# Focus on the Social Context: Cultural/Contextual Psychology

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## I. INTRODUCTION
### A. Introduction

- Are you a different person in different cultures?
- Socio-cultural theory holds that you are.
  - **Culture**: A program of shared rules, handed down from generation to generation, that govern the behavior of members of a community or society, and a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes shared by most members of that community.
- Cross cultural psychology shows how much culture affects our behavior and attitudes.
  - Also shows how the violation of our cultural standards creates strong emotional reactions.

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## I. INTRODUCTION
### B. Cross-Cultural Psychology

- Cultures vary in conversational distances: The physical distances separating speakers n a conversation
  - We tend to stand far away from each other but others (Middle Easterners) tend to stand close.
- Cultures vary in extent of their focus on the self.
  - Individualistic: Focus on self and personal needs (American and European cultures)
  - Collectivist: Focus on one's part in a group, particularly a family (Hispanic and Asian cultures)

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## I. INTRODUCTION
### B. Cross-Cultural Psychology

- Cultures vary in how they are regulated by time.
  - Monochronic Cultures: Time is organized sequentially: Schedules valued over people
  - Polychronic Cultures: Time is organized horizontally: People value relationships over schedules.
- Cultures vary in the meaning of polite behavior
  - Native Americans think it impolite to look you in the eye.
  - Certain religious sects think its impolite to even shake hands with members of the opposite sex.

## I. INTRODUCTION
### C. Cultural/Contextual Psychology

- Cultural/contextual psychology uses the insight of but is distinct from cross-cultural psychology
  - Cross-cultural psychologists generally use culture as a *independent variable* to determine the effect of culture.
    - Are Piaget's stages of development the same across a variety of cultures?
      - They found that culture matters (Cole Gay Glick & Sharp, 1972)
  - Cultural/contextual psychologists determine how local practices shape psychological processes.
    - How do cultural processes affect thinking the manner that it does (Vygotsky, 1962; 1978).

## I. INTRODUCTION
### C. Cultural/Contextual Psychology

- Culture may best be thought of more narrowly as the social context in which people operate.
  - The implication is that the individual must be understood as *contextualized;* as defined within a circumstance which controls behaviors.
    - Consider your reaction to a stranger sharing with you intimate problems in his or her life
    - Consider that information is being shared in church or in school , Do you react different? Why?
  - Of interest to the cultural/contextual psychologist is how do we all learn (uniformly) of the different social norms operating on one setting or another.

## I. INTRODUCTION
### C. Cultural/Contextual Psychology

- Cultural/Contextual Psychology assumes the idea that culture and mind are inseparable.
  - There are two central implications
    - Psychological theories grounded in one culture are likely to be limited in applicability when applied to a different culture.
    - There are no universal laws for how the mind works.
  - These implications run counter to the assumption of other paradigms.
    - They hold the mind to be an autonomous and individualistic biological, computational, or self-conscious entity.

## II. GERGEN
### A. Central Points

- To Gergen, psychology is imperialistic when compared to cultural anthropology,
  - Others in different cultures are understood in terms of western ideals and preconceptions.
    - Compare primitive vs. modern mind compared to formal vs. preoperational thinkers
  - He turns the tables and asks to what extent is psychological science a cultural manifestation?
    - Science itself is a western cultural tradition, along with it suppositions about the nature of knowledge, the character of objectivity, the place of value in knowledge, and the nature of linguistic representation.

II. GERGEN
   A. Central Points

- Gergan makes his point about the ethnocentrism of psychology by exploring cultural psychologies from around the world
  - Three particular approaches
    - Indian Psychology
    - Maorian Psychology (Maori people in New Zealand)
    - Turkish Psychology
  - The goal was to understand the diversity of approaches
    - Of particular interest is how and why the psychology practiced in these cultures is different than the psychology practiced in the US and the rest of the west.

II. GERGEN
  B. Indian Psychology

- Indian Psychology was initially western but was soon revised.
  - Universities taught western psychology isolated from Indian culture and thought.
    - Moved to a view of persons as guardians of culturally based assets.
      - Human action is explored through different modes of understanding which emphasize subjectivity, interpretation, and everyday understanding.
    - Proposal for an indigenous psychology, based in on Hindu construals of self, identity and consciousness.
      - Different accounts of therapy, leadership, achievement , emotion, justice, morality , the concept of well-being, values, development, detachment and organizational interventions.

II. GERGEN
  C. Maori Psychology

- The Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand.
  - They are Polynesian (migrated 9th and 12th C) and comprise about 10% of the population with many distinctive tribes, each with its own customs.
    - For over 300 years, the British asserted their rule of the territories of the Maori people.
  - Psychology pathologized the Maori people by diagnosing them as helpless
    - Minorities everywhere find psychology more of a form of social control than a practice of compassion and caring (e.g., Native Americans)

II. GERGEN
  C. Maori Psychology

- The issues reflect a clash of cultures
  - Maori psychiatric admission rates are two or three times those of non-Maori
    - Their dialogic (narrative) style is quite different and misunderstood by the dominant culture.
    - To be effective, psychologists had to tailored therapeutic processes to the social expectations and practices of the Maori.
  - Academic and applied psychology are just deemed irrelevant for measuring, diagnosing, or understanding the Maori people.

