When Psychology and Culture Meet: An Introduction to Cross-Cultural Psychology

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For both of us, launching this volume of original commentaries on cross-cultural psychology is a rewarding and long-awaited experience. We have spent most of our careers teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate level, and have taught a variety of courses of various sizes over a wide range of topics. But we have never faced an audience of the size that this book will (we hope) reach. And the timing for this message about the cultural aspects of psychology has never been better. So we have to take more seriously than usual the need to be clear about what it is you should know about culture and behavior. We will try to write in plain and simple language, and above all we will try to take a personal view of what we think is important. In doing so, we will try to speak directly and personally to you from our own life experiences.

SOME BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

The findings of researchers in the natural sciences, such as chemistry and physics, are almost certainly as valid in rural Japan, busy and bustling Bangkok, the placid fiords of Norway, or the Florida Ever-
glades as they are anywhere else on the planet. Well-established laws that govern the non-human world serve as reliable guides to workers in these fields. They have served humankind as guides for many years and we can all be confident that they will continue serving us well as we muddle our way through a very complex world of minerals, plants, quarks, anteaters, and so on. But unlike these sciences, psychology and its sister disciplines, such as anthropology and sociology, must deal with the extremely dynamic and complex human being who survives by moving and adapting. This has produced a great variety of cultures and ethnic groups.

The typical psychology text contains hundreds of concepts, terms, and theories, all of which were designed by psychologists to help explain, predict, and (maybe) control human behavior. Most of these abstractions are used as if it has already been established that they are applicable everywhere. This is a premature if not dangerous assumption to make. Because modern psychology was developed largely in the Western world, we must be careful when any of these concepts, terms, and theories are used in many parts of the world. Just because some psychological term or concept has been useful in the culture in which these ideas originated—the United States or Canada, for example—does not automatically mean they can be transported elsewhere and used with the same level of confidence.

To a very large extent, psychology has been culture-bound and culture-blind. It is culture-bound because its roots are deeply planted in the rich and productive soil of European-American thought and theory. Consequently, modern psychology has developed without significant input from scientists and thinkers who represent the non-Western world. It has been estimated that over 90 percent of all psychologists who have ever lived are from the Western world. It has also been estimated that over 90 percent of all the world’s psychological literature has come from the minds of Westerners and laboratories in the industrialized world. This obviously means that the vast majority of psychological research and scholarship on humans have used people from the “highly psychologized” world—that is, those parts of the world that have been studied intensely because that’s where most of the psychologists have lived and worked.

The accusation of culture-blindness stems from the fact that psychology has not significantly taken into account a great variety of factors, not generally found in the West, that influence the behavior of millions of humans elsewhere. For instance, different values placed on children, different beliefs about how men and women should behave or be treated, different ways to diagnose illness, among many other widely differing antecedents to behavior, have not customarily been part of theory development or research designs in psychology. Some aspects of these factors, and much more, are found among the chapters in this book.

We mention these historical facts and trends not to “trash” our discipline (which we believe is important), but to alert the reader that any serious study of human psychology and its related disciplines must include cultural and ethnic variation. To ignore these realities, or to trivialize them, is to contribute to a science while wearing blinders. We strongly believe that psychology offers humanity a very important and interesting way to look at the world. However, we also believe that psychology must expand its vistas. In the words of the late Gardner Murphy, an influential United States psychologist, we must learn to “consult all that is human.”

The study of psychology, indeed, the study of any of the social and behavioral sciences, is incomplete without giving serious consideration to the ecological, cultural, and ethnic factors that contribute to human variability. These factors exert powerful influences on human behavior. This fact is often overlooked or underemphasized in most of the many thousands of courses offered in the educational institutions in the United States and other countries—whether they are two-year community colleges or junior colleges, four-year colleges, or major universities. There are many different reasons for this short-sightedness. For instance, in the United States, the study of cultural variation has received little attention because the typical American (a term that ranks many because technically all people indigenous to North and South America can claim to be “American”) has had relatively little direct contact and experience with other cultures. The increasing interdependence of the world’s many cultures is, however, leading to a “shrinking world” and global economy in which the “survivors” will be acutely aware of cultural and ethnic differences, and will learn to live with and adapt to these differences. By the same token, the “non-survivors” will be too slow to adjust to the realities of the shrinking globe. Also, within different nations one usually finds strong efforts toward heterogeneity or cultural pluralism rather than the homogeneity of a “melting pot” mentality which was once highly
valued in the United States and still might be elsewhere. It has been projected that in less than a century the once white-dominant United States will be 24 percent Hispanic, 15 percent African-American, and 12 percent Asian-American. In other words, the white population in the United States will be in the minority for the first time in about three centuries. Other countries are experiencing similar dramatic demographic changes.

