

CROSS- CULTURAL TOPICS IN PSYCHOLOGY

2nd Edition

Edited by LEONORE LOEB ADLER
and UWE P. GIELEN

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Foreword by Florence L. Denmark

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CROSS- CULTURAL TOPICS IN PSYCHOLOGY

This book is dedicated to our siblings, to Margo, Ute, Dina, and Anka, who always supported our ideas and activities with candor.

With great sincerity,
Leonore and Uwe

Foreword

Florence L. Denmark

Psychology is a science that seeks to explain the fundamental questions regarding human thought and behavior. This is a broad and far-reaching goal. The majority of human psychological research today is focused solely on the thought and behavior patterns of Americans. While this research is meaningful, it certainly does not provide an adequate explanation for all human thoughts and behaviors. Restricting the scope of research to the population in the United States of America inherently limits the capability of the results to provide universal explanations. This consequence is a tremendous detriment to the discipline and highlights the overwhelming need to expand the breadth of research to include individuals from other countries across the globe.

Psychologists have long debated whether human behavior is caused by nature, the genetic makeup of individuals, or by nurture—the environment in which individuals are reared. Culture is one of the most pervasive elements of a person's nurture because it represents the overarching principles that shape a society, which will in turn influence upbringing. The study of cross-cultural psychology may play a critical role in resolving specific issues within the nature-nurture debate. Reminiscent of a controlled experiment, individuals living in different countries share the same basic biological composition, but differ in respect to the environmental influences impinging on them. Investigating precisely how their behavior is different is thus a function of cultural difference. We can see more clearly the areas of behavior in which nurture is dominant.

Thus, cross-cultural psychology provides a glimpse of both similarities and differences in human nature. Research is guided by a search for the universal explanations underlying behavior, and one common goal is to synthesize

findings into a single cohesive theory. However, as is often the case, thorough examinations of human behavior often point to areas of difference, and it is equally important to draw conclusions based on these distinctions. Cross-cultural psychology draws its theoretical strengths from working within this framework of similarities and differences.

The importance of cross-cultural psychology can be demonstrated more clearly by drawing an analogy to a basic area in psychological research—the controlled laboratory experiment. When psychologists undertake a systematic study of human behavior, they must choose a sample of participants for examination. In most instances, the researchers are seeking broad explanations for human behaviors that are generalizable and can be applied beyond the laboratory setting to a variety of people. Thus, it is imperative that this sample population include a diversity of individuals. If an experiment utilized African American males ages 18 to 25 as participants, then the subsequent conclusions would pertain to this very specific segment of the population only. Indisputably, the results of this study cannot be applied to males from other age brackets, males from other ethnic groups, or females. This consequence is not inherently problematic; perhaps the researcher's endeavors were carefully directed toward this select group. However, if the researcher is attempting to construct a broad theory of human behavior, then a larger, more diverse sample is required. It logically flows from this example that it is impossible to obtain a complete understanding of human behavior by narrowing perspective to include individuals from only one cultural background.

Incorporating cultural diversity into psychological experiments is only one area in which cross-cultural studies can expand knowledge. Of equal importance is the need to examine the ideas and theories that originate in countries outside of the United States. Psychologists do not reside solely within the confines of Western culture; they are a breed of professionals who inhabit all corners of the world. Anyone who attends an international psychology conference realizes that valuable contributions to research and practice are derived from individuals residing in countries besides the United States. In fact, one of the main reasons to organize conferences is precisely reflective of this relationship. These meetings provide an appropriate setting to convene people from all over the world to compare and contrast their thoughts and beliefs. In a similar fashion, this volume of *Cross-Cultural Topics in Psychology* assembles varied perspectives and explores the many applications of cultural studies on traditional psychological theory. Just as each conference participant contributes insights gained through personal research and experience, each chapter of this book is infused with insights that are gleaned from cross-cultural comparisons. The science of psychology benefits tremendously from this exchange of information and would be incomplete in its absence. Underlying this collection is the belief that we must not be so narrow-minded as to lose sight of the significance of cultural relativism

and of the power of diversity to enrich psychological theory and practice. The publication of this volume is a significant achievement toward the goal of widespread dissemination of a psychology that is sensitive to multiculturalism.

