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Self-Concept and Self-Esteem among Graduate  
Women:  
A Cross-Cultural Study

*By*

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# Why?

## Gap in Literature

- Scarce research on gender issues and education in post-colonial societies (see Crowley & McConaghy, 1998; Jayaweera, 1999).

## Self-Theory

- Cross-cultural focus on stable self.
- Reification of independent and interdependent self constructs.

## Student Retention

- “Leaky Pipeline” (Pell 1996)
- Self-Esteem Lower in female students (Lawrence, Ashford & Dent 2006)

# Questions

- Were there differences between women and men in terms of self-concept and self-esteem?
- Did these differences impact on adjustment to graduate school (depression, loneliness, impostor phenomenon)?
- Did marital status and culture play a role in that adjustment?
- Did self-concept change over time?
- Did shift in processing lead to adaptation problems?

# Approach

- Study 1: Quantitative study
- Answers “what”.
- Differences in self and adjustment based on gender, marital status and culture (for the female students)?
- Differences in self and adjustment across time?
- Study 2: Qualitative study
- Answers “how.”
- Methodological Triangulation (Denzin, 1970).

# Key Concepts

## Self Related Constructs:

- Independent self: gives priority to personal goals.
- Interdependent self: give priority to the goals of the ingroup (Triandis, 1994).
- Self-Esteem: Self-Satisfaction (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).
- Relational Construal: developing and nurturing close relationships is important for self-definition, self-expression and self-enhancement (Cross, Bacon & Morris, 2000).
- Primary Control: attempts to change the world so that it fits the self's needs (Rothbaum et al., 1982).
- Secondary Control: attempts to fit in with the world and to 'flow with the current' (Rothbaum et al., 1982).

# Key Concepts

## Emotional Adjustment

- Depression: “A disorder of the mind that affects the physical, psychological and social functioning of an individual” (Culbertson, 1997).
- Emotional Loneliness: “Isolation brought about by the loss of a significant relationship” (Weiss, 1973).
- Social Loneliness: “Absence of social networks” (Weiss, 1973).
- Impostor Phenomenon: “An internal experience of intellectual phoniness” (Clance & Imes, 1978).

# Study 1

- Cross-sectional non-experimental design.
- Longitudinal: pre-test/post-test quasi-experiment.
- Sample:
- 356 Graduate-level students from Jamaica, India, (collectivist orientation) and Canada, and the United States, (individualistic orientation).
- Both women and men for comparison (men in Caribbean and North American cultures).



# Measures

- Adult Source of Self-Esteem Inventory (ASSEI) – Elovson and Fleming (1989)
- Relational Interdependent Self Construal (RISC) – Cross, Bacon and Morris (2000)
- Primary–Secondary Control Questionnaire (PSCQ) – Wrosch, Heckhausen and Lachmen (2000)
- Brief Screen for Depression (BSD) – Hakstian and McLean (1989)
- Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (UCLA-R) Russell, Peplau and Cutrona (1980)
- Impostor Phenomenon Scale (IP) – Clance (1985)

# Study 1 Some Key Results

- H 1 There are significant gender differences in mean scores for independent self.
- H 2 There are significant gender differences in mean scores for interdependence.
- Women recorded higher mean scores on both independent and interdependent self importance in comparison to men.
- ( $F(4, 282) = 2.80, p = .026, \eta^2 = .038$ )
- Supports Watkins, Mortazavi & Trofimova, (2000)

# Some Key Results

- H 1 Sub H1 Female graduate students will demonstrate a greater change in mean interdependence score between Time 1(T1) and time 2 (T2) than will male graduate students.
- Change in interdependent self over time.
- (F (1,108) = 4.00,  $p < .048$ , Eta squared = .036)
- Supports shifting self (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Matsumoto, 2000)

# Some Key Results

- H11 Sub H1 Female students will demonstrate a greater change in mean depression scores between time 1(T1) and time 2 (T2) than will male students.
- H12 SubH1 Female students will demonstrate a greater change in mean loneliness scores between time 1(T1) and time 2 (T2) than will male students.
- H13 Sub H1 Female students will demonstrate a greater change in mean impostor phenomenon scores between time 1(T1) and time 2 (T2) than will male students.
- No significant change in adjustment measures over time based on gender.
- Shifting successful

