Many Forms of Culture

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Psychologists interested in culture have focused primarily on East–West differences in individualism–collectivism, or independent–interdependent self-construal. As important as this dimension is, there are many other forms of culture with many dimensions of cultural variability. Selecting from among the many understudied cultures in psychology, the author considers three kinds of cultures: religion, socioeconomic status, and region within a country. These cultures vary in a number of psychologically interesting ways. By studying more types of culture, psychologists stand to enrich how they define culture, how they think about universality and cultural specificity, their views of multiculturalism, how they do research on culture, and what dimensions of culture they study. Broadening the study of culture will have far-reaching implications for clinical issues, intergroup relations, and applied domains.

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What forms of culture are there, and what is important and interesting about cultural variation from a psychological point of view? Several disciplines in psychology have long taken up such questions, including cultural psychology, cross-cultural psychology, ethnic minority psychology, ethnopsychology, and others (for historical perspectives on these fields see Kashima, 2000; LeVine, 2007; Nisbett, 2007; and Triandis, 2007). A person reading these literatures could be excused for concluding that there is a very small number of cultural identities (North American vs. East or Southeast Asian), that vary principally on the dimensions of individualism–collectivism or independent–interdependent self-construal—whether people are seen as inherently independent from others or whether social roles are most important in defining the self (Bond, 1994; Brewer & Chen, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Triandis, 1995).

Psychological understanding of culture has advanced in many ways as a result of work in this theoretical tradition. Nevertheless, the intensive focus on geographic or ethnic variation in self-construal does have certain drawbacks. For one, Hui and Yee (1994) noted that individualism–collectivism is commonly invoked to explain any observed cultural difference despite the fact that Oyserman et al. (2002, p. 40) concluded that cultural differences in individualism and collectivism "were neither as large nor as systematic as often perceived" and that findings from student samples were likely not generalizable. Second, there seems to be a tendency to equate culture with country,

so much so that Triandis (1995) felt it necessary to point out that countries are not the same as cultures. Nevertheless, Triandis's view of cultural syndromes best fits people living in a certain country, speaking a certain language, at a certain time:

A cultural syndrome is a pattern of shared attitudes, beliefs, categorizations, self-definitions, norms, role definitions, and values that is organized around a theme that can be identified among those who speak a particular language, during a specific historic period, and in a definable geographic region. (Triandis, 1996, p. 408)

A Southern Baptist male from Sacramento, a Sephardic Jewish grandmother from San Francisco, and an agnostic Chinese American student at the University of California, Berkeley share a language, a historic time period, and a geographic region yet might not share their most important attitudes, beliefs, norms, or values.

The purpose of this article is to suggest that psychologists explore more kinds of variation among more kinds of cultures. An example of the kind of question that inspired this article is: In what ways does an English-speaking male Jew, raised in the United States, share a cultural outlook with his Yiddish-speaking Jewish great grandmother (of blessed memory), who lived in Eastern Europe, or with a modern, Hebrew-speaking Jew who lives in Israel? These are people speaking different languages, separated in time and space, but surely there is some shared culture as well as some cultural differences. Perhaps they recite the same prayers and observe the same holidays—important aspects of culture. Perhaps they have similar views about which foods may or may not be eaten, a culturally significant activity that shapes social relationships and provides clues about the culture's worldview (Douglas, 2002; Meigs, 1991; Rozin, 1990). In other domains, the American Jew may have more in common with the Christian who lives next door. Perhaps certain aspects of individualism characterize the American Jew and Christian but not the Israeli or Eastern European Jew.