I am extremely pleased to introduce the second edition of *Cross-Cultural Topics in Psychology*, a highly valuable resource and an important contribution to the ever-expanding field of psychology. Leonore Loeb Adler and Uwe P. Gielen have compiled a text of unparalleled scope, drawing from both traditional topics in the discipline of psychology and from areas inextricably linked to multiculturalism. Some chapters provide a thorough reexamination of fundamental psychological subjects, such as personality, development, and psychopathology, by infusing them with a cross-cultural perspective. Other chapters consider topics that naturally lend themselves to inspection through cross-cultural lenses, such as immigration and multinational enterprises. These editors are renowned for their expertise in cross-cultural psychology, and in this volume they have assembled an insightful collection of psychological theories that are sensitive to cultural relativity. A quick review of current literature will reveal the dearth of textbooks on multicultural psychology, and consequently, it is impossible to overstate the necessity for a resource of this kind.

I must also highlight the overwhelming need to introduce cultural studies into the academic discipline of psychology. Specifically, it is important to expose psychology students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels to a global perspective so that they may gain an appreciation for the influence of culture and not be blinded by the American viewpoint that currently dominates their curriculum. The lack of cross-cultural course offerings is certainly a void in any complete education in psychology. Further, I enthusiastically recommend this second volume of *Cross-Cultural Topics in Psychology* as an excellent learning tool to perfectly complement any instruction in psychology.

Finally, understanding other cultures can allow us to better appreciate global concerns, ensuring us to work in unison toward solutions of international problems. The contributions of psychology from other nations can also accrue to a deeper and broader-based understanding of ourselves. As experts in human behavior, psychologists can influence other disciplines and serve as leaders in the academic arena, adopting a wider worldview that is beneficial to all.

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I

History and Methods of Cross-Cultural Studies

Introduction to Cross-Cultural Psychology

David Yau-Fai Ho and Madalina Wu

Cross-cultural psychology has a long past, but only a short history. Psychologists have had a long-standing interest in the impact of cultures on individuals. For instance, how do child-rearing practices influence personality formation in various cultures? Do speakers of different languages have different patterns of thought, as claimed by the Whorfian hypothesis? Is the Oedipal complex universal? As an organized intellectual discipline, however, cross-cultural psychology is no more than two or three decades old. A developmental milestone was the establishment of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology in 1972, when its inaugural meeting was held in Hong Kong.

Today, cross-cultural psychology is firmly established as a psychological science. Yet most students of psychology probably complete their studies, even at the graduate level, without coming into formal contact with cross-cultural psychology. More seriously, many psychologists still regard it as peripheral to the concerns of mainstream psychology. The reason is that psychology has always aspired to be a universal science, to be achieved through the study of individuals, without reference to cultural contexts. It aims to discover “objective,” universal psychological principles. Ideally, these principles, like those in physics, should be invariant through time and space. For instance, the principles of conditioning apply at any time, at any place—and, it might be added, to dogs and humans alike. There is, presumably, nothing “cross-cultural” about conditioning or other psychological “facts,” such as maturation and individual differences. The same assumptions of regularity or lawfulness governing behavior would apply regardless of historical and cultural context. True enough, people behave differently in different

cultures, but that is of central concern to cultural anthropology, not psychology.

Our contention is that no serious psychologist can remain indifferent to and ignorant of cross-cultural psychology. Psychology is distinct from the physical sciences in that the agent of investigation is also the object being investigated: It is the study of human beings by human beings. It studies not only human behavior but also conceptions about human behavior, including our own—that is, the question of how psychological knowledge, including that about the self, is generated. Culture enters into the generation of psychological knowledge because of its pervasive influence on both behavior and conceptions of behavior. As we shall see, cross-cultural psychology is much more than the intellectual luxury of studying people's oddities in exotic cultures. It challenges mainstream psychology to a self-examination and to make good its claim of being a universal science.

CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY DEFINED

Cross-cultural psychology is the scientific study of human behavior and mental processes, including both their variability and invariance, under diverse cultural conditions. Its primary aims are to investigate (a) systematic relations between behavioral variables and ethnic-cultural variables, and (b) generalizations of psychological principles.

This definition embodies a number of important notions. First, cross-cultural psychology is a science, by virtue of the scientific principles and methods it employs. We may go as far as to say that cross-cultural psychology owes its gain in stature largely to its methodological contributions to psychological science.

Second, unlike cultural anthropology, cross-cultural psychology is not primarily concerned with the comparative study of cultures per se, that is, the enduring characteristics that mark a culture apart from other cultures. It is still focused on the individual and thus retains its identity as a psychological science. The units of comparison are not modal or normative patterns at the collective or population level but are the psychological functioning of individuals across cultures. However, it insists on adopting a perspective of crucial significance: The individual is not regarded as an abstract entity to be studied without reference to culture; accordingly, the unit of analysis is now the individual-in-a-cultural-context.

Third, as in general psychology, included in the scope of investigation are both observable behavior and mental processes that cannot be directly observed but must be inferred from behavioral or physiological observations. Animal behavior is excluded, presumably because culture is unique to humans. More important, the scope of investigation is explicitly enlarged to include, ideally, the total range of human behavior and mental processes under all known cultural conditions. Virtually nothing about life's secrets in

diverse cultures is left untouched—not even unusual behavior under extreme cultural conditions. The enlarged range of observations forms the foundation for attaining the two stated aims.

Fourth, by definition, a comparative framework is always operative. Both differences and similarities in psychological and social functioning across ethnic-cultural boundaries are studied. Strictly speaking, however, cross-ethnic and cross-national comparisons do not qualify as cross-cultural research, unless relevant cultural variables have been included.

Comparison is thus the hallmark of cross-cultural psychology. It should be noted, though, that all scientific investigation entails comparison. The significance of a phenomenon can be gauged only against a background of patterns, regularities, or uniformities established after prolonged observation. Cross-cultural psychology goes to an extreme in delineating conditions under which legitimate, systematic comparisons across cultures can be made. It pays special attention to questions of comparability of samples and equivalence of measures used in different cultural contexts. Probably it is in answering these questions that its methodological contributions will be most strongly felt.

THE STRENGTHS AND PROMISES OF CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Cross-cultural research is far more ambitious than merely cataloging behavioral differences across ethnic-cultural groups. The scope of investigation is enlarged, giving substance to the claim that psychology is a universal science of human behavior. We are compelled to recognize the inadequacy of basing our knowledge on research conducted within only one culture or under a limited range of cultural conditions. We are thus challenged to examine the completeness of psychology as a body of knowledge about human beings. Ideally, the scope of investigation should be panhuman—that is, inclusive of the entire range of human behavior under all known cultural conditions.

Obvious advantages follow from conducting research in diverse cultural conditions. The range of cultural variables is increased, especially if extreme or unusual cultural environments are included. The likely result would be a corresponding increase in the range of observed behaviors. Consequently, we lay a more solid empirical foundation upon which theories may be constructed.

Let us consider, for instance, the advantage of increasing the range of cultural variables in estimating the heritability of the intelligence quotient (IQ)—a research problem that continues to be hotly debated. Heritability is a statistical concept derived from genetics. A coefficient of heritability, which ranges from 0.00 to 1.00, tells us the percentage of variance accounted for by genetic factors. Many investigators have put the value of the

heritability coefficient for human ability or achievement around .80, which is quite high. But is this a fair estimate? Research on the heritability of the IQ has been plagued by a host of methodological problems. Here we shall consider only one: the sampling of populations. Most of the research has been conducted in Euro-American societies. Suppose we extend the sampling to the entire universe of populations, including those living under Stone Age conditions. (This requires the construction of IQ tests that have panhuman applicability—in actuality, far from being achieved.) The range of environmental variables would be immensely increased. Consequently, in all likelihood, a much lower heritability coefficient would be obtained. The point is that a finding about heritability is applicable only to the population where the study is made. Furthermore, if the environmental characteristics of the population change over time, it is applicable only to the generation studied. In sum, the finding is subject to both spatial and temporal limitations.