# Self-Esteem Cluster Validation

- Hierarchical cluster analysis using ASSEI Satisfaction scores.
- Clusters validated using ASSEI Importance, PSCQ, RISC, BSD, UCLA Loneliness, IP
- Results indicated two groups of students-
- Cluster 1 Above average Self-Esteem
- Cluster 2 Below average Self-Esteem

# Some Key Results

- H 33 There is a significant relationship between gender and cluster membership (above average/below average self-esteem).
- Women predominate in the above average self-esteem cluster.
- $\chi^2 = 3.91 (1) p = .048$
- Contradicts Lawrence, Ashford & Dent (2006)

# Some Key Results

- H 15 Sub H1 The main effect between marital status and loneliness scores is modified by gender.
- Significant interaction effect between gender and marital status-  
married men lowest mean scores for loneliness, single men the  
highest mean scores for loneliness.
- Univariate Tests  
( $F(1,279) = 6.93, p = .009, \eta^2 = .025$ ).
- Supports protection hypothesis - Adler (1953)

# Some Key Results

- H23 There are significant cultural group differences in mean scores for loneliness, with female students from more collectivist cultures having higher mean scores for loneliness than female students from more individualistic cultures.

Indian female students -significantly higher mean score ( $M = 47.86$ ,  $SD = 6.66$ ) compared to both Jamaican ( $M = 41.35$ ,  $SD = 10.93$ ) and North American ( $M = 39.39$ ,  $SD = 12.08$ ) female students.

Culture shapes loneliness experience- e.g Rokach (2004).



# Study 2: Overview

- Explores the processes involved in adapting to graduate school.
- Focus on 3 distinct cultures (North America, Caribbean, East Asia).
- Explore individual lived experiences.
- Seeking “how.”

# Research Themes

- Pressures
  - How do gender, marital status and culture (female students) impact perceived pressures?
- Supports
  - How do gender, marital status and culture (female students) impact perceived supports?
- Coping
  - How do gender, marital status and culture (female students) impact coping (techniques, success)?
- Self-View
  - How do gender, marital status and culture (female students) impact self-view?

# Method

- Semi-structured interviews with 72 graduate students.
  - 41 Jamaica, 18 Canada, 13 India
- Students purposively chosen based on their demographic characteristics.
- Interview Themes
  - Educational Choices, About School, About You, Life Situation, Demands and Expectations

# Study 2: Some Key Results

Pressures

Male: amount of coursework

There was one particular week where we had four assignments due and two tests, one week you know and in fact, no that was five assignments and two tests (laughs) right and I remember that I just went through the week in a daze.

Female: balancing roles

Well it's kinda hard to work and go to school I mean I started out doing work and after a while I was thinking I can't cope.

# Some Key Results

- Coping.
- **Interview female - *Active***
- Exercise going for a walk or going for a run kind of helps me think about things while I'm exercising.
- – adjustment to grad school -Sasaki & Yamasaki (2007)
- **Interviews male -*Avoidant***
- Watching the television.

# Some Key Results

## **Culture:** *Secondary Control Strategy-Lam & Zane (2004)*

- Jamaica: It makes no sense to 'fight the alligator'...I mean I've learned on this course I mean I've learned it's better to 'drain the swamp.'
- India: I try to change myself according to the situation. It is very rare that situations can be changed according to me.

## **Culture:** *Combination*

- Canada: I use a combination of problem and emotion focused coping, in most circumstances.

# Some Key Results

## *Culture Coping -*

### *Compartmentalize*

- Jamaica: Okay well there's a time and place for everything. I just have to you know ensure that I keep a very, a good schedule.
- India: I am very conscious about keeping these two (home and school) apart from each other.

### *Spillover-Greenhaus and Beutell (1985)*

- Canada: Definitely, it's really hard to find a balance when you're doing more than one thing... you have to reserve time for every one of those people, every one of those things and it becomes really difficult at times to balance all that out .

# Discussion

- Both the independent and interdependent aspects of self are employed in adapting to the context of graduate school- interdependent self not “chronically activated” in women.
- Above average scores on both aspects of self are an indicator of positive self-esteem- Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine and Broadnax (1994).
- Support a dialectical approach to understanding self structures- Spencer-Rogers and Peng (2005).
- Marriage may have an insulating effect for students.
- Problems related to the greater number of roles women are required to balance in society- Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Triandis, 1994.



# Implications/Recommendations

## Flexibility

- *Change is not a one-way street.*
- Emphasis on social development and integration - Nerad and Cerny, (1993)
- Incorporate diversity- Jones (1997)