Defining Culture

Defining culture is exceptionally tricky. More than 50 years ago, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) collected 164 defini-

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tions of culture, which they organized into several categories: broad definitions that focused on content; definitions that focused on social heritage or tradition; normative definitions that focused on rules or ways of doing things; psychological definitions that focused on adjustment or problem solving; structural definitions that focused on patterns and organizations; genetic definitions that focused on culture as a product or artifact; as well as incomplete or metaphorical definitions that Kroeber and Kluckhohn called "on-the-side stabs in passing" at definitions (p. 72). Another thing that makes defining culture even more complicated is that there are multiple constituents of culture, such as material culture (methods by which people share goods, services, technology), subjective culture (ideas and knowledge shared in a group), and social culture (shared rules of social behavior, institutions; Chiu & Hong, 2006). If one were to turn to anthropology—surely the field that has devoted the most attention to this issue—one might even despair at the prospect of defining culture. LeVine (1984, p. 67) explained,

Anthropologists who converse with scholars in other disciplines are often asked what *culture* is . . . culture is often treated in quantitative social science as representing the unexplained residuum of rigorous empirical analysis, an area of darkness beyond the reach of currently available scientific searchlights.

Despite these complications, there is some emerging consensus on the properties of culture (Lehman, Chiu, & Schaller, 2004; Triandis, 2007). Triandis (2007, pp. 64–65) explained,

There are many definitions of *culture* . . . but almost all researchers see certain aspects as characteristics of culture. First, culture emerges in adaptive interactions between humans and environ-

ments. Second, culture consists of shared elements. Third, culture is transmitted across time periods and generations.

This consensus fits well with other recent definitions of culture, for example, that of Fiske (2002, p. 85):

A culture is a socially transmitted or socially constructed constellation consisting of such things as practices, competencies, ideas, schemas, symbols, values, norms, institutions, goals, constitutive rules, artifacts, and modifications of the physical environment.[1]

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There is a large array of cultural influences I could discuss. For example, take an individual who is Ashkenazic Jewish, middle class, a social psychologist, American, from Philadelphia, and now living in the Southwest. Probably all of these, as well as many other identities, can be fruitfully viewed as cultural identities. Selecting from among the many kinds of culture that are worthy of study, I focus here on three kinds of cultures: religion, socioeconomic status, and region within a country. I chose these three types of cultural variation for three main reasons. First, they are marked by different kinds of group affiliations and have cultural dynamics different from one another, and reviewing these diverse types of cultural variation will hopefully show the many interesting distinctions among cultures. A second reason is that each of these influences has been explicitly discussed and explored within psychology as a cultural influence, so there is already a burgeoning conceptual and empirical platform on which to base my discussions. Third these three kinds of cultures seem especially influential. Along with ethnicity or nationality, religion, region, and social class probably account for an especially large amount of variation in transmitted norms, values, beliefs, behaviors, and the like. These are important cultural influences. By studying these as cultures, psychologists can understand these domains better, as well as culture more broadly.

Religion and Culture

Religion is not easy to define because religion (like culture) is a fuzzy set. Generating a meaningful, single definition that encompasses monotheistic Islam, polytheistic Hinduism, and atheistic Buddhism is quite a challenge. Just as there is an array of definitions of culture, so too are there many definitions of religion. William James (1902/1997) focused on an individual's relationship with the divine:

Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us *the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.* (p. 42)

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[1] Because many views of culture often focus on what is inside the mind of people, I also wish to note Kleinman's (1995) recommendation that ethnographers focus on "what is at stake for particular participants in particular situations" (p. 98), with a focus on "collective (both local and societal) and individual (both public and intimate) levels of analysis" (p. 98). Kleinman's analysis encourages us to locate culture in the social world as well as in the individual, a key point (cf. Fiske, 2002; Nisbett, 2007; Rozin, 2003; Triandis, 2007).

It is perhaps not often enough stressed that James saw religion as a diverse set of phenomena and that he was not trying to provide a comprehensive definition. Rather, he was defining religion for the purpose of the lectures on which *Varieties of Religious Experience* is based, and a large focus of the work was on highly personal, born-again experiences.