## II.  GERGEN
### D. Turkish Psychology

- Turkish scholars transforming psychology to meet the needs of the socio-cultural context.
  - Muslim dominated Turkey requires ethno-psychologically sensitive research
    - New conceptualizations of mental health, child development, and family (Gulerce, l992).
    - Psychologists adapting and normalizing western instruments to the Turkish contexts and challenging various psychological ideas
      - Review includes unidirectionality, unilinearity, universalism, hierarchical and progressive order of development.
      - A rational, materialist, pragmatic, functionalist, self-centered, and self-contained human beings

## II.  GERGEN
### E. Conclusions

- Accounts are striking similar and set stage for a fruitful range of inter-cultural dialogues.
  - The result of the dialogue would be multiple…
    - conceptions of knowledge (metatheory)
    - discourses of human functioning (indigenous theory),
    - culturally located descriptions of action (research outcomes)
    - professional practices (e.g. therapy, counseling, meditation, mediation).
  - Abstract universal theories are seen as parochial and culturally-sensitive practice as valuable

## II.  GERGEN
### E. Conclusions

- The culturally-sensitive practice focus on a variety of practical concerns
  - These concerns include health (e.g. trust in medicine, safe sex), birth control, child abuse, drug addiction, ethnic and religious conflict, and effects of technology on society.
  - Abstract theory not abandoned, but practical concerns drive theory construction.
    - But the alternative conceptions of the person invite alternative modes of action, new institutions, and new policies.

## III.  INTELLECTUAL HISTORY
### A. Post Modernism

- History
  - Premodernism
    - Refers to the belief that human behavior can be explained in terms of Church dogma.
      - Prevalent during the middle ages
      - Church authority slowly began (Renaissance) to be questioned and more objective modes of inquiry developed.
  - Modernism
    - The enlightenment (17thC ) ensued; experience and reason were emphasized in the quest for knowledge.
    - The terms *modernism* and *enlightenment* are used synonymously.

## III. INTELLECTUAL HISTORY
### A. Post Modernism

- History
  - Postmodernism
    - Hume and Kant and later the romanticists and existentialists attacked enlightenment ideas
      - Postmodernism, also called *social constructionism*, began its attack on enlightenment ideals in the mid-1960's.
      - Postmodernism believes that "reality" is created by individuals and groups within various personal, historical and cultural contexts.
    - The "truth" is always relative to cultural, group, and personal perspectives.
      - Position adopted by sophists, skeptics, romantics, existentialists, and humanist psychologists

## III. INTELLECTUAL HISTORY
### A. Post Modernism

- Postmodernism and linguistic analysis
  - Language carefully tied to reality to create the correspondence theory of truth
    - For example, philosophers in the past believed that to be a member of a category required the possession of some defining characteristic.
  - Wittgenstein and other postmodernists reject this argument.
    - They believed the search for essences or universals is doomed to failure.
    - Thus they replaced the traditional concept of essence or universal with that of family resemblance.

## III. INTELLECTUAL HISTORY
### B. Narrative Psychology

- Narrative approach to psychology
  - The "narrative turn" in both the social sciences and in psychology reflects a rejection of elements of traditional scientific approaches
    - Psychologists borrow or adapt concepts and notions about *narrative* from literary theorists, philosophers, historians, theologians, anthropologists, sociologists, and scholars of women's, gay/lesbian, and ethnic studies.
  - The narrative approach used to understand issues of self, identity, morality, social relations, reasoning, perception, reading, and the creation of fictional worlds among other issues.

## IV. CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
### A. Ratner's Analysis

- Contemporary cultural/contextual psychology has moved in three distinguishable directions
  - Each explains how cultural/contextual factors exercises such control over individuals.
  - The three theoretical orientations include
    - **Activity Theory**: Explains psychology as grounded in practical cultural activities.
    - **The Symbolic Approach**: Explains psychology as formed by collective symbols
    - **Individualistic Approach**: Emphasizes individual construction of psychological functions from collective symbols and artifacts.

## IV. CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
### B. Symbolic Approach

- Symbolic Approach
  - The predominant approach to cultural psychology.
    - Defines culture as shared symbols, concepts, meanings, and linguistic terms.
  - Socially constructed entities being produced by individuals in concert.
    - The socially constructed entities organize psychological phenomena
    - Socially contracted and internalized ways of labeling and categorizing information and directing responses in particular ways.

