PSYC 105: INTRO TO PSYC I

PSYC 245: RESEARCH METHODS

GLOBAL ASSIGNMENT

Read the attached article “Emergent Characteristics of Effective Cross-Cultural Research: A Review of the Literature “from the Journal of Counseling and Development, summer 2010, Volume 88 and answer the following questions:

1. Write a brief explanation of the problem with describing cultures as individualistic or collective.
2. Describe 3 challenges of conducting research in a cross cultural context.
3. Why is it a “strength and mutual benefit” to use mixed culture research teams in cross-cultural research.
4. Explain why a concept like “self-esteem” is difficult to study across cultures.
5. What is the intersection of culture and counseling?

Emergent Characteristics of

Effective Cross-Cultural Research:

A Review of the Literature

Christopher Sullivan and R. Rocco Cottone

• T h i s article identifies characteristics of effective research done in cross-cultural environments; reviews the literature

in the years following the publication of Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier's (2002) seminal article, challenging the

basis for the description of cultures as individualistic or collectivistic; and summarizes major issues concerning research

in a cross-cultural environment and outlines how cross-cultural research increases contextual understanding, shows

sensitivity to language and culture, and takes a collaborative and flexible stance. How different research designs allow

for greater inclusion of a variety of cultural perspectives and implications for practice are addressed.

Interest in how cultural differences affect the counseling process

has been among the most important and innovative approaches

to develop in the field of counseling and psychotherapy in the

past 40 years. Multiculturalism, the culmination of this culturally

sensitive stance, has been identified as "a fourth force"

(Pedersen, 1991) following the previous psychodynamic,

behavioral, and humanistic movements in counseling. Cultural

awareness has transformed the practice of counseling through

efforts to gain greater sensitivity and acceptance of different

cultural perspectives and attitudes. Moving beyond the growing

awareness of the 1960s and 1970s that people from different

places viewed and experienced the world in different ways,

culturally sensitive counseling has come to benefit from the

collected information and insights in a variety of different fields,

particularly cultural anthropology (Geertz, 1973), sociology,

and intercultural communications (Hall, 1976).

One of the major organizing characteristics across disciplines

has been the categorization of different cultures as

either individualistic or collectivistic. It has been accepted as

almost self-evident that individuals from some cultures had a

more collectivistic identity and identified more with the larger

social group to which they belonged, whereas other cultures

were more individualistic and were made up of individuals

less concerned with the overall group's welfare and more

motivated by individual concerns. Hofstede's (1980) Culture's

Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related

Values was based on a study of employees in a multinational

corporation that justified these conclusions by providing

data validating the categories and providing an empirical

basis for describing the world's cultures as individualist or

collectivist. Almost immediately, Hofstede's descriptive

model of how cultures can be categorized was embraced as

an axiomatic description of cultural differences. Although

Hofstede identified power distance, uncertainty avoidance,

and masculinity-femininity as other important distinctions

between cultures, the individualist-collectivist distinction

is most enthusiastically embraced and referenced in cultural

studies (an Internet search on September 1, 2007, showed

more than 20,000 references to the concept).

This commonsense understanding of describing and

categorizing cultural differences was upended with the

publication of Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier's (2002)

examination of the empirical work using the individualism collectivism

model done between 1980 and 2002. Oyserman

etal. examined roughly 170 studies using Hofstede's (1980)

framework and questioned whether the practice of individual-

level analysis could accurately lead to valid country-level

conclusions as Hofstede and later researchers did. Oyserman

et al. also identified "the narrow focus on undergraduates as

research participants, single group contrasts, and enormous

heterogeneity in how researchers conceptualize" (p. 6) individualism

and collectivism as other major limitations to the

approach. In addition to questioning the underlying premise

of measuring individualism and collectivism, Oyserman et

al. criticized the "apparent willingness to accept any cross national

difference as evidence of IND-COL [individualist collectivist]

processes" (p. 44). These limitations and associated

questionable research results flew in the face of a

construct that had been assumed to be self-evident, and the

empirical foundation for separating cultures into these two

major categories was thus irreparably damaged. Although the

individualism-collectivism model continues as a theoretical

model, the questions raised by Oyserman et al. do not allow

for continued acceptance of the individualist-collectivist

construct as a simple, clear method of distinguishing between

and categorizing cultures. The critique by Oyserman et al. is

an alert to the cross-cultural research community: It encourages

a culturally sensitive analysis of distinctions made about

cultures—distinctions that should not be accepted globally or

solely from a Western cultural stance.