Other definitions of religion are essentially indistinguishable from definitions of culture more broadly. Durkheim (1912/1995) understood sacred objects to symbolize the society and proposed that religion unifies people into a community:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden— beliefs and practices which united into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. (p. 44)

Geertz's definition of religion is even closer to one of culture. In a chapter called "Religion as a Cultural System," Geertz (1973) defined religion as

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (p. 90)

In fact, many scholars believe that a tendency to see religion as a category in itself, dissociable from broader culture, reflects a Western, Christian bias (McCutcheon, 1995).

Members of different religious groups, even within one country, differ in many psychological processes. One elegant line of work examined cultural differences between Calvinist Protestants and members of other religions (e.g., Catholics) on whether they were focused on a business task, or were interpersonally oriented, while in work contexts. Sanchez-Burks (2002) took his theoretical grounding from the highly elaborated Calvinist values regarding finding a calling in work. In one experiment, participants were put into a workplace frame of mind by having them don shirts and ties and discuss how to reduce business costs. Or participants were put into a casual frame of mind by having them wear Hawaiian shirts and play a card game. In a work context, but not in a casual context, Calvinist Protestants were less attentive to relationality and therefore able to tune out the emotional tone of a list of words they listened to and focus only on the words' meanings. Members of other religions did not vary in this task depending on condition. In an experiment on nonconscious mimicry as a cue to whether people were focusing on others or on the work task, Calvinist Protestants did not mimic the foot-shaking behavior of a confederate while in a work context but did in a more casual context. Cues to business versus casualness had little effect on members of other religions.

Religious cultures also differ in what it means to be religious. For example, some religions focus more on practice (orthopractic religions) and others on belief (orthodox religions). For Jews, religiousness is primarily reckoned by the extent to which one behaviorally adheres to the prescriptions and proscriptions present in Jewish law. If one knows whether a Jewish man practices the dietary laws, whether he observes the Sabbath, and how often he prays, one does not need to know whether he believes in God to predict how religious he considers himself to be—despite the fact that belief in one God is at the theological core of Judaism and that Jewish law assumes, and perhaps commands, belief in God (A. B. Cohen, Siegel, & Rozin, 2003). It seems fair to say, however, that such belief does not occupy the same place in Jewish culture as it does in Christian culture. In contrast, the idea that one could estimate a born-again Christian woman's religiousness without knowing her beliefs about God is oxymoronic, if not heretical. Empirically, for Christians, both belief and practice make unique contributions to predicting self-rated religiousness (A. B. Cohen et al., 2003; reviewed in A. B. Cohen, Hall, Koenig, & Meador, 2005).

In the domain of moral judgment, religious cultures also show important differences. Christian doctrine considers thoughts about immoral actions to be as morally relevant as the actions themselves—reflecting Jesus' pronouncement that "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). In Judaism, however, thinking about an immoral action does not have the moral status of the action. Jews in fact consider thoughts about various immoral actions, such as thinking about having an affair, or thinking about being cruel to an animal, to be much less morally important than do Protestants (A. B. Cohen & Rozin, 2001). Although Protestants consistently rate thoughts about immoral actions to be more likely to be acted upon than do Jews, this is not why Protestants attribute more moral status to thoughts. Even thoughts about very unlikely immoral actions (such as a man thinking about having an extramarital affair with Julia Roberts) are judged more immoral by Protestants than by Jews (A. B. Cohen, 2003).

These tendencies are nuanced by the specifics of theology. The Jewish *Talmud* explains that God does not consider an intention to commit an immoral action to be morally consequential but does consider an intention to commit a positive action to be virtuous. The reasoning is that Talmudic scholars assumed people would overcome their evil inclinations when given the opportunity to act on them but that people would cultivate and try to act on their inclinations to do good. Reflecting this reasoning, Jews give as much moral credit as do Protestants to thoughts about highly virtuous actions, such as giving a large amount of money to charity (A. B. Cohen & Rankin, 2004). Insofar as it is unlikely that their Jewish subjects actually had ever directly read the Talmudic discussions of these issues, Cohen and Rankin proposed that Jewish culture (as distinct from the texts per se) contains these notions.

