures and individualistic cultures in terms of self-concept. Cohen and Gunz (2002) point out the different ways to perceive same events based on first- or third-person memory between North American students and Asian students. Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, and Suzuki (2004) indicate that effort justification in the free-choice paradigm occurs in Japanese students only when they are primed to think about others while occurring in American students all the time, implying strong social pressures within Japanese culture. English and Chen (2011) explain the different types of consistencies of self-concept observed among Eastern culture and Western culture. The results from these studies indicate that those cultures possess distinct ways to construct, to express, and to keep self.

In terms of identity across cultures, Heine, Takemoto, Moskalkenko, Lasaleta, and Henrich (2008) successfully show an interesting difference. By manipulating self-focused attention of American and Japanese undergraduates with exposure to a mirror, they showed that self-focus makes Americans more self-critical and keeps them from cheating whereas there was no significant effects observed among Japanese students. They argue the reason for this difference is that in the culture of Japan, people tend to worry about how they are evaluated by others. In other words, they conclude that Japanese people are habitually in a state of self-focused situations.

There is still no strong evidence to support the theory, but at least this experiment indicates the possibility of new findings from identity study across cultures.

Minority Ethnicity Effect

One difficulty that may arise when researchers want to conduct research internationally is how and where they recruit participants. The easiest way is to recruit participants from international students who come from the country where researchers are interested in their study. However, this method may cause a minority ethnicity effect which interferes with the results. According to a study conducted by Devos and Banaji (2005), even though most white Americans in the U.S. report egalitarian views toward racism, they are less likely to perceive non-white Americans, including African and Asian Americans, as Americans. Huynh, Devos, and Smalarz (2011) studied the effects of unconscious discrimination toward those ethnic minorities and find that the awareness of those stereotypes causes identity conflict and a lower sense of belongingness to American cultures.

At the same time, a study conducted by Cheryan and Monin (2005) showed that the awareness of identity denial due to the racial discrimination tended to encourage Asian Americans to present more American cultural knowledge than did white Americans. These results suggest that the use of the international students in identity studies may possess some problems that researchers have to address because in the self-focused situations, international students would change their identities not because of their cultural characteristics, but because of just being ethnic minorities.

Computer Mediated Communication

Instead of recruiting international students to represent their culture, another way is to take advantage of the increased diffusion of computer technology and the Internet. Research

studies using a computer mediated communication (CMC) focusing mainly on the characteristics of the alternative concept of communication have become more popular recently. Sassenberg (2005) reports that a text based CMC increases private self-awareness similar to the situation when people are exposed to a mirror. However, Riva and Galimberti (1998) point out that in CMC, only limited social cues are available within text, voice, and emotional icons, so people tend to form a false identity. Also, Riva (2002) reports more use of intense language that tends to result in a hostile communication by the use of CMC, which is very different from a face-to-face conversation. Those results indicate that the identity study in a real world cannot be replaced by those standard CMC studies because of the different characteristics of communications.

However, the way Yao and Flanagin (2006) conduct their experiment provides a solution to this problem. In their design, participants are asked to fill out a questionnaire to assess their level of self-awareness on a computer screen where their video images from a webcam are also projected. The video image serves as the same function of the mirror reflection in classic identity studies, and they successfully heighten the self-awareness of the participants in that condition. In this design, since this model does not include any communication, the possible threat of false identity in standard CMC is eliminated.

Current Study

The current experiment focuses on the extended study over the relationship between self-awareness and self-identity within two different types of cultures: an individualistic culture (the U.S.) and a collectivistic culture (Japan). Many previous studies within Western cultures support the antagonism of personal identity and social identity; however, we predict that the hypothesis may be nullified within a collectivistic culture like Japan. In order to conduct research internationally and to avoid the minority ethnicity effect, this experiment uses CMC to replace

the classic use of the mirror in the identity study. This study adds a new networking capability with the Internet to the model that is tested in the previous experiment (Yao & Flanagin, 2006) so that participants can join the study from anywhere in the world at any time.

Both American and Japanese students are randomly assigned into either a self-focused condition with a webcam or a controlled group without the webcam and are asked to answer a questionnaire to assess the degree of their personal identity and social identity. In the self-focused condition, we expect that within American students, the personal identity increases while the social identity decreases as expected from the results of previous research studies. On the other hand, in the self-focused situation, we expect that Japanese students will increase both the personal identity and the social identity because of the characteristics of collectivistic cultures and nullify the hypothesis of antagonism between personal identity and the social identity.