Moreover, one should not use the terms racial or ethnic minority without considering the very pluralistic nature of such minorities, most of whom represent wide variations in values, languages, family structures, political orientations, and so on. There are, for instance, several hundred recognized tribes or bands among the widely distributed Native American, or Native Canadian, populations. And, although the United States is one of the more heterogeneous and pluralistic of all nations, most of the rest of the world’s nation-states can boast tremendous cultural and ethnic variation within their borders. Indeed, today’s stories in the world’s newspapers and news magazines will undoubtedly carry graphic reports on body counts, assassinations, coup d’etats, and the like as a result of racial and ethnic tensions. Identification with a particular group, a feeling of solidarity with “like-minded” people, a line drawn in the sand in the middle east or across a playground in an inner-city ghetto, are powerful forces that shape and define what we call cultures or ethnic groups.

Another reason for the relative lack of significant coverage of cultural variation in typical psychology courses is the scientist’s desire to simplify events and behavior in the interest of finding psychological order. Science is basically a search for orderliness, a search for reasons why things work the way they do. Things that tend to be very complicated and hard to grasp, such as culture, might easily be avoided in this search for order. Complexity confuses; simplicity clarifies or so it seems.

Consider also that the United States has been a dominant economic, political, and military force for many years. The United States and its citizens have often been accused of cultural, economic, political, and even scientific snobbery—a situation that is rapidly changing in this tumultuous world. These factors have contributed to a sense of isolationism—a political stance that was once part of national policy in the United States and still remains somewhat popular among a sizeable minority of active politicians. The United States’s unique geopolitical situation, where its neighbors have never been a serious threat and instead have largely been congenial partners and allies, has led to a sort of malaise. As a result, the United States developed into a nation where most of its citizens have been monolingual and only superficially interested in the rest of the world. These different factors have contributed to “America bashing” and to such name-calling as the “ugly American” or the “superficial Yank.”

Finally, it appears that a majority of teachers or professors who teach most of the psychology courses that are offered in the several thousand institutions throughout the United States are not very familiar with the considerable culturally-related literature that exists in many books and journals. Many who teach courses in the social and behavioral sciences may want to cover such topics as cultural and ethnic diversity. Indeed, we often receive phone calls and letters from instructors who request advice on such matters. But their busy schedules and relative lack of concrete ideas concerning how such courses might be structured can easily result in ignoring such important information or skipping by it in a most superficial way.

Taken together, all of these factors not only inhibit the growth of psychology but they tend to give an incomplete picture of the immense breadth and scope of human variation. If we do not understand such variation, we cannot fully appreciate the considerable regularities, or universals, there are in human behavior. Constraining factors such as these have been mentioned in various places lately, including a recent publication of the American Psychological Association (Bronstein and Quina, 1988) and also in a study that documented the relatively scant coverage in basic psychology texts of how and why culture influences human behavior (Lonner, 1990).

THE EMERGENCE OF THE STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND CULTURE

There is a growing movement within psychology to help correct these deficiencies. As briefly noted in the Preface, a sizeable and increasing number of psychologists around the world are deeply involved with research that is designed to help psychology develop into a truly universal science. A major activity is to test the validity, or generalizability, of psychological theory, and to help rectify discrepancies between theory and cultural realities.
It is in the spirit of wanting to help create a better and more complete psychology, and with it a broader and deeper understanding of other cultures and world views, that this book was prepared.

This book is not, however, a complete and formal introduction to cross-cultural psychology. By carefully scanning the short list of references that follow each chapter in this book, one will find a number of recent publications that give broad introductions to this area in psychology. Such publications contain much theory and many methodological points, and we recommend them highly. General orientations such as those you will find in the references are specially relevant for students who are considering psychology as a college major or even as a career, however, we feel that they are not quite appropriate for those who want to get a taste of the relationships that exist between psychology and culture. Accordingly, the main goal of this book of specially prepared readings is to introduce the student to a wide variety of topics, issues, and problems that are of major interest to cross-cultural psychologists and others who study the broad spectrum of human variability.

