

The Anthropological Conceptualization of the Self: The Self as Embedded in Culture

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the topic, you are expected to:

1. Recognize what the field of anthropology can contribute to the understanding of the self.
2. Understand how culture and self are complementary concepts.
3. Discuss the cultural construction of the self and social identity.
4. Explain the concept of identity struggles.
5. Develop insights on how to achieve a sense of self, situated in multicultural and dynamic situations.

- Anthropology holds a holistic view of human nature. It is concerned with how cultural and biological processes interact to shape the self.
- Anthropology considers human experience as an interplay of “nature” referring to genetic inheritance which sets the individual’s potentials and “nurture” which refers to sociocultural environment .
- Both biological and cultural factors have significant influence in the development of self.

- In the Anthropological perspective, there are two ways in which the concept of self is viewed in different societies: egocentric and sociocentric.
- The egocentric concept of the self suggests that each person is defined as a replica of all humanity but capable of acting independently from others.
- In the sociocentric concept of the self, the self is viewed as dependent on the situation or social setting.

- For example, the Japanese possess a sociocentric view of the self, wherein the membership of a person in a particular social group defines the boundaries of the self.
- The Chinese prioritize kin ties and cooperation. They put importance to compliance and subordination of one's will to the authority figures in the family

- In egocentric view, the self is viewed as autonomous and distinct individual with inherent characteristics.
- the Americans are egocentric. They believe that they should be assertive and independent

- From the similarities and differences in characteristics among individuals, people construct their social identities.
- The identity toolbox refers to the “features of a person’s identity that he or she chooses to emphasize in constructing a social self.”
- Self-identification may be attained by: kinship, family membership, gender, age, language, religion, ethnicity, personal appearance, and socioeconomic status.

- Some characteristics such as kinship, gender, and age are almost universally used to differentiate people.
- Other characteristics, such as ethnicity, personal appearance, and socioeconomic status are not always used in every society.
- Family membership could be the most significant feature to determine the person's social identity.

- Another important identity determinant that is often viewed as essential for the maintenance of a group identity is language.
- In other societies, religious affiliation is an important marker of group identity.
- In Mindanao, being a Christian or a Muslim is possibly the most important defining feature of social identity.

- Personal naming, a universal practice with numerous cross-cultural variations establishes a child's birthright and social identity. A name is an important device to individualize a person and to have an identity.
- One's identity is not inborn. It is something people continuously develop in life.
- Changes in one's identity usually involve rites of passage that prepares individuals for new roles from one stage of life to another.

- Changes in one's status and identity are marked by a three-phased rite of passage: separation, liminality (transition), and incorporation.
- In the separation phase, people detach from their former identity to another.
- For example, in a wedding, the bride walking down the aisle to be “given away” by the parents to the groom implies the separation from one's family to become part of a new one.

- In the liminality phase, a person transitions from one identity to another. For example, the wedding ceremony itself is the process of transition of the bride and groom from singlehood to married life.
- In the incorporation phase, the change in one's status is officially incorporated. For example, the wedding reception and parties that celebrate the wedding serve as the markers that officially recognize the bride and groom's change towards being husband and wife.