Before I leave my discussion of religion, one final note is that a cultural analysis of religion need not detract from what is most unique about religion, including relationships with the divine, sacred objects, rites, and faith. Be that as it may, religion is evident in interactions between individuals and their environments; involves sharing of

information, meaning, and values; and is transmitted across generations. This makes religion ripe for cultural analysis (Fiske, 2002; Tarakeshwar, Stanton, & Pargament, 2003) and indeed for more attention in psychology generally (Hill, 1999; Jones, 1994; Rozin, 2006).

Socioeconomic Status, Social Class, and Culture

The American Psychological Association's Task Force on Socioeconomic Status (2007) recently noted that differences in socioeconomic status and social class have important implications for human development, well-being, and physical health. In particular, poorer people show considerably worse trajectories of development, worse physical health, and lower well-being. In research on socioeconomic status and social class, these are commonly operationalized as combinations of variables such as income, education, and occupational prestige. When investigating social class and socioeconomic status, many investigators also probe subjective social class, or individuals' estimation of their own social class. People may perceive their social class to be different from what objective indicators might suggest. For instance, a plumber may have several times the income of a college-educated bookstore clerk, yet the clerk may regard herself as middle class, whereas the plumber may regard himself as lower in social class. Socioeconomic and class inequity may be perceived not only in terms of tangible resources such as income but also in terms of structural aspects such as power, privilege, and social capital.

Whereas much attention has been paid to the effects that socioeconomic status and social class have on domains such as health, development, and well-being, psychologists have not often taken a culturally informed approach or considered the rich culturally textured beliefs, values, and practices of higher versus lower social class individuals. Like the work on religion I have reviewed, theorizing and empirical work on socioeconomic and social class differences also document cultural differences in values, norms, and practices, as well as artifacts (such as music) that cultural groups create and that affect their worldviews. These may be important to understand in linking socioeconomic and class differences to health and well-being outcomes.

Snibbe and Markus (2005) focused on how people of low and high socioeconomic status differ in their views of agency. Those of high socioeconomic status are more able to control their environments and influence others. Those of low socioeconomic status are more likely to have to adapt to their surroundings and maintain their integrity because of their inability to directly control their environments. Thus, Snibbe and Markus claimed that the culture of high socioeconomic status values control and agency, whereas the culture of low socioeconomic status more highly values flexibility, integrity, and resilience.[2]

In one study, Snibbe and Markus (2005) examined the content of country music (more preferred by low socioeconomic status people) versus that of rock music (more preferred by high socioeconomic status people). Snibbe

and Markus pointed out that "cultural models reside not only in individual psyches but also in the products and practices with which individual psyches are constantly interacting" (p. 706)—such as music. As content coded by these investigators, it turns out that rock music emphasizes self-actualization, going against the grain, and making the world accommodate and conform. Country music is more likely to emphasize adapting to challenges and maintaining integrity and resiliency.

Snibbe and Markus (2005) also performed several experiments using educational attainment as their indicator of socioeconomic status. They focused only on European Americans, so that racial identification was not confounded with their cultural variable—socioeconomic status. In one experiment, they examined the spreading alternatives effect. This effect describes the tendency for people to value more highly, after some time has passed, an alternative that they chose, relative to an equally attractive alternative that they did not choose. Snibbe and Markus demonstrated that this effect occurs among college-educated participants but not among high-school-educated participants. When asked to choose between two equally attractive compact discs, college-educated people came to value more highly the disc they chose, whereas high-school-educated people did not later see the disc they chose as more valuable.

