Dissertations ERCOMER

Culture, self-understanding and the vicualtural mind: a study in Greece and the Netherlands

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Abstract:

To understand the impact of culture, cross-cultural psychology addresses questions such as: Do individuals in one society make sense of themselves and their lives in different ways than individuals in other societies? Are there aspects of self-understanding specifically emphasized in one cultural context, but not in the other, and, if so, how can these differences be related to psychological well-being? Are certain values more important in the one compared to the other cultural context? Do people from different cultures differ in the ways they reason about social behavior? How do individuals experience their own culture in our rapidly globalizing world? How do individuals enculturated in two cultures deal with different and even conflicting cultural meanings? How does a bicultural mind guide cognition and behavior?

The present dissertation investigates these issues by comparing the Dutch and the Greek culture in various psychological domains at three different levels: between cultures, within cultures and within individuals.

Findings in the present thesis have shown the ways that a northern European individualist culture -the Dutch-and a southern, more collectivist one - the Greek - differ in self-understandings, endorsement of values, social explanations and semantic networks of associations. It is the specific aspect of self-understandings emphasized in each culture that contributes to psychological well-being. In addition, Dutch-Greek bicultural individuals demonstrate that they are able to shift perceptions and behavior in a manner appropriate to each cultural setting. Last, but not least, the importance assigned to the relational self in both cultures may enlighten how important it is for all of us to be related to significant other(s). In short, culture matters in how all of us make sense of ourselves and our lives.