Method

Participants

We recruited 32 American students who were born in the U.S. (15 men and 17 women) from the University of Arkansas and 52 Japanese students who were born in Japan (26 men and 26 women) from Japanese universities. The mean age for American students was 19.0 years ($SD = 0.88$), and the mean age for Japanese students was 22.2 ($SD = 1.37$).

Materials

Two types of browser based computer programs were used. While both types provide a questionnaire on a right half side of a computer screen to measure personal / social identity, only one type projects an answerer's face via a webcam on the other side of the screen to manipulate his or her self-awareness. Additionally, an English version and a Japanese version of the program were made for American students and Japanese student respectively.

The questionnaire consists of 6 pages. The first page consists of 11 statements that were designed to measure self-awareness by Diener, Lusk, DeFour, and Flax (1980), Prentice-Dunn and Rogers (1980), and Mullen, Chapman, and Peaugh (1989). Participants responded on Likert-type scales that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). On the second page, participants were instructed to indicate their racial or ethnic group and to respond to 9 statements on Likert-type scales that were designed to measure ethnic social identity by Brown, Conder, Mathews, Wade, and Williams (1986) and Hinkle, Taylor, Fox-Cardamone, and Crook (1989). The third page consisted of 16 statements from the Social Identity/Personal Identity scale (SIPI) developed by Nario-Redmond et al. (2004). The fourth page presented 15 empty boxes where participants were instructed to list the name of groups that are important for them as many or few as they wanted. This was a modified version of the Twenty Statement Test (TST) developed by Kuhn and McPartland (1954). The fifth page consists of 8 questions to measure strength, distinctiveness, and dependence of personal identity, which was used in Baray, G., Postmes, T., & Jetten, J., (2009). In the last page, participants' social identity salience was measured based on their similarity to other members and other members' similarity within their ethnic group, their gender group, and their religious affiliation. Both personal identity and social identity measured with the different methods were standardized to be analyzed.

Design

The experiment used a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ mixed factorial design. The independent variables include self-focused situation and culture as between group, and type of identity tested as repeated measure.

Procedure

Data collection was completed online. Each Participant filled out the questionnaire, which appears on the right half on a computer screen, while his or her face was projected or not projected on the other half on the screen. The conditions were randomly assigned to participants.

Results

Personal identity analysis

Participants' test scores were submitted to a 2 (cultures: U.S. or Japan) \times 2 (self-awareness: heightened or not) ANOVA for both measure of personal identity and social identity. The results from the measure of personal identity showed an opposite way of a significant main effect from our predictions, $F(1, 80) = 4.55, p < .05$. Both American and Japanese participants in a high self-awareness condition showed lower degrees of personal identity ($M = 6.3, SD = 0.74$) when compared to the participants in low self-awareness condition ($M = 6.6, SD = 0.75$). The result showed no significant main effect by cultures, $F(1, 80) = 0.10, p = 0.75$, and no significant interaction, $F(1, 80) = 1.78, p = 0.19$.

Social identity analysis

The result from the measure of social identity showed a significant interaction supported out predictions, $F(1, 80) = 4.18, p < .05$. American participants in a high self-awareness condition showed lower degree of social identity ($M = 6.1, SD = 1.13$) when compared to the other American participants in a low self-awareness condition ($M = 6.8, SD = 1.08$). Conversely, Japanese participants in a high self-awareness condition showed higher degree of social identity ($M = 6.1, SD = 1.20$) when compared to the other Japanese participants in a low self-awareness condition ($M = 5.81, SD = 1.12$). Additionally, the results were marginally influenced by cultures, $F(1, 80) = 3.13, p = .08$, indicating that the overall degrees of social identity of American participants ($M = 6.45, SD = 1.15$) were higher than Japanese participants ($M = 6.0, SD = 1.16$).