This book covers a lot of territory. We hope the reader will be convinced that the study of culture and behavior is important and interesting. For those who wish to delve more deeply into the subject, there are two excellent recent treatments of the subject (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen, 1992; Shweder and Sullivan, 1993). But let’s get personal for a moment. People from all over the world have been leaving their countries of origin for Western Europe and North America. If you are able to get to an international airport and watch who is getting on and off airplanes, you will see what we mean. The impact on you is that you are going to meet some of these people, maybe even hundreds of them. You may end up working with or for (or even marrying) one of them. And your children are going to grow up with the children of their cross-cultural marriages—and maybe marry one of them. It is nearly certain that in your lifetime you will meet and get to know people with cultural backgrounds that differ from your own, that is, if you don’t already have a number of such acquaintances. It is in your own personal interest to understand the psychological aspects of culture.

If you are attending a college where you do not have friends and acquaintances whose cultural background contrasts with your own, you are one of a small (and dying) breed. The worldwide trends toward increased contact are inescapable. Today the world is not just interconnected by mail and air travel, but by telephone, facsimile (fax), and computer-based (E-mail) communication. Even small companies and agencies have occasion to be in contact with and work with persons from and in other nations or cultures. Just as you will need to understand how to use computers to be competitive in the work environment of the 21st century, you will likely have to be able to work with people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

And the old ways of adapting to the United States (and perhaps other countries) are on the way out. It used to be that monolingual speakers of English could assume that other immigrants to North America would (usually gladly) learn English and give up their foreign culture to assimilate during the great influx of largely European immigrants 70 or 80 years ago. As was mentioned in the Preface, this was the “melting pot” concept that was prevalent at the time. But that’s not happening much any more. The trend now is for newcomers to retain their cultural identity, and to do so with great pride and fanfare. In fact, there are strong reasons to believe that it is a natural human tendency to want to belong to some smaller, different group and not some monolithic nation-state with its homogenizing influences. This trend has not always been obvious. Running shoes and T-shirts are worldwide phenomena. It is startling to walk on a nearly deserted beach in Transkei (Southern Africa), only to be greeted by a young local man wearing a “Button your fly” T-shirt! It is also unsettling that a very popular pastime among a group of very traditional, non-Westernized youths in a remote area of New Guinea is to try to look, dress, and sing like Elvis Presley!

The shirts, shoes, and jackets worn all over the world would look familiar to even the casual
United States mall-walker, even though the local cultural differences might still be great. And, although the English language is becoming the “lingua franca” of the world, it does not mean that the Romanian (Haitian, Pakistani, Filipino) cab driver who picks you up at Kennedy airport, and who speaks to you in a reasonable approximation of English, goes home after work with a mindset that duplicates your own. It is in your own personal interest to understand the psychological aspects of culture. Consider this book of original readings on psychology and culture to be a starter kit toward reaching the goal of being more culturally sensitive and expansive in your global outlook.

We want to give you an example of what we mean when we say that learning about psychology and culture will benefit you personally. As coincidence would have it, just when one of us (Lonner) was in his office working on this chapter, one of his former students knocked on his door. LeAnn (not her real name) had just returned from France, where she spent the preceding term in a study abroad program. She came to Lonner’s office and said, “I just want to tell you how much your course (psychology and culture, which she had taken some months earlier) contributed to making my trip to France a really great experience.” Beaming and salivating for more praise to brighten up a cold and windy day, he asked LeAnn, now a senior psychology major, how this was so. She said, “When I went to France during my sophomore year I didn’t enjoy it at all. Nothing made much sense. But this time I was able to see things differently. Many of the things we talked about and read about in your class just jumped out at me this time, in living color. The whole experience was wonderful because I was better equipped to see how all kinds of cultural things make the French what they are, and how and why the French differ from Americans and people from other countries as well.”

Later in the day, Lonner reflected a bit about LeAnn’s kind words. He wondered if her successful experience could be explained by the old proverb, “Experience is the best of schoolmasters,” reflecting nothing at all about what was said or done in the course. Or maybe she just matured. On the other hand, he noticed that LeAnn’s unsolicited report was totally consistent with one of the items on his course syllabus listed under course objectives. That item reads, “To help the student understand and appreciate cultural differences so that future intercultural interaction might be more enjoyable and productive.” Several other course objectives were listed, most of them associated with academic goals.