Further experiments performed by Snibbe and Markus (2005) suggested similar conclusions. Imagine participating in a psychology experiment and being asked to choose a pen, from among several alternatives, as a reward. How important to you is it that you get the pen that you chose? Snibbe and Markus told participants that the pen they chose was actually not available—thus usurping their choice. High socioeconomic status subjects found this more upsetting than low socioeconomic status subjects, who are more used to having their choices overturned and more used to adapting to not getting what they want.

Dovetailing nicely with Snibbe and Markus's (2005) work is evidence that children of differing socioeconomic status are enculturated to have different values. Kusserow (1999) performed an ethnographic analysis of parents and teachers of White children in different communities in New York: Carter Hill (a relatively upper class neighborhood in Manhattan), South Rockaway (a relatively lower class, working community in Queens), and Beach Channel (a relatively upper, working-class community in Queens). Children are enculturated in each of these neighborhoods to be individualistic, but they are taught to exhibit different kinds of individualism. In lower class South Rockaway,

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[2] As a background to their work on socioeconomic status, Snibbe and Markus (2005) provided the following definition of cultural models (p. 704): "Cultural models are sets of assumptions that are widely (though not universally) shared by a group of people, existing both in individual minds and in public artifacts, institutions, and practices. At the individual level, these cultural models provide implicit blueprints of how to think, feel, and act. When people act according to these blueprints, they reproduce the public models, thereby perpetuating the cultural context from which both were derived."

individualism focuses on self-sufficiency and self-determination and on surviving in a bad system. In relatively upper class Beach Channel, individualism is about personal success and achievement, and success is linked to hard work, tenacity, and self-confidence. In upper class Carter Hill, the focus is on appreciating children's uniqueness and individuality, cultivating their success and happiness, and encouraging them to feel they can do anything.

Region of Country and Culture

One additional cultural variable that I wish to review is regional differences within a country. People from different geographic regions within countries differ in their norms and values, such as in the importance of honor and reputation, and in aspects of individualism and collectivism. First I review work on the culture of honor (D. Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996). Cultures that subsist by herding typically attach more importance to honor and reputation than do people from agrarian societies. If a person in a herding culture develops a reputation as someone who vociferously defends threats against his honor, his livelihood is less likely to be taken away by rustlers. A person who has a reputation as a pushover is more likely to have his herd rustled. Whites in the southern United States derive historically from Scotch-Irish herding societies, but Whites in the North are more likely to be descended from farmers. Therefore, D. Cohen and colleagues proposed that values about honor and reputation are more likely to be present in Southerners and that Southerners are more likely to respond to insults with violence.

This research team generated compelling, converging evidence for this hypothesis by using survey studies, field experiments, and lab experiments. In surveys, Southerners are much more likely than Northerners to espouse the use of violence in response to threats to a person's honor. For example, Southerners are more likely to agree than Northerners that a person would not be much of a man if he did not fight a person who insulted his wife. In field experiments, Southern businesses were more likely to consider a male job applicant who had been in jail for violently defending his reputation (by killing a man who claimed to be sleeping with the protagonist's fiancé and publicly challenged him to do something about it). Southern and Northern businesses, on the other hand, were not different in their responses to a male job applicant who had committed a crime that was not relevant to honor (stealing cars). In the lab, White Southern males responded angrily to being insulted, behaviorally asserted their masculinity by being more aggressive and confrontational with a physically intimidating research assistant, and showed spikes in their salivary cortisol and testosterone—hormones related to stress and aggression. White Northern males were more likely to respond with confusion or even amusement to being insulted. After closely analyzing patterns between areas within the South that differed in history of slavery, climate, or socioeconomic status, the investigators suggested that these differences were not due to these factors.

