

Cultural Self

The cultural self has not received attention in the self-concept literature though the idea can be found in models of identity development (Brown-Collins & Sussewell, 1986; Ibrahim, 1991; Myers et al., 1991; Ponterotto & Pedersen, 1993) and in Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck's (1961) value orientations system from cultural anthropology. The integration of a cultural self into a self-concept model reflects the critical role of values and culture to our definition of ourselves. The cultural self includes that part of ourselves which is defined from our identification with distinctive populations or cultural groups. Watt (1992) uses the term distinctive populations to "denote groups of people who strongly identify with one another because of shared cultural, physiognomic, life-style, or demographic attributes" (p. 126). The terms distinctive populations or cultural groups are used interchangeably in this paper. The author uses the term heritage to represent an individual's connection with these distinctive populations commonly listed as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or class. Each person has a connection with these groups and the essential part of this heritage is an affirmation of certain values. When we deal with human existence, we, in the final analysis, must confront the question of human values (Strupp and Hadley, 1977).

The essence of the cultural self is the affirmation of certain values. Cultures or groups define for themselves the key issues of human existence and place value on their interpretation of life. Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck (1961) identify five central categories of values that define a comprehensive worldview and are represented in Table 1. Each category is aligned along a continuum representing the range of variations for the category. Space limitations provide no opportunity for further explanation of the five categories.

Table 1
Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Range of Value Orientations

Category-----		Variation	Orientation-----
human nature	evil	mixture of good & evil	good
man-nature	subjugation to nature	harmony with nature	mastery over nature
time	past	present	future
activity	being	being-in-becoming	doing
relational	lineality	collaterality	individualism

Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck's theory has differentiated between ethnic groups within the U.S. as well as different cultural groups internationally (Carter, 1991). The cultural self-concept allows for differentiation within cultural groups as well as between groups. There is no monolithic ethnic culture group (e.g. Mexican American) but rather generalized values and beliefs which each subgroup or individual may or may not represent. This need for individuation is also seen in a diverse heritage where multiple cultures are represented in one person. The person will be a unique combination of cultures (Pedersen, 1991) which will impact their values and worldview.

In addition to the value orientations defined by Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, the author would suggest other value dimensions that show a variation across and within distinctive populations. Again, space limitations demand only a listing of the dimensions in Table 2 with no opportunity for further explanation.

Table 2
Continuum of Cultural Values

Value Category	Value Continuum	
human agency:	determinism	freedom
divine/holy:	naturalism	transcendentalism
materialism:	high value	low value
personal property:	strict, narrow boundaries	no boundaries
education:	informal/practical	formal/theoretical
interpersonal function:		
personal power:	dominance/subjugation	egalitarian
truth:	lying	truth-telling
communication style:	closed/reserved	open/ expressive
physical expression:	violence	compassion
decision-making	reason/thinking	emotion/feeling
fidelity:	no commitment	absolute commitment
planning:	spontaneity	organization

The significance of the cultural self is its role in identification and differentiation. At a personal level each individual understands herself and others through the perspective of these values which have been affirmed as part of their heritage. This identification with one's heritage can become a central element of one's overall self-concept. On the other hand these values differentiate the person from elements of their heritage when they reject group values. The critically reflective process is a central part of the development of the cultural self.

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Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Range of Value Orientations

Category	Variation		Orientation	
human nature	evil		mixture of good & evil	good
	1	2	3	4
man-nature	subjugation to nature		harmony with nature	mastery over nature
	1	2	3	4
time	past		present	future
	1	2	3	4
activity	being		being-in-becoming	doing
	1	2	3	4
relational	lineality		collaterality	individualism
	1	2	3	4

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	1	2 3 4 5
communication style:	closed/ reserved	open/ expressive
	1	2 3 4 5
physical expression:	violence	compassion
	1	2 3 4 5
decision-making	reason/thinking	emotion/feeling
	1	2 3 4 5
fidelity:	no commitment	total commitment
	1	2 3 4 5
planning:	spontaneity	organization
	1	2 3 4 5