We can also test the generality of psychological laws or principles. For example, are Piaget's stages of intellectual development invariant across cultures? And Kohlberg's stages of moral development? The degree of generality may be assessed by their range of applicability, that is, by delineating the cultural conditions under which they remain valid or become invalid. Suppose we have a principle stating that there is a specific pattern of relations among several variables. We find that the pattern of relations is highly similar across the cultures studied. It would be reasonable to conclude that the principle tested has a high degree of generality.

Panhuman variability and invariance in psychological functioning can be established with confidence only when observations have been made under a sufficiently wide range of cultural conditions. Principles presumed to have panhuman validity, that is, invariance across all known cultural conditions, are universal generalizations. They are especially significant because the quest for universal principles has been a long-standing aim of psychological science. Cross-cultural psychology participates in this quest by helping to distinguish universal concepts from emic impostors. In practice, however, panhuman validity is difficult to demonstrate. What is required is that no major exception is found in a sizable number of diverse cultures investigated.

Another promise of cross-cultural research stems from its inclusion of and emphasis given to ethnic-cultural variables, in addition to the usual variables of psychological functioning. Investigating systematic relations between these two classes of variables is now brought into the research agenda. These relations may be causal or merely correlational. If causal relations are entailed, usually psychological variables are regarded as the effects (or dependent variables), and cultural variables as the causes (or independent variables). The reason is that, traditionally, behavioral scientists are interested in how culture shapes psychological functioning. However, there is no intrinsic reason why this has to be so. A fertile area of investigation attracts the attention

of psychologists and cultural anthropologists alike: How does the psychological and social functioning of individuals collectively affect cultural processes and translate into cultural change? Boyer (1994), for example, has explored the relation between cognitive constraints and the recurrence of certain features of religious representations across a wide range of cultures.

If our research agenda were successfully followed, cross-cultural psychology would attain the status of a mature science. The promise is no less than a coherent body of knowledge about behavior-culture interactions involving both individual and collective phenomena. These interactions are of unsurpassed significance in behavioral science because they tell the story of how human character and culture create each other. If culture is defined as that part of the environment created by human beings, then we create environments that, in turn, make us human. In short, human beings are both the creators and the products of culture.

ANALYTIC CONCEPTS USED IN CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Cross-cultural psychologists have introduced three important terms that serve as analytic concepts: *emics*, *etics*, and *theorics*. Emics are culture-specific concepts; they apply in a particular culture, and no a priori claim is made that they apply in another. The emic approach aims to describe and interpret behavior in terms that are meaningful to members of a particular culture. Etics are culture-invariant concepts or universals; or, if not entirely universal, they apply to more than one culture—many more. They may be used to analyze emic phenomena. The etic approach aims to make valid cross-cultural comparisons and is characterized by the discovery of true universals in different cultures. Etics that are assumed, but have not been demonstrated, to be true universals have been called imposed etics (Berry, 1969, p. 124) or pseudoetics (Triandis, Malpass, & Davidson, 1972, p. 6). Such etics are said to be usually only Euro-American emics indiscriminately, even ethnocentrically, imposed on the interpretation of behavior in other cultures. A true etic, in contrast, is empirically and theoretically derived from the common features of a phenomenon under investigation in different cultures. Berry (1969, p. 124) called this a derived etic. At an even higher level of analysis, general principles are formulated to explain or account for systematic variation as well as invariance in human behavior across cultures. Naroll (1971a) proposed that the term *theorics* be applied to this level of analysis. Berry (1980, p. 13) defined theorics as “theoretical concepts employed by social scientists to interpret and account for emic variation and etic constancies.”

An example may be used to illustrate the meanings of emics and etics. The term *face*, which is Chinese in origin, may be cited as an example of emics. An emic approach would investigate face behavior in Chinese society,