In another line of work on regional cultural differences within the United States, Vandello and Cohen (1999) examined patterns of individualism and collectivism. This work is noteworthy because these factors are usually examined at the country level, but U.S. states differ in individualism and collectivism as well. The state-level measures of these constructs included variables such as the percentage of people living alone (individualism), the percentage of households with grandparents in them, and the percentage of people with religious affiliations (collectivism). Collectivism was highest in the Deep South, and individualism was highest in the Mountain West and Great Plains. Hawaii was found to be especially collectivist, perhaps because of the high proportion of people of Asian descent living in Hawaii. These investigators also documented certain correlates of individualism and collectivism. Poverty and population density were associated with greater collectivism. In terms of economic system correlates, plantation farming was associated with collectivism, but self-run farms with individualism. Finally, Vandello and Cohen found that minorities were generally more collectivist.

There are interesting regional differences in other countries, as well. Recent work by Kitayama, Ishii, Imada, Takemura, and Ramaswamy (2006) examined residents of Hokkaido, Japan. Hokkaido, which can be thought of as Japan's northern frontier (Japan's "Wild North"), shares certain historical features with the American Wild West frontier. Hokkaido was settled by jobless samurai during the Meiji government in the late 1800s. Kitayama et al. theorized that settling a frontier may depend on a desire for personal wealth and achievement, may promote self-reliance, which is necessary to survive, and may promote a lay theory of behavior as internally motivated because settlers are goal oriented. This is similar to the reasoning offered for American individualism being related partly to a frontier history (Oyserman et al., 2002).

Kitayama and colleagues showed that in Hokkaido, people's behavior consistently looked much more individualistic than is typical for Japanese. In Hokkaido, unlike in classic work among Japanese, both disengaging positive emotions (such as pride) and social-harmony-promoting emotions (such as friendly feelings) were associated with happiness. Typically, only socially engaging positive emotions predict happiness among Japanese. Second, Hokkaido residents showed spreading alternatives effects (like those documented in Snibbe and Markus's, 2005, work) when making private choices, like Americans typically do. This effect did not occur when the Hokkaido Japanese were made to feel that they were making a public choice, because the choice was then perceived as constrained. The participants were made to feel that their choice was public in a subtle manipulation in which they were or were not made to choose in front of a poster that contained schematic drawings of eyes. Again, this is a pattern of results more typically seen among Americans, not Japanese. In terms of attribution, Hokkaido residents showed the individualistic pattern of considering internal (dispositional) factors to be more important than external (situational) factors in causing behavior.

Regional differences within countries can show consistent patterns across countries. Small towns in Australia may look a bit like small towns in Japan. Kashima et al. (2004) examined regional differences in the self in Japan in Tokyo (a large metropolitan city) and Kagoshima (a regional city) as well as in Australia in Melbourne (a large metropolitan city) and Wodonga (a regional city). The aspects of the self that were of interest were agency (assessed with items such as "I act more on the basis of my own judgment than on other people's decision"), assertiveness (e.g., "I assert my opposition when I disagree strongly with other people"), the relational self (e.g., "I feel like doing something for people in trouble because I can almost feel their pains"), and the collective self (e.g., "I would act as a member of my group rather than alone as an individual"). The authors found that Australians had a more individualistic self, scoring higher on agency and assertiveness, than the Japanese. Women were more relational. However, in both countries, metropolitan residents were less collective than their regional counterparts.

In a study that points to another form of interesting variation among people of differing socioeconomic status, Haidt, Koller, and Dias (1993) examined moral judgments of higher and lower socioeconomic status adults and children in three cities in the United States and in Brazil. These investigators were particularly interested in actions that were highly disgusting or disrespectful but were not harmful to others—such as a person having sex with a dead chicken before cooking it for dinner, a son breaking a promise he had made to his dying mother, and a brother and sister passionately kissing each other. (Of course, child participants were not presented with the more provocative scenarios.) Both country and socioeconomic status differences were found. Brazilians found the actions more immoral than Americans, and in both countries, those of low socioeconomic status were more likely to judge the offenses to be immoral rather than a personal choice or a violation of a social convention. Socioeconomic-status-based differences were in fact bigger than the country differences.

