Journal of Leisure Research
2005, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 106-116

Self-construal in Context: A Response to Walker, Deng, and Dieser

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The article by Walker, Deng, & Dieser stimulates questions and raises many good points to consider as leisure research evolves. Their article resonated with many of my own thoughts and challenges as I have been engaged in international research. Walker et al. articulate a need to develop a viable theoretical framework, which includes intervening variables, to explore differences and similarities in leisure from a framework that includes culture, race, and ethnicity. They propose a new-to-leisure construct *self-construal* be incorporated into leisure theory, broadly conceptualized. In this construction of theory, they propose that self-construal is influenced by culture, and predictive of cognition, emotion, and motivation. As a final piece to their paper, they discuss self-construal as it might relate to practical issues such as benefits based programming.

After reading and mulling over the article, several thoughts based on my own research and understanding of the concepts described by Walker et al arose. I then tested these thoughts against a brief literature review (a literature new to me except for the self-determination literature). This included reading some of Oyserman's work, whom Walker et al. rely on for part of their discussion. I left this process by applauding Walker et al. for raising some important issues, but also saying, "Whoa! This is far too complex to wholeheartedly endorse as the next defining moment of leisure research and practice." The final step in constructing this response was to ask my colleague Garry Chick, whose disciplinary background is cultural anthropology, to review my thoughts. His advice and input was invaluable and greatly appreciated. Although Walker et al.'s article prompted many thoughts, I will confine my remarks here to discussing the constructs of self-construal and self-determination in relationship to culture.

By way of background to understand my perceptions, over the past four years I have had the privileged opportunity to engage in international research on adolescent leisure and health with colleagues from Australia, Chile, Columbia, (former east) Germany, South Africa, and Togo[1], and I am

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[1]I have also worked closely with a student from Korea (and worked on a research project based in Korea with her) and one from Bangeldesh (where she is currently is conducting research). I am also doing some psychometric research on leisure variables with a colleague in Nigeria.

engaged in preliminary discussions with a colleagues in Czech Republic and Maylasia. Some of these countries are considered more collectivist than others, with Togo probably being the most collective (judging from a personal, not empirical, perspective). One of the interesting things to consider in our work in eastern Germany has been the course toward individualism caused by German reunification.

The work in Australia, Columbia, Germany, and South Africa (and possibly the Czech Republic and Malaysia) essentially is to culturally adapt, implement, and evaluate leisure and health curricula that were developed by U.S. researchers (of which I am one). Over the course of these research projects (most of which are on-going) I have been plagued with doubts about the transportability of constructs, methods, and curricula based on "Western theory" across cultural conditions. I must admit that although my concerns have been valid, in reality they have been quite insignificant compared to the robustness of the theoretical framework that informs our work. This is only partly evidenced by the fact that in each country, our research team was invited to share what we were doing and work with "in-country" colleagues (and other stakeholders) to make cultural adaptations. These experiences have shaped the way I viewed Walker et al.'s article.

Devilish Dualism

It would have helped me understand their perspective if Walker et al. had defined what they meant by culture and to clarify if their interest was on cross-national or cross-cultural studies, or both, and why. Culture can be defined in a number of ways and some discussion of why and how culture was perceived as a topic would have aided in understanding why self-construal is important.

I was initially confused by what self-construal was. . .did it have to do with so-called Western vs. Eastern (or non-Western) thinking, individualism vs. collectivism, independent vs. interdependent selves, and/or ethnic vs. cultural identity? Each of these has related but different conceptual and operational definitions, but they seemed to be used interchangeably to define self-construal. Regardless of the clarification to my confusion, I am concerned with the dualistic approach in the article. Even as a short-hand organizing framework, dualism does more harm than good. I acknowledge that dualistic discussions occurs in various literatures, but even according to Oyserman et al.'s own perspective, the direct comparison between independent vs. interdependent selves is problematic. It also appears the cultural anthropologists are wary of cross-cultural studies that contrast only two cultures, which tend to emphasize the extremes of the cultural groups. It is also worth keeping keep in mind that culture does not mean the same thing as national, a point that goes with my subsequent comments about intra-cultural variation.

Unfortunately, although they acknowledge that it is a simplistic representation, Walker et al. often make statements such as "for people with in-

dependent (or interdependent) selves" and then state what appears to be a fact or conclusion. This makes people's "self type" sound stable, invariant, and as an either/or proposition. Although there is some discussion in the literature that people with a predominantly independent self-construal *is* more stable, I would suggest this is still an open question, particularly as technology and globalization increase exponentially; stark differences between people will be less and less common.