Clearly, LeAnn benefited from learning about culture through books, papers, and discussion before experiencing it firsthand. Importantly, she thirsts for more travel and for more international travel and intercultural contact. She seems well on her way to becoming a student of the world, outstripping her age-mates who have yet to discover that the world is a large and fascinating place—a place to enjoy and experience and understand.

MORE ABOUT THIS BOOK

In the Preface, we explained some of the characteristics of this book. At this juncture we want to expand a bit on some of the points we made there. This book is an introduction to the kinds of questions and problems that are of interest to psychologists and other behavioral scientists who study interrelationships between culture and human behavior. As mentioned earlier, however, it is not a complete introduction. A comprehensive grounding in the various aspects of the world of cross-cultural research would require much more space than this book affords. For instance, a complete foundation would have to introduce students to many methodological problems such as how to make research studies equivalent across cultures, how to translate tests and instructions so that they are understood equally well in different languages, how to select appropriate samples of individuals to participate in experiments, and so on. Instead of emphasizing methods, this book presents a broad sampling of many topics that interest cross-cultural psychologists. Collectively, we believe that the readings in this volume give a unique and wide-ranging picture of assorted general concerns and problems facing mankind and how these concerns and problems are approached by cross-cultural researchers.

Each of the authors who prepared chapters for this book was selected on the basis of his or her expertise in specific areas. The authors were asked to tell, in his or her words, what he or she considers important to know at a fundamental level about the topic with which he or she has become intimately familiar by studying other cultures or by doing research in them. Each chapter was kept intentionally short so that we could have breadth of coverage rather than depth in a smaller number of areas. We
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asked authors to emphasize what they think is important for the beginning student to know.

Each section of the book is concerned with a number of interrelated topics and questions, and each of the chapters concern a certain "slice" of these topics and questions. We asked each author (or authors) to provide a short list of references to which students could turn for further and more detailed information about each topic. As editors, we have introduced each section by explaining some of the more basic concerns and questions that each chapter, in its own way, covers.

The orientation throughout this volume is decidedly psychological. However, several of the authors represent other disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, and medicine. A few authors, though they are psychologists, are as familiar with other disciplines as they are with psychology. Counting ourselves, 57 experienced researchers representing approximately 25 different cultures or ethnic groups have contributed to this book. We are indebted to the many talented and experienced researchers and scholars who accepted our invitation to write chapters for this book.

And, finally, we must pay tribute to the large number of people throughout the course of human history who have tried to understand the immense complexities of human behavior. We are still somewhat smitten by the sense of awe that Theophrastos, one of Aristotle's students, must have felt in 319 B.C. when he said,

*I have often applied my thoughts to the perplexing question—which will probably puzzle me forever—why, while all Greece lies under the same sky and all Greeks are educated alike, we have different personalities. I have been a student of human nature for a long time, and have observed the different composition of men. I thought I would write a book about it* (Cohen, 1969).

Theophrastos's puzzlement would have been compounded beyond his imagination had he known then about the total extent of human variation that the world embraced beyond Greece's skies during his days on earth; he would have been absolutely stunned if he could have peered nearly 2,400 years into the future. For (although it can never be known precisely), it is believed that there are now approximately 4,000 distinctly different psycholinguistic groups in the world. These groups range all the way from huge nation states like China and the United States, to smaller groups such as the Basque people in Spain, or to tiny groups such as the Amish of Pennsylvania.

AN OVERVIEW OF SOME MAJOR CONCERNS IN STUDYING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CULTURE AND BEHAVIOR

Understanding the relationships between culture and behavior is difficult both conceptually and organizationally. Regarding the latter, studying behavior "in the raw" or in the "real world" often creates problems of the kind that are never experienced within the warm surroundings of a cozy and well-heated psychology laboratory. In the field, things can get uncomfortably wet or dry, or dangerously hot or cold; one can become seriously ill and expect little or perhaps strange treatment. People who are counted on to participate in well-planned experiments may have no idea what the researcher is doing, or may never show up. Or they may tell falsehoods to humor, beguile, or thwart their foreign inquisitors. (One of our favorite cartoons depicts a family of natives in their home. One of the family members is saying, "Here come the anthropologists again! Quick, put the VCR and the chess set away, and throw those books under the water-bed!"). It may also be very difficult to find adequate funding to carry out the research, and to get enough time off from one's job at home to conduct research in exotic, unusual places. These logistical and organizational problems are enough to make one wonder if it's worth all the effort. On the positive side, it can be exhilarating to be in a totally different place and experience new languages, foods, and beliefs. Such forays into other parts of the world can also give one a sense of accomplishment, a feeling that something different, unique, and bold is being done.