Implications and Recommendations

Having pointed to some of the important ways in which an expanded array of cultures and cultural differences operates, I now discuss several ways in which this expanded array has broad implications for psychologists' thinking about culture—for how we define culture, for discussions on specificity and universality, for understanding multiculturalism, for how we do research on culture, and for the types of variation we explore.

Defining Culture

I mentioned above that there are many definitions of culture and alluded to the difficulty of arriving at a single definition of culture. Here I claim that the way an investigator defines culture probably depends on what form of culture, and what domain within that culture, is of interest and that by studying more kinds of culture, psychologists can under-

stand this issue better. As one example, some definitions of culture focus on *meaning*, whereas others focus on *information*. Geertz (1973) believed that culture is an interpretive search for meaning. Similarly, D'Andrade (1984, p. 116), saw culture as consisting of "learned systems of meaning," and Shweder and Haidt (2000, p. 398) stated that "'culture' thus consists of meanings, conceptions, and interpretive schemes." But other definitions of culture focus on information or knowledge. For Boyd and Richerson (1985), "culture is information capable of affecting individuals' phenotypes which they acquire from other conspecifics by teaching or imitation" (p. 33), and Lumsden (1989, p. 15) defined culture as "a system of socially learnable knowledge shared among members of a society."

So is culture about information or about meaning? Theorists who are interested in values and morals (such as Shweder and Haidt), may tend to see culture as meaning. People who are interested in the cultural evolution of adaptations, such as tool use, may see the information in culture (e.g., Boyd, Richersen, and Lumsden). The point is that the cultures psychologists study, and what we study about them, influence what we think culture is. By studying a wider array of forms of culture, we can understand why there are so many definitions of culture, and this understanding might promote new views about what culture is.[3]

Cultural Specificity and Universality

There are several ways of thinking about cultural specifics or universals (D. Cohen, 2001; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005). One way is to recognize that even apparent cultural differences, when one digs a little deeper, actually reflect a universal nature. This seems to be a perspective more commonly adopted by cross-cultural psychologists:

Many cross-cultural psychologists allow for similarities due to species-wide basic processes but consider their existence subject to empirical demonstration. This kind of universalism assumes that basic human characteristics are common to all members of the species . . . and that culture influences the development and display of them. (Segall, Lonner, & Berry, 1998, p. 1104; cf. Lonner, 1980)

This perspective is also shared by some evolutionary psychologists, who see many cultural practices as environmentally evoked, context-dependent, evolved strategies (Kenrick et al., 2002; Schmitt, 2006; Tooby & Cosmides, 1995). A quite different perspective is that culture so profoundly affects how people structure their worlds that it can

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[3] The difficulty in defining culture, the many existing definitions of culture in the social sciences, and the many components of culture may lead one to conclude that the definition of culture is hopelessly elusive, and the current argument may appear only to make matters worse. On the one hand, if there are many kinds of culture and many forms of cultural variation, one approach may be to abandon talking about culture and instead discuss more specific terms to refer to cultural markers (such as religion, ethnicity, nationality, social class, or region). On the other hand, it is possible that recognizing that there are many forms of culture could actually help to disambiguate concepts of culture, which may seem slippery partly because of a failure to appreciate the diversity of the kinds of cultures and kinds of variation that exist.

be difficult or impossible to understand cultural meanings or practices from outside that culture. This perspective seems more commonly held among proponents of cultural psychology (Shweder, 1991).

A middle ground is the view that all cultures contain to some extent the same ideas and meanings but that they elaborate or make more accessible a certain set of these ideas and meanings while deemphasizing others. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) values orientation theory proposed that all cultures contain the same values but that different cultures will prefer some values over others. Rozin (2003) has similarly proposed that many cultural differences derive from differences in default responses to a stimulus, though members of different cultures can likely understand the responses of people from other cultures. However, default differences can result in more divergence down the road as they take people in different directions.