Walker et al. can be excused for being conceptually confusing, however, as much of the psychological literature seems to haphazardly operationalize self-construal using at least two sets of dualisms: individualism vs. collectivism and independent vs. interdependent selves. If leisure researchers wish to use the construct, we must be conceptually and operationally clear about what we are talking about. My brief read of the literature is that there are conceptual and methodological issues to be addressed when using the construct of self-construal that go beyond semantics. In my review, there is clearly a concern, for example, about measurement issues, as well as the fact that much of this research is focused on undergraduate students, an extremely biased group on which to conduct research on self-construal. (Walker et al. do point this out, but I don't think the caution is strongly enough worded).

Biggs (2000) sheds some light on the genesis of this conceptual confusion. He suggests that until the 1990s, psychologists (and perhaps others) interested in cultural differences bifurcated cultures into collectivist or individualistic. As economic and political relationships changed between eastern and western cultures, this bifurcation seemed less relevant, and Marcus and Kitayama (1991) and Singelis (1994, 1995) advanced the concept of self-construal, defined as self-perception in relation to cultural identity. The important thing here is that a person's self-construal is conceptualized as having elements of *both* interdependence as well as independence. The interplay and prominence of type of dependence depends, in part, on cultural factors. This perspective differs from collectivism and individualism, which as far as I can determine focuses on the strength and obligation of being bound to groups, with the final concern of whether goal setting is based on personal desires vs. collective desires. As a side comment, researchers like Biggs also suggest that there is not a cut and dried distinction between collectivistic and individualistic cultures, witness American patriotism and willingness to go to war for the common good.

An advantage of using self-construal as a model for describing the individual in relation to culture is that, if used properly, it allows for varying degrees of both independent and interdependent perceptions of self. It is based on a person's perception than an external determination of whether a society is considered individualistic or collective (which also varies in degree). This viewpoint seems much more conducive to understanding individual differences within context, and begs a human developmental perspective, which is typically a more ecological than psychological perspective. The key is that while self-construal may be a viable construct, it is important not to house it in dualism.

If Self-Construal Is to Matter

As I was thinking about the article, I was further troubled by two things: (a) the notion that self-construal is defined as self perception in relation to *cultural* identity and (b) the lack of contextualization of self-construal. Defined as self-perception in relation to culture, self-construal appears to be a limiting construct. While there are evidently some very good research questions that can stem from this construct, at the present I am not necessarily enthusiastic about it being a major component of "a new leisure theory" (which I have doubts about at any level). My concern is that there are many other *boundaries* besides culture that influence a person's self-construal, as suggested by the identity development literature. So a question might be, why is self-construal important and what can and cannot it do to advance leisure-related research, theory development, and practice? How does it relate to the other "self" work, which includes identity?

As I see it, a person has multiple boundaries implicated in his or her life. Some of these are invariant, impermeable, and very proximally influence affect cognition, emotion, and behavior. Other boundaries are more fluid and their influence might fluctuate in degree and salience. Perhaps self-construal could be expanded to include self-perception relative to the many types of parameters that attach one to some type of collective identity, such as geo-political, racial, ethnic, ability (disability), gender, poverty, social class, family, environmental, religion, sexual, and national identities. These things can bind people through common characteristics, interests and goals, as well as a feeling of distinctness and uniqueness. This expansion fits nicely with much of the contemporary human development literature, which is largely premised on the observation that there are multiple, reciprocal and interactive influences among persons and environments.

This perspective on self-construal makes things more complex because one must consider the permeability and stability of boundaries; whether they are contingent on something, and what it is; whether boundaries are imposed, selected, or constructed; and how strongly or weakly one identifies with these boundaries. I think these are important issues to address in understanding how one perceives oneself in relation to one's world, and in particular leisure. Culture may well be a defining or superordinate boundary, but that seems an extant empirical question.

This type of thinking would address another of my concerns that relates to the need for contextualism. Much research and thought suggests that there is intra-cultural diversity, brought about in part by cohort differences, socio-economic status, and gender. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) assert that "how one identifies oneself—and how one is identified by others—may vary greatly from context to context; self- and other-identification are fundamentally situational and contextual" (p. 14). For example, how does one compare or use in a research study self-construals among Chinese persons living in China, individuals who have immigrated from China to Canada (perhaps thinking of themselves as a Chinese Canadian), and people of Chinese an-

cestry who has lived all their lives in Canada (perhaps thinking of themselves as a Canadian Chinese)? Singelis (1994), in discussing self-construal, addressed this issue by postulating that a person may possess components of both an interdependent and independent personality, such as an African American individual holding both interdependent beliefs of his or her ancestry and independent beliefs associated with Caucasian Americans.