Repeated measure analysis

Then, a within subject variable, the type of identity tested was added to ANOVA. The result showed that the degrees of personal identity and social identity measured were significantly different, $F(1, 80) = 4.11, p < .05$. The overall mean of degrees of personal identity ($M = 6.4$) was higher than the overall mean of degrees of social identity ($M = 6.1$). Also, the result indicates that the degrees of identity measured between the two cultures were significantly different, $F(1, 80) = 4.23, p < .05$. While within American participants, the degree of personal identity ($M = 6.4, SD = 0.78$) was similar to the degree of social identity ($M = 6.5, SD = 1.15$), within Japanese participants, the degree of personal identity ($M = 6.5, SD = 0.75$) was different from the degree of social identity ($M = 6.0, SD = 1.16$).

Public self-awareness analysis

Additionally, test scores of questions that was related to public self-awareness were submitted to a $2(\text{cultures}) \times 2(\text{self-awareness})$ ANOVA. This found a significant main effect between the two cultures, $F(1, 80) = 5.95, p < .05$. This indicated that American participants showed lower degree of public self-awareness ($M = 6.2, SD = 1.11$) when compared to Japanese participants did ($M = 7.0, SD = 1.57$).

Discussion

The major finding of this study was that American participants and Japanese participants showed significantly different change in social identity when they were exposed to a web-cam while completing the questionnaire. As we expected, self-focus resulted in decreased social identity of American participants while increased social identity of Japanese participants. This difference can be explained by the distinction of characteristics between individualistic culture and collectivistic culture. Since self-focused situation increases people's self-consistency (Kernis

& Grannemann, 1988), the reason why American participants in self-focused condition decreased their social identity was because they exhibit the individualistic characteristics due to American culture. Similarly, Japanese participants in self-focused condition increased their social identity maybe due to the collectivistic characteristics of their culture. The change was more significant among American participants than among Japanese participants, and so this result was contingent to the finding by English and Chen (2007): people in collectivistic culture relatively tend to hold more inconsistent self-concept than people in individualistic culture. Further analysis also revealed that overall, American participants showed lower public self-awareness when compared to Japanese participants. Therefore, the result successfully represents the difference between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

On the other hand, the result of the personal identity did not support our hypothesis. Conversely to our hypothesis, both American and Japanese participants decreased the personal identity in a self-focused condition with a web-cam. Therefore, we could not fully replace the use of a mirror in past studies with a use of a web-com in this study.

One possible explanation for the cause of this problem was that our procedure enhanced participants' public self-awareness, thus shifting their focus to the public aspects of the self. People tend to act accordingly to appropriateness in a social situation when they are publicly self-aware (Yao & Flanagin, 2006). In the current study, we did not explicitly tell the purpose of the use of web-cam; therefore, participants increased their public self-awareness possibly because they wondered if the video was recorded to be analyzed by somebody later. As a result, we assumed that the participants in a self-focused condition with a use of web-cam decreased their personal identity. However, if the assumption is correct, both American and Japanese participants were supposed to increase their social identity in the condition. The reason why

American participants decreased their social identity was possibly because, as Yao and Flanagin (2006) pointed out, public self-awareness is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to increase social identity due to contextual factors like anonymity.

Mullen, Migdal, and Rozell (2003) showed that increased anonymity by making American people wear a mask resulted in a decrease in both personal and social identity. Similarly, Walter (1997) pointed out that CMC increases anonymity by allowing people to selectively self-disclose more favorable aspects by masking their undesirable physical or behavioral cues. Therefore, the exposure to a web-cam indeed may have served as a similar function to wearing a mask rather than exposure to a mirror. Future study over those two conditions between different cultures would provide more evidence to support this assumption.

Another possible explanation for the cause of this problem was that the explicitly stated possible use of a web-com. One big difference between this study and the past studies with use of a mirror was that while all participants in this study were informed the possible use of a web-cam regardless of the conditions, previous studies did not explicitly tell the existence of a mirror even for the participants in the self-focused condition. In order to test the assumption, we can use a similar technique to the pronoun circling manipulation used by Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee (1999) in order to control the self-focus differently.

Overall, even though we failed to show the antagonism of the two types of identity, we successfully showed the cultural differences in identity perspectives, which was contingent to many past studies over the contrast between individualistic cultures and collectivistic cultures. Also, the similarity of the results we found between the use of mask and a web-com posed several new questions. This study provided a new way to easily conduct a self-perception

research oversea with an introduction of use of the Internet and CMC. This is just a beginning, but we believe that this will open up a new future of the research in self-perception.

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