When one does decide to delve into the broader world for research purposes, he or she must grapple with a number of conceptual problems. Several of these problems are summarized on the following pages.

Culture

A common word-game among cross-cultural psychologists is to ask, "What is Culture?" We play this game despite the fact that after many years of
studying the effects of “culture” on human behavior, neither they, nor anthropologists, nor anyone else has devised a definition that satisfies everyone. Almost unbelievably, about 175 definitions of culture can be found in the social scientific literature! These range from complex and fancy definitions to simple ones such as “culture is the programming of the mind” or “culture is the human-made part of the environment.” We have neither the space nor the inclination here to weed through these definitions, or to tell you what we think is right or wrong about them. But it’s an important concept that needs to be understood in at least a general way.

Back to our question, “What is Culture?” We have our own answer, but first we should build a context. Concepts like values, personality, society, development, and culture are not God-given ideas. They were not discovered written on the bottom of a rock somewhere amid the pyramids, or at some prestigious university! They are all rather recent constructions, made by social scientists. And like nearly all scientific concepts—physical, social, or behavioral—the concepts are used to name sets of observations, or ideas, that certain observations are thought to exemplify. So when adolescents wear clothing, use language, or listen to music that has the (likely) disapproval of their parents and other adults, it is often claimed that they “value” the favor of their friends more than their parents. That may or may not be true, but the abstract concept value was invented to explain such observations.

So what about culture? Culture is a term invented to characterize the many complex ways in which peoples of the world live, and which they tend to pass along to their offspring. It includes just about everything, from the stuff people own, make, buy, or trade (sometimes called material culture, and if you think it refers to the same things sung about by the “material girl,” you’re right), to family structure, to how life decisions are made, to how one plays with toys, to the position people assume when they say their prayers (if they say them) and go to the toilet.

Many uses of the term culture to explain differences between groups are circular. Culture is at least a label for a large category of differences among human groups. Using it as an explanation for these differences is like telling a man with an injury to his lower leg that he can’t walk because he’s lame, or like asserting that the reason a particular group of people frequently attacks its neighbors is because it’s a warlike culture! Using a label as an explanation doesn’t help our understanding very much. So when it is claimed, in this book and elsewhere, that an observed difference between groups is cultural, what is meant generally is that the nature or importance of the difference can be found in one of the many differences suggested by the term culture. In other words, a more specific inquiry is usually needed to understand the difference.

Let’s take an example from one of the chapters in this book. The concept of intelligence (a highly controversial concept) is thought by most researchers who study it to contain, in part at least, various visually related skills, like making stick figures, drawing, and modelling objects. It would be appropriate to say that there are cultural differences in this area of intelligence, as Robert Serpell shows in Chapter 23. It turns out that children in Zambia have a lot of experience making models out of wire and sticks, but they don’t get to do too much drawing, like children from the highly industrialized Western world do. Some Zambian children are generally much better at making wire models and U.S. children are much better at drawing—both performances that are thought to be part of a certain kind of intelligence. To say that there are cultural differences in intelligence means, in this case, that because the cultures of Zambian and U.S. children differ in the materials used as part of modelling and making things, their representational skills are specialized in somewhat different ways. The cause of the differences lies within the respective cultures. To say that the difference is cultural just means that we have to look for the explanation in the details of how people live. Mistry and Rogoff (Chapter 20) make a similar argument for cultural differences in memory. The same kind of argument is at the center of the discussion of the idea of cleanliness and culture discussed in Chapter 9 by Fernea and Fernea. In fact, you’ll find the same approach throughout this book. When Triandis starts Chapter 24 with the observation that the start of the Desert War of 1991 was at least to some extent the result of a cross-cultural misunderstanding, it is an invitation to try and understand exactly what the misunderstanding was and how it could have occurred.

This way of treating the idea of culture is so pervasive, and is used by most researchers in the field so automatically, that we thought we ought to explain it rather than to assume that you already know how it works. An implication of this way of thinking about culture is that the important stuff is in the details. We think that’s very true.