Because self-understandings are thought to be variable across time and space, one question might be to ask to what degree is this true in leisure settings, for whom, and under what conditions? Can leisure enhance or detract from type of self-construal? What is the role of tourism? Do people who travel have higher degrees of interdependent self-construals? Does travel mediate or moderate self-construal?

Self-construal and Motivation

Turning now to self-determination, Walker et al. state that a person's self-construal predicts motivation and they criticize self-determination theory (SDT) for not adequately addressing people with high levels of an interdependent self-construal. My own work is highly reliant on theories of motivation, and so the issues raised by Walker et al. in terms of self-perception in relation to culture is one I have repeatedly addressed (and continue to address) in my own research.

Walker et al.'s concern is a natural one in that leisure is predicated on concepts of motivation and freedom. As with understanding self-construal, however, I think we need to closely examine these constructs conceptually. As I read Walker et al.'s discussion, it seems that they are framing their comments mainly on the notion of choice. While constructs of choice, autonomy, agency, self-determination, motivation, control, independence, and freedom share properties, putting semantics aside, there are qualitative differences among the terms.

Before I briefly touch on some of these differences, I want to make one point about the meaningfulness of choice. Walker et al. describe several instances where personal choice was an issue. In most of these instances, e.g., visiting a coffee house; what to drink before, during, and after dinner; and, what kind of sandwich to have for lunch, the choices were entirely trivial. While these choices might matter to many of us for hedonistic and momentary pleasure, they are "no big deal," despite Fiske et al.'s (in Walker et al.) contention, "Choosing involves knowing, communicating, and realizing one's own preferences or attitudes; consequently, choice allows people to manifest their individuality, to express themselves, and to be active agents who control their own destinies." Choosing what to eat or drink really does not contribute to controlling one's destiny. I think the point that Walker et al. are trying to make is that being autonomous seems to be a critical human need, and one that bears scrutiny cross-culturally. I agree with that, and would like to briefly explore the meaning of autonomy in greater depth.

Ryan states that autonomy "literally means 'self-governing' and therefore implies regulation by self" (p. 8). The key to autonomy is well-put by Ryan: "Insofar as one's actions are perceived to be engendered by forces outside the self (ego-center) or are not fully condoned or endorsed by the self, then willing or self-determination is not in evidence" (p. 8). He goes on to state that just because someone experiences environmental pressures to enact a behavior does not mean one is not autonomous. If one willingly endorses the action and enacts the behavior because it fits into one's personal value system and interests, then an externally motivated behavior can be considered self-determined and autonomous even though it is not *intrinsically* motivated. It is, however, an *internalized* form of motivation. Here is where I think confusion sometimes sets in. According to SDT, giving up a chance to do a preferred, intrinsically motivated activity (e.g., take a course on sculpture) to build a Habitat for Humanity house might be a form of externally compelled, but internalized, form of motivation, which theoretically leads to feelings of self-determination and autonomy. Choosing to play soccer because it is valued by one's parents, and not because one loves the game, is another example of this *integrated* or *introjected* form of motivation (see Ryan & Deci, 2000a; 2000b) that is still autonomous—it is self-endorsed but not intrinsically motivated. Note that the goals of building the house and playing on a soccer team rely on *collective* goals and interdependency. Of course, there are many behaviors enacted due to external compulsion that are not self-endorsed, and thus not autonomous.

Much conceptual and methodological work is needed to better understand the related constructs of autonomy, motivation, agency, control, and choice, and when and why these are important, especially to leisure research. For example, Walker et al. invoked a study by Iyengar and Lepper (1999) to describe the difference in autonomy among children with different self-construals. In this study, using a sample that included Anglo American, Chinese and Japanese children, it appears that intrinsic motivation was equated with choice, which certainly seems to contribute to being intrinsically motivated, but it is not the only thing that matters. The use of this study to make a point about autonomy is an unfortunate contribution to the conceptual confusion, and adds fuel to my argument that we have to be very clear about what we are talking about.

