Ought, Ideal, and Undesired Self-Discrepancies: Are there Ethnic Differences?
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Abstract

Introduction: Previous research has found that Asians (versus Caucasians) exhibit higher levels of ought and undesired self-discrepancies. We examined if these ethnic differences could be better explained by acculturation.

Methods: Participants (N = 155) completed two sessions. In session 1, participants completed a computer task to measure self-discrepancy. In session 2, participants’ ought self-discrepancies and closeness to an undesired self were primed.

Results: The relationship between closeness to an undesired self and ethnicity was mediated by acculturation. Acculturation had significant moderating effects for affect when self-discrepancies were primed.

Discussion: Interventions based on these systems (i.e., Self-System Therapy; Vieth et al., 2003) should consider acculturation when treating diverse individuals.

Introduction

• Self-discrepancy theory predicts that self-guides influence affect (Diggins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986).
• Ideal self = want to be
  • Higher levels of discrepancy = depression
  • Ought self = should be
  • Higher levels of discrepancy = anxiety
• Undesired self = do not want to be
  • Closeness to an undesired self = negative affect
• Ought self discrepancy and closeness to an undesired self in Asian participants predicted depression better than ideal self-discrepancies (Chuang, 1997).
• Closeness to an undesired self had a direct path to social anxiety in Asian but not Caucasian participants (Herdin & Leong, 2005).
• However, Japanese participants less distressed over discrepancies (Heine & Lehman, 1999).
• Acculturation
  • Changes that take place as a result of contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences
  • May better explain previously found ethnic differences in self-discrepancy research

Participants

• Participants were 155 adult students
  • Mostly women (n = 102; 66%)
  • Caucasian (n = 91, 59.1%), Asian/Asian American (n = 46, 29.9%), African-American (n = 10, 6.5%), Multi-racial (n = 6, 0.6%)
  • Median age was 19.82 (SD = 1.74)
  • Most (n = 132, 85%) were U.S. citizens
  • Ranged in generational status from first to fifth or more generations
  • Mean generational status of 3.19 generations (SD = 1.52)
  • English was language spoken in home (n = 121, 78%)
  • Chinese (n = 15, 9.7%), Korean (n = 14, 9.1%), and other (n = 4, 2.6%) as the primary language
  • Main analyses: only Asian/Asian American and Caucasian participants

Measures

Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS; Stephenson, 2000)
• Measure of dominant and ethnic acculturation
• Dominant acculturation = Adoption of, or immersion in, the dominant society
• Ethnic acculturation = Retention of, or immersion in, an ethnic society other than dominant society

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)
• Positive (e.g., excited; proud) and negative activated affect (e.g., upset; scared).

Brief State Anxiety Measure (BSAM; Berg et al., 1998)
• Used to measure affect during priming task
• Default and activated affect.  

Analyses: Indirect effects (i.e., mediation) were conducted using bootstrapping.

Results

• No significant differences between Asian and Caucasian participants on ought, ideal self-discrepancy, or closeness to an undesired self
• Dominant acculturation carried the indirect effects of ethnicity on closeness to an undesired self
• The 95% confidence interval for the indirect effects was -1.507 to .058 (significant at p < .05)

Discussion

• Differences found when utilizing acculturation (rather than only ethnicity) as a predictor
• Assimilation to Western culture mediated the relationship between closeness to an undesired self and ethnicity
• Acculturation may better explain how ethnicity exerts its effect on closeness to an undesired self
• Ought self-discrepancy and closeness to an undesired self operate differently dependent on levels of acculturation
• Considering levels of acculturation when using therapies based on self-discrepancy theory (i.e., Self-System Therapy; Strauman et al., 2006) may be beneficial

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