Consider another example. One of us (RSM) grew up in a small city in New York’s Mohawk
Valley. Everybody in the high school knew that there were cultural differences between the western European groups who had been in the United States for many generations and the eastern European groups who had not been in the United States for so long. In fact, many of the high school kids were the first in their families to grow up with English as their first language. The high school folk wisdom (if that is not a contradiction in terms) was that the (insert insulting ethnic label here) were (whatever) and that the (insert another ethnic label here) were (something else). Generally it was thought that, for example, the Poles were much more family-centered than the Scots or English. But the ways in which that made itself apparent were really meaningful to a young man who loved the outdoors, and water sports of all kinds. He (RSM) is from an English background, and while he liked the water, his family did not own property on one of New York's many Adirondack lakes. His family didn't own a boat (not even a canoe, let alone a power boat). And when he learned to water ski, it was at summer camp. But in his high school there were many Polish kids who were not as well off as his family was who appeared to have access to a camp on the lake, water skis, a power boat, and many other upscale objects. He gave a lot of thought to where that stuff came from, and wondered for a while whether his parents were holding out on him! Then he got invited to go water skiing at the camp of one of his Polish friends. It turned out that the camp was owned by the eldest uncle in the family, the boat by another uncle, the water skis by a brother, and it went on and on like that. The summer vacation and sports opportunities that the Polish boy had access to really were the aggregate of about six families, some younger, some older, with many income-producing families participating. RSM's family could never get together and share like that. It just wasn't done. To him, that was some impressive cultural difference, although it was years before he really understood what was going on. To say it was a cultural difference explains nothing on its own. But the explanation that finally emerges—that the Polish kids lived in a more communal culture, one aspect of which is sharing resources among a more extended kinship network than in more individualistic cultures—takes its meaning from the specifics of the differences.

Probably everyone who reads this chapter will be able to recount stories that are similar to the one just given, provided there was contact with people from other cultures or countries, and provided enough time has elapsed to permit reflection on why (usually) intriguing differences in values, beliefs, or behavior were observed or experienced. In experiences similar to RSM's, the other editor of this book (WJL) was literally bathed in a sea of cultures. He grew up in Butte, Montana, a colorful and rather tough copper mining town that boasted many little cultural enclaves. Thus there was "Finntown," "Little Italy," "Dublin Gulch," and so on. The town (really a small city) of some 60,000 was a miniature United Nations (although diplomacy was not one of Butte's strengths; a certain amount of physical "persuasion" was the norm) and was that way long before the U.N. was formed. Just about all of these groups of people had colorful name tags—"Micks" (Irish), "Cousin Jacks" (English), "Bohunks" (various Slavic people), Chinks (Chinese), "Dagos" or "Wops" (Italians) come to mind as quick and printable examples. If someone got into a certain kind of trouble, or if there was a certain kind of accident, or a certain type of interpersonal happening, it was generally common knowledge among Butte residents what the likely nationality of the responsible party was. For example, one would often hear such comments as "What else can you expect from the (insert proper group)," or "It must have been a (you name it) who did that."

This was stereotyping, pure and simple (see Chapter 12 by Taylor and Porter). But there is often a "kernel of truth" in stereotyping. Attributions like these in Butte were often correct (but certainly not always), thereby reinforcing the stereotype on both sides and perpetuating the relentless biases. However, the perspective and wisdom provided by the years has allowed WJL to understand that it wasn't being Irish, or Austrian, or Scottish as categories or names that "caused" these different behaviors. It was the details—details that can only be understood by examining very specific socialization and enculturation factors for each group.

These personal experiences are very long ways for us to tell you that the term culture is a non-explanatory label, refers to a lot of stuff, and that the precise and interesting meaning is indeed in the details.

Culture, therefore, is analogous to knowing the "rules of the game." When one becomes socialized (through rule-governed learning and child-rearing practices) and enculturated (through subtle informal learning) in a specific society, he or she has
learned a complex set of explicit as well as implicit rules concerning how he or she should behave among his or her fellows who share the same culture by virtue of being raised under the same rules. Just as one cannot either play or understand the game of basketball by using a baseball rule book, one who has learned how to "play the game" of culture in Korea should not expect to be equally competent in "playing the game" on New Zealand's terms.