Despite the conceptual confusion, Walker et al. raise a very important topic for research by discussing the cross-cultural differences regarding autonomy-related constructs. Several interesting cross-cultural questions might include: does autonomy influence motivation? Is intrinsic motivation really as important to leisure experience as initially believed (e.g., Iso-Ahola, 1989), and for whom and under what conditions? What is the role of choice in autonomy and motivation, and how meaningful and "large" does that choice have to be? Does the degree of internalization, and/or the type of external force, make a difference to one's sense of autonomy, and for whom, and under what conditions? For example, under what conditions do middle

aged women who tend to be more interdependent in social leisure settings feel more or less autonomous? Could it be that action based on inherent satisfaction is subordinated more or less often, depending on context, gender, culture, race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status? What is the relation of perceived freedom and intrinsic motivation?

One has many sources of external compulsions daily, and in light of the construct self-construal, other questions might include how does one integrate (or not) one's various boundaries (including culture) that compel one to action, and how does one at the same time engage in purely intrinsically motivating activity? When and under what conditions is behavior that is intrinsically motivated other-based versus self-gratifying? When and for whom are collective goals intrinsically motivating, or are collective goals incompatible with intrinsic motivation? Although it seems there is some support, at least conceptually, that autonomy is possible without being intrinsically motivating, at what point and for whom, and under what conditions, does externally compelled behavior negate autonomy?

Another potentially useful and related theory is Bandura's (1989) social cognitive theory (SCT), which is posited as a theory of agency. In 1999 Ryan criticized SCT due to its primary focus on self-efficacy and goal achievement (outcomes). While Ryan considered these useful constructs, they did not address *why* a behavior is enacted, which is what SDT attempts to do. Bandura's (2001) most recent conceptualization of agency seems to be a bit broader than his 1989 conceptualization. Bandura's concept of agency encompasses self-efficacy, which is an important precursor to competence. Competence and relationality are, as Walker et al. stated, important considerations in understanding human motivation as part of SDT.

These distinctions are important in light of my previous discussion noting the differences between the set of constructs of collectivism vs. individualism and interdependent vs. interdependent self-construal. The first set seems to be more oriented to achieving group-valued goals as compared with individually-oriented goals. The second set of terms, according to Walker et al., is something that acts as "the motivator" or reason a behavior is enacted. From a meta-cognitive perspective, it seems that self-construal suggests an ability or need to understand how one's intentional actions, which are presumably goal driven (although it is debatable as to how many actions are intentionally goal driven), will influence one's status in one's environment at any given time in any given context.

According to SCT (Bandura, 2001) human agency encompasses a number of constructs, including but not limited to intentionality, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and meta-cognition through self-reflectiveness. Essentially, agency is about believing one *can* reach a desired goal, and then exercising control over and adapting to one's environment in a purposeful manner to reach the goal. Agency is conceptually similar to much of the work of Ryan (1993, and Deci & Ryan, e.g., 2000a, 2000b) that focuses on understanding human motivation. SCT also takes into account the multiple, reciprocal and

interactive influences between person and environment, and focuses on how one exercises agency in the context of these influences. Thus, the interplay, intricacies, and conditional nature of one's environment, and boundaries, must be accounted for in understanding human behavior, affect, and cognition.

SCT identifies three types of human agency: personal, proxy, and collective (Bandura, 2001). Personal agency is reflected in one's ability to be self-directed and self-efficacious in achieving one's goals (which may include group goals). In instances where people are unable to influence direct control over their environment, they seek agency through proxy agents (e.g., elected representatives). Proxy agency is also important in cases where people have not developed or do not wish to develop skills to carry out their wishes, and feel that someone else can do it better. Bandura cautions that "personal control is neither an inherent drive nor universally desired as it is commonly claimed" (p. 11).

Collective agency has to do with a group of people, bounded by "something" (e.g., culture, race, family, fraternal organization, poverty), who work together to effect change. What they seek to change is something that is more likely to respond to collective rather than individual effort. Bandura (2001) suggests that coordinated action on people's shared beliefs is the motivating and regulating element of collective agency.

Bandura makes the point that personal agency is rooted within a broad network of sociostructural influences. He maintains that although the self is construed based on social conditions, personal agency is not reactive. . .people are both producers and products of social and environmental systems. Furthermore, there is a great deal of individual variation in agency. Bandura does suggest that it is important to well-being and effectiveness for a person's primary self-construal to be matched with the structure of the social system in which one is embedded.