Broadening the kinds of cultures that psychologists study can help us to have a richer understanding of the ways that cultures resemble each other and differ from each other. Even if there are broad and recurring similarities between cultures, it is inevitable that there will also be culturally significant nuances. Both the similarities and the differences will be more apparent when we think about more types of cultures. For example, it is fair to say at a certain level of abstraction that Japanese, Hindu Indians, Chinese, Koreans, and Mexicans are all relatively collectivist, and this is an important dimension to explore. However, there will also be specificity that is critical to address. There are some similarities and some differences among aspects of collectivism (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Fiske, 2002), and different forms of culture probably vary along different facets of collectivism. We can learn more about these facets of dimensions of collectivism if we study collectivism not just across nations but across differing religions, social classes, and regions of countries, as well as in other cultural groups. Both Jews and Japanese may attach importance to being good members of the community, broadly speaking. But Jews may demonstrate being good members of the community by participating in public prayer (A. B. Cohen & Hill, 2007), whereas Japanese may do so by suppressing self-expression to promote group harmony. To paraphrase Santayana (1905/1982)—who was writing about religion—every culture has its own idiosyncrasies and uniqueness.

Multiculturalism

We usually consider a person to be multicultural if he or she has lived in more than one country or has parents representing more than one ethnic group. However, another implication of studying more forms of culture is that there are many forms of multiculturalism and that all people are in fact multicultural. To use the examples discussed here, everyone has a national origin, an ethnic origin, a religion (or a lack of religion), a level of socioeconomic status or social class, and a regional origin within a country. It is likely that psychological functioning at any given moment represents a pooling of influences of these many forms of cultural identity, among others. This may be one reason

that culture is often seen as being imperfectly represented in people's minds and that there is more within-culture variation than between-culture variation in most traits (Adams & Markus, 2004).

In a related point, people become exposed to their own and other cultures in many ways, including assimilation, acculturation, socialization, enculturation, and even tourism. Researchers who work on such topics often rely on two perspectives. First, there is likely a sensitive period for the acquisition of culture (as there is for language), after which one cannot ever fully acquire a culture the way a native has. A second focus of research is the stress that can be experienced as a person has difficulty coping with unfamiliar worldviews, norms, languages, and foods of other cultures (Berno & Ward, 2005; Gonzales, Knight, Morgan-Lopez, Saenz, & Sirolli, 2002; LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). These processes have been given considerable attention, yet the focus is almost always cultural transitions between countries.

Different forms of culture could have interesting differences in these processes. Moving between socioeconomic status groups could be in some ways similar to, and in some ways very different from, moving between countries. Being the first in one's family to go to college often means one is put in a situation that highlights the vastly different cultural environments that upper versus lower social classes entail. Moving from one part of a country (such as Philadelphia) to another (such as Tempe) may not seem as much of a cultural transition as moving from one country to another. People in Philadelphia are American, and so too are people in Tempe. English is spoken in both places, and perhaps most people in these American cities are essentially individualistic. Nevertheless, different regions of a country have their own norms, practices, and values. The 2008 presidential electoral map showed Pennsylvania as a blue state but Arizona as red.

Religious conversions represent a kind of cultural change that would have its own dynamics. Converting from one religion to another, going from having no religion to having one, or losing one's religion may have their own unique processes. These processes can differ among religions, as well. Some religions, such as Judaism and Hinduism, decide their membership primarily on the basis of biological descent. Other religions base membership on what one believes, and conversion processes are often informal or absent (Morris, 1996). Some processes of religious conversion may be gradual and highly ritualized, whereas others may be informal and sudden (James, 1902/1997). Various types of cultural changes will have different dynamics depending on the type of cultures an individual is moving among.

Implications for Research

In research on culture, it is common to compare a group of individuals from one country with a group of individuals from another country. But this often results in some ambiguity in interpretation. For example, when one studies Indian American differences in moral reasoning (