Universalism versus Relativism
Cross-cultural psychologists often have to deal with a very important question: How much of the behavior that one observes in another culture (or one's own) can generally be seen in other cultures? Of course, this implies a corollary question: Is what one has observed or experienced in another culture (or in one's own) restricted to that single instance? This is the issue concerning how much of human behavior is universal as opposed to its being totally relative to each and every culture. Relativists, under the slogan, of "radical cultural relativism," generally argue that people must be studied only within the context of their own culture. At the other extreme are the "universalists" who argue that all humans, at base, are the same; they might point out that only a few surface elements, such as language, manners, or clothing create the impression of astonishing differences where there are few or even none. Another position, which we think is untenable, is called absolutism. An absolutist would argue that all human behavior is essentially the same, and may just be masked by variations in languages and various superficial features such as clothing and modes of transportation. Thus, they would believe that studying "culture" is unnecessary. Chapter 18 by Adamopoulos and Lonner discusses these distinctions in more detail.

This issue is related to the "leash principle" developed by the sociobiologist E. O. Wilson (1980). Some behaviors, such as eating, sleeping, drinking, and sexual activity, are on very "short and tight leashes"—the biological characteristics and physical needs of the species literally guarantee great similarity in such behaviors across cultures. Behavior on "long and flexible leashes," on the other hand, permit much greater differences across cultures. These "leashes" permit clear and distinct differences in clothing, in music, in bodily adornment, and in many other behaviors. But despite such widespread differences in behavior, so say the sociobiologists, the "biogrammar" of the species places an absolute ceiling on culture or anything else not biological as a way to explain human behavior. If one wanted to pursue this argument further, it might be argued that cultural relativism is untenable. Different and exotic behaviors that seemingly exist nowhere else would simply be colorful and rare extensions of basic universal dimensions of behavior.

We are thus faced with a series of age-old questions: In what ways are humans alike? Different? What accounts for these similarities and differences? Perhaps we must be content with a famous statement made years ago by two prominent social scientists: In some ways each of us is like all other humans; in other ways we are like some other humans; and in still other ways we are like no other human.

SOME RECURRING ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Psychologists and others who study behavior in global perspective must contend with a number of other challenges. We will close this introduction to Psychology and Culture by introducing the reader to several of these challenges. Many of these issues and concerns are to be found throughout the book.

1. What is the nature of the samples? The scientific method involves making generalizations from samples to some specific universe that the samples are believed to represent. For instance, a geologist might wish to develop an accurate picture of the nature of the Earth's crust. But he or she cannot study the entire surface of the planet. Thus, he or she would want to get a number of good and representative samples and not, for example, samples from around the Swiss Alps only. So it is with making generalizations about human behavior. Cross-cultural psychologists are concerned about samples at four levels: the societal level, the community level, the person level, and the behavioral level. Thus the culture-comparative researcher would ask the following questions: How many societies do I need, and why?; how many communities or groups within each society do I need, and why?; how many individuals in each community do I need, and why?; and which behaviors manifested by these people must I measure,
and why? Only when these questions are satisfactorily answered and actually carried out in the research can one hope to make reasonable generalizations about that aspect of human behavior that is being investigated.

2. The "hard-data" versus "soft-data" issue. Many scholars who study culture tend to distrust data that are based upon, for instance, observations by one researcher, using one method (e.g., an interview), involving just a single culture. Studies that involve several researchers, using several different methods, and several strategically chosen cultures are difficult to conduct, but their sophistication usually pays off. If all "arrows" from these multiple probes point in the same direction, one would assume that something solid has been found. In the former example, the data could be biased because of researcher bias or because of flaws inherent in a single method.

3. The problem of "deviant" cases. What does one do with a unique case among an otherwise solid pattern of regularity? For instance, if in a sample of 25 cultures we find that the data from 24 are consistent with theoretical expectations while the data from the 25th are not, would this be sufficient evidence to discount the otherwise uniform pattern? In other words, would one exception to the rule lead us to conclude that we had better not trust the evidence provided by all the other cases? One research strategy involves probing deeply into the deviant case in an effort to find out why it departed from the others. It is a method primarily associated with anthropology, and goes by the unsurprising title, deviant case analysis. Those who use this strategy are more interested in the irregularities and reasons underlying them than in the general rule.

4. The problem of equivalence. Before valid comparisons can be made across cultures, equivalent bases of comparison must be established. For instance, if one wanted to study aggression across cultures, it may be inappropriate to use, as a basis of comparison, the number of people in prisons in different cultures who have been incarcerated for armed robbery. This is because it may be that each culture has its own criteria for imprisonment. Or the great variation there is in the availability of handguns may form an inappropriate basis for comparison. The problem of linguistic equivalence must also be addressed. This means that words or concepts must mean the same thing, or approximately the same thing, to people who have been sampled in different cultures. It takes a lot of thought and hard work to construct such things as useful and sophisticated questionnaires. Some researchers have tried to minimize translation problems by using technology. But this can backfire. One of our favorite examples is the translation machine that translated the idiomatic phrase "Out of sight, out of mind" from English into Russian. The resulting Russian "equivalent": "Invisible maniac."

5. The clarity of concepts studied. The social and behavioral sciences have their share of rather obscure phrases or concepts. These concepts can mean many different things to different people, or they may simply be too difficult to measure with any precision. An example is the (apparently) common mental condition of depression. Depression is not an exact term, and because of this it is extremely difficult to measure it. Chapter 41 by Manson describes a procedure that is useful in understanding culture-specific meanings of depression. Depression as a concept certainly can't compete, for instance, with concepts such as calorie or white blood cell count, both of which have very specific and clear definitions everywhere.

6. The problem of "deep culture" versus "cultural gloss." Have you ever noticed how well you know your closest friend, or your brother or sister? You have acquired this knowledge through years of sharing things with that person and observing his or her behavior under many different circumstances. When someone says to her bosom buddy, "Look, Cynthia, I just know you wouldn't do such and such," she is demonstrating deep knowledge of Cynthia compared with a shallow or superficial knowledge. You probably know many people pretty well, but only one or two really well. It is the same with cultures. In a sense, cultures have their own "personalities," and it takes a long while to understand one of them—even your own—deeply. Anthropologists, when they study cultures, speak of "deep cultural immersion." Through this process, which can take years, the anthropologist hopes to get to know the culture in question very deeply, perhaps even intimately. Contrast this with a fleeting or shallow knowledge of a culture. Under these
circumstances, the observer or researcher may pick up some superficial aspects, or the surface gloss, of a culture or ethnic group, but in the process may overlook the essential character of a culture. In the past, some cross-cultural researchers have been called “jet-set” researchers: they would fly to some exotic place, spend a few weeks giving tests or supervising people conducting interviews, then return home to write the research report in some comfortable office. They scarcely knew anything about the culture they studied, despite their good intentions. So, we have a rule of thumb to recommend: place more value on research done over a longer period of time and with local support and collaboration than research which seems to have been rushed or characterized by what appears to be “glossy” and superficial interpretations.

7. A fundamental problem: how much of behavior is learned as opposed to being inherited genetically? This, of course, concerns the hollow and unanswerable question: What is more important in understanding behavior: nature or nurture? It is impossible to answer this question definitively. We can only say with certainty that both are important, and that the learning atmosphere (nurture) and the biological background (nature) are in a constant state of complex interaction. On the other hand, we can also be reasonably assured that the more that behaviors are linked to physiological factors (such as basal metabolism, blood pressure, and speed of neural transmission in the central nervous system) the more universal and less variable they are. The corollary here is that the more that behaviors are dependent on strictly cultural factors, the less universal and more culturally variable they will be. These relationships are shown in Figure 1.

But even with this simple diagram we can see how interactions can complicate matters. For instance, it is usually a physiological necessity to wear some kind of clothing. Clothing is therefore a universal based upon this biological imperative. That being the case, why then don’t all the people of the world wear the same kinds of clothes? The answer, of course, lies in the domain of culture. An Eskimo would look silly trekking across the tundra in Scottish kilts, just as a man in Scotland would look out of place on the golf tee wearing a hand-stitched jacket made from untanned caribou hide.

FIGURE 1 A schematic representation of the extent of genetic and cultural inheritance in five domains of behavior (cf. Poortinga, Kop & Van de Vijver, 1989)

SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this introduction we have given a brief sketch of some of the background factors that influence the cross-cultural psychologist’s interest in, and concern about, the interrelationships between culture and behavior. We believe that such a foundation is needed to understand and appreciate the many chapters in this book. Taken together, these chapters give a broad introduction to many of the ways culture influences behavior. However, important as these topics are, they constitute only a small fraction of the total number of topics that could be included in a potentially neverending book. We hope that as a sample of topics written in interesting ways by very competent people the reader will gain a deeper appreciation for the many ways in which culture shapes, modifies, and otherwise adds distinctiveness to human behavior. In a shrinking world which is chronically suffering from open warfare, other forms of intergroup hostility, social injustices, interpersonal misunderstandings, competition for scarce resources, and so on, it is imperative that we develop more respect for and understanding of the realities of the many cultural
and ethnic groups that make up the species called *homo sapiens*.

REFERENCES