A sense of personal agency is consistent with making decisions for the good of the order, to advance collective goals. As discussed, Ryan's (1993) conceptualization of self-regulation (autonomy) is based on the belief that one's activity has stemmed from and is consistent with oneself. It does not matter whether the goal is an individual one or a collective one, or whether the behavior contains intrinsic rewards or is being externally rewarded while at the same time self-endorsed; being self-regulated is motivating and produces feelings of autonomy. Much of Deci and Ryan's latest work on motivation addresses this issue and spawns questions such as: How does one internalize externally motivated actions, who does this, and under what conditions? Is it more likely that one will internalize externally motivated actions in a leisure context, and which ones?

One final point is to reiterate the need to abandon dualistic thinking. In discussing SCT, Bandura (2001) makes a strong point that the influence and expression of culture (referring to individualistic and collective goals and incentives) are situationally dependent and that "Bicultural contrasts, in

which individuals from a single collectivist locale are compared on global indices to individuals from a single individualistic one, can spawn a lot of misleading generalizations" (p. 14).

In Conclusion

I mentioned that my international work is based, in part, on SDT and SCT, and is framed from an ecological perspective. As part of that work, colleagues and I developed a leisure education curriculum for middle school youth as a prevention intervention (for substance use and risky sexual behavior). Part of the intervention teaches youth about making healthy decisions in leisure time as well as to understand their own form of motivation (using Deci and Ryan's SDT continuum). We teach them to recognize personal and community benefits to healthy leisure activity, and the importance of and how to be self-responsible and self-determined in planning for leisure to attain those benefits.

We were very curious, and possibly suspicious, about how well these constructs and the translation of them into practice would work in other cultures. What we have found so far is that these constructs continue to hold a great deal of currency in all of the contexts we are in. At the same time, in some countries we have modified the content of the intervention to be more reflective of interdependent decision making. For example in South Africa, among low-income, urban, "colored" youth, we include topics such as how to balance personal choice and goals with the collective goals of peers and family to maintain autonomy. Our initial pilot study indicated that these concepts "made sense" and we could measure them. As stated earlier, colleagues in all of the countries we work with believe that with minor modification, teaching self-determination and self-regulation in leisure is an important goal.

Now this does not mean that hook, line, and sinker, we should continue on our merry way without a great deal of attention to and reflection about how culture (in addition to and interacting with the other boundaries I proffered) is a main, mediating, or moderating effect in what we do. But, after a reading Walker et al.'s paper, and based on my own experiences, I am not sure leisure research is in a crisis, needing to adopt a new "leisure theory"—certainly not one based on self-construal. I do hope, however, I have made it clear that I think it is essential to understand differences and similarities among people, and particularly how these differences and similarities are accounted for, understood, and influenced by and in leisure. It is also important to understand what constructs used in leisure research are transportable across boundaries, and if not transportable, how are the theories modifiable—to improve the global human condition, including access to, opportunity for, and expression of personal self through meaningful leisure engagement.

Understanding self-construal (as defined by a degree of independence and interdependence within multiple boundaries) is only important if it will

help answer questions that advance science and practice. I have tried to contribute to the discussion of using self-construal as a construct in leisure research and practice by generating numerous questions that might be fruitful, but there are many more and I am sure mine are not the best questions to address. Walker et al. also take this approach in parts of their article, most notably at the end where they criticize some of the self-construal research and suggest ways to overcome their concerns.

Technology, among other things, will increasingly contribute to globalization, and all cultures will continue to evolve, mix and change. Even in rural Togo and rural Fiji, in small villages without electricity, generators are connecting cultures and dramatically changing how youth see themselves and their opportunities in relationship to their expanding world view. I saw first hand how youth in Fiji and Togo were influenced by computers, video and/or television—and unfortunately not all influences are healthy ones. Immigration and aging patters also contribute to intra- and intercultural transitions. Bandura (2001) exhorts that the development and maintenance of collective efficacy will be eroded by transnational forces; it will be interesting to see whether he is right. As global change occurs (often rapidly), not only should leisure scientists keep a watchful eye on these changes, but also we should be critical of the methods and concepts we use to study human phenomena in light of these changes. We have Walker, Deng, & Dieser to thank for being critical of our literature and theory, as well as *Journal of Leisure Research* editor David Scott for seizing this opportunity for discussion. Indeed, researchers and practitioners should follow Walker et al.'s advice and: ". . .understand how beneficial outcomes may vary both within and between members of different cultural groups." I think rather than focus on self-construal, we need to ask better questions and frame our research in ways that will contribute to this collective research and practice goal.

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