## IV. CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
### B. Symbolic Approach

- Symbolic Approach
  - These social symbolic approach exemplified in Shweder's account of sleeping arrangements for family members in different societies.
    - Argues that cultural arrangements for sleeping are generated by moral concepts
      - Anglo-Americans insist that husband and wife sleep together because we believe in the principle of "the sacred couple."
      - Not shared by the Oriya in India (ibid., p. 32).
    - Also comprises the sleeping arrangements of children
      - Autonomy and independence reinforced by sleeping alone which is inconsistent with the communal bad, which is far more culturally popular.

## IV. CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
### B. Symbolic Approach

- Symbolic Approach
  - The rarity of child abuse among rural Turkish people also reflects the symbolic approach.
    - Muslim beliefs that life is unpredictable and subject to the vagaries of natural and supernatural forces which transcend human will.
    - People have neither the power nor responsibility to control life, so they don't control their children.
      - Caretakers accept and indulge children's behavior. As a result, most misbehaviors of children are not punished but tolerated as childish naughtiness. Parents' benevolent treatment of their children is mediated by beliefs about the causes of events, the powers and responsibilities of people, and the capabilities of children.

## IV. CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
### B. Symbolic Approach

- Symbolic Approach
  - Strengths
    - Offers a specific description of culture.
      - Collective symbols or concepts having specific content
    - Internalization symbols and organization of phenomena.
  - Weaknesses
    - It is a purely mental view of culture:
      - No reference to material and institutional considerations such as social structure, conditions, politics, power and control,
    - How and who symbols construct remains unclear.
      - The social-psychological processes which lead to changing symbols are not considered.
      - The heterogeneity of culture not considered and not all groups equal in creating or valuing cultural symbols.

## IV.   CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
### C.  Activity Theory

- Activity Theory
  - Practical, socially organized activity is the primary cultural influence on psychology.
    - Engaging in socially organized/mediated activity (science, schooling, art, writing, and reading) stimulate distinctive kinds of psychological phenomena.
      - This is assumed to be how the cultural become the psychological
    - Consistent with Vygotskian notion that cognitive development proceeds from the outside in rather than the inside out (Piaget).
      - The dependence of psychological phenomena on practical social activity is known as praxis, Tatigkeit (German), or deyatelnost (Russian).

## IV.   CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
### C.  Activity Theory

- Activity Theory
  - Strengths
    - Activity theory is used to elucidate the full social character of activities.
    - The analysis focus on hidden social norms, roles, leadership, privileges, and opportunities embedded in activity.
  - Weaknesses
    - Activity influences psychology but process is not adequately delineated.
    - Activity theorists overlook the opposite direction by which people construct, maintain, and reconstruct activity.

## IV.   CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
### D. Individualistic Approach

- Individualistic Approach
  - Assumes that individual factors (creativity) mediate culture by selectively assimilating culture.
    - Rather that culture alone organizing psychological functions, culture is regarded as an external context which the individual utilizes and reconstructs.
    - The defines culture as the outcome of an interaction between an individual and social institutions-conditions.
      - In this sense, individuals "co-construct" culture
  - The individualist approach allows for dynamic changes in culture.
    - Parenting activities represents the re-negotiations every generation regarding  cultural expectations and practices.

## IV.   CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
### D. Individualistic Approach

- Individualistic Approach
  - Strengths
    - Importance in acknowledging that culture does not function apart from  individuals.
    - Also in acknowledging individual variations in psychological phenomena.
    - Individualistic cultural psychologists empower the individual to resist social influences by exercising internal capabilities which are independent of society.
  - Weaknesses
    - The influence of collective cultural constraints not acknowledged, which limits cultural negotiations.

IV.    CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
D. Individualistic Approach

- Individualistic Approach
  - Weaknesses
    - The influence of collective cultural constraints not acknowledged, which limits cultural negotiations.
    - The approach may both exaggerate individual agency, autonomy, and diversity and denigrates the reality of culture altogether.
      - Underestimates the importance of adapting oneself to normative, regulated activities and concepts.
    - View of cultural change as individual and unpredictable rather than political, collective, and perhaps rule-governed.

IV.    CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
E. General Conclusions

- Four general conclusions.
  - Psychological phenomena are cultural in essence.
    - Psychological phenomena are formed as people participate in social life, they embody characteristics of a particular social life, and they generate behavior that perpetuates particular social relationships.
  - The cultural essence of psychological phenomena consists in practical social activities.
    - The symbolic and the individual have their effect in cultural activities.

IV.    CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL APPROACHES
E. General Conclusions

- Four general conclusions.
  - Psychological phenomena organized by social concepts
    - Consistent with as symbolic cultural psychologists, and certain activity theorists such as Vygotsky, emphasize.
      - But the symbolic concepts are not passively acquired to purely mental.
  - Social activities, concepts, and psychological phenomena are devised by humans, as individualistic cultural psychologists insist.
    - But agency may not be the only controlling factor , as agency itself develops through participating in broad, collective social activities.