An Introduction to
Culture and Psychology

Chapter 1

Outline
- The study of culture in psychology
- Defining culture
- Factors that influence culture
- Groups that have cultures
- Contrasting culture, race, personality and popular culture
- The psychological contents of culture
- How does culture influence human behaviors and mental processes?
- The contribution of the study of culture

THE STUDY OF CULTURE
IN PSYCHOLOGY

The Goals of Psychology
- Create body of knowledge about people
- Applying knowledge to improve people's lives

Cross-Cultural Research and Psychology
- Most theories in psychology based on studies with American university students
- Are these theories true for all people, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, class or lifestyle?
- Cross-cultural psychology answers this question by testing people of differing cultural backgrounds

Cross-Cultural Research and Psychology
- Definition of cross-cultural psychology
- Research method testing the cultural parameters of psychological knowledge by comparing data from participants of more than one cultural background
- Cross-cultural psychology is scientific philosophy
- Not topic specific
Cross-Cultural Research and Psychology

- Contribution of Cross-cultural psychology
  1) methodological change in psychology studies by varying cultural background of the samples being studied
  2) tests limitations of our knowledge in psychology by examining whether theories are universal or culture-specific

The Growth of Cross-Cultural Psychology

- Cross-cultural psychology has made substantial impact in psychology worldwide in the past decade or two
- This popularity due to increased awareness of importance of culture and frequency of intercultural conflicts
- Published in Journal of cross-cultural psychology, Cross-Cultural Research, Culture and Psychology as well as top-tier mainstream journals

Figure 1.1

DEFINING CULTURE

- We use "culture" to describe and explain broad range of activities, behaviors, events and structures
  - Descriptive, historical, normative, psychological, structural, genetic
  - General characteristics, food & clothing, housing & technology, economy & transportation, individual & family activities, community & government, welfare, religion & science, sex & life cycle
- As a result, much confusion and ambiguity

Where does culture come from?

Figure 1.2

Human Nature and Culture
Where does culture come from?

- In order to survive, people had to meet **biological needs** (e.g. reproduction, eating) AND **social motives** (e.g. negotiating complex hierarchies)
- Universally need to come up with **solutions** on how to adapt to environment to address needs and motives

Is culture a uniquely human product?

- Many aspects of human culture are shared with other animals
- Therefore culture is **NOT** uniquely human product

What is unique about human culture?

- Unique human skills
  1) Language
  2) Complex social cognition
  3) Ratchet effect
- As a result, human culture have three characteristics: **complexity, differentiation, institutionalization**
- Humans evolved to have human culture

The difference between society and culture

- Large distinction between society and culture
- **Society** is "a system of interrelationships among people"
  - Both humans and non-human animals have society
- **Culture** is meanings and information associated with social networks
  - Humans give social groups unique meaning
  - Non-humans do not have human culture associated with social groups
FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CULTURE

Factors Influencing Culture

- Ecological Factors
  - geography, climate, natural resources

- Social Factors
  - population density, affluence, technology, government, media, religion

- Biological Factors
  - temperament, personality

GROUPS THAT HAVE CULTURE

Groups that have Culture

- Nationality
  - Country of origin and each country has own culture (as well as subcultures)

- Ethnicity
  - Racial, national or cultural origins

- Gender
  - Behaviors society/culture deems appropriate for men and women

- Disability
  - Some type of physical impairment in senses, limb, or other parts of bodies

- Sexual Orientation
  - Person with whom one forms sexual relationships

CONTRASTING CULTURE, RACE, PERSONALITY, and POPULAR CULTURE
Culture and Race

- Race is not culture
- Race is a social construction and thus boundaries & definition of race different for different cultures
- Need clear understanding of underlying causes of similarities and differences observed between races

Culture and Personality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Personality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macro, social, group-level construct</td>
<td>Individual differences that exist among individuals within groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social psychological framework within which individuals reside</td>
<td>Unique constellation of traits, attributes, qualities, and characteristics of individuals within those frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared among individuals and transmitted across generations</td>
<td>Not shared among individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable across individuals</td>
<td>Different across individuals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Culture and Popular Culture

- Popular culture: trends in music, art and other expressions popular among people
- Like culture, sharing of expression and its value by people involved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Popular Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>System of rules that cut across attitudes, values, opinions, beliefs, norms and behaviors</td>
<td>Does not involve sharing wide range of psychological attributes across various psychological domains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable over time across generations</td>
<td>Values or expressions that come and go as fads or trends within few years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Culture consists of both objective and subjective elements

- Objective
- Subjective (psychological)

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTENTS OF CULTURE

Psychological Contents

- Hofstede's cultural dimensions
- Schwartz's values
- Leung and Bond's Social Axioms
Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

- Individualism, Collectivism
- Power Distance
- Uncertainty Avoidance
- Masculinity, Femininity
- Long, Short Term Orientation

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Individualism, Collectivism
Degree to which cultures encourage
i) tendency for people to look after themselves and immediate family
or
ii) belong to ingroups that look after them in exchange for loyalty

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Power Distance
Degree to which cultures encourage less powerful members accept that power is distributed unequally

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Uncertainty Avoidance
Degree to feeling threatened by unknown or ambiguous situations and have developed beliefs, institutions, or rituals to avoid them

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Masculinity, Femininity
Distribution of emotional roles between males and females; success, money vs. caring, quality of life

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Long, Short Term Orientation
Degree to which cultures encourage delayed gratification of material, social, emotional needs
Schwartz's Values
- Embeddedness
- Hierarchy
- Mastery
- Intellectual Autonomy
- Affective Autonomy
- Egalitarianism
- Harmony

Leung and Bond's Social Axioms
- Dynamic externality
- Societal cynicism

Behavior and Worldviews
- Cultural worldviews:
  - Culturally specific belief systems (attitudes, beliefs, opinions and values) about the world
  - Having cultural worldviews is universal but content of it is culture specific
  - Cultural worldviews and behavior are sometimes not related to each other
  - Therefore cultural differences in worldview may or may not be associated with cultural differences in behavior

HOW DOES CULTURE INFLUENCE HUMAN BEHAVIORS AND MENTAL PROCESSES?

Cultural influences on behavior and mental processes
- This system is dynamic and interrelated
- Although culture is an important factor influencing behavior so are other factors like personality, context
- Depending on context, cultural influences on behavior may change
Understanding culture in perspective: universals and culture-specifics

- **Universals**: psychological processes in which all humans engage
  - Ex) all humans make attributions about reasons underlying human behavior
- **Culture-specifics**: differences among cultures due to specific, unique environments of cultures
  - Ex) different cultures may differ in the way they make attributions

**Etics and Emics**

- Universals are **Etics**
- Culture specifics are **Emics**

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY OF CULTURE**

**On psychological knowledge and truths**

- Is the knowledge we learn in psychology applicable to all or only to some people of some culture?
- By asking this question, psychology can move toward producing accurate knowledge that applies to all
- Culture incorporated into mainstream psychology

**In our own lives**

- Exercise in critical thinking
  - Is what we know true for all people regardless of cultural backgrounds?
  - If not, under what conditions do differences occur and why?
  - What is it about culture that produces such differences?
  - What factors other than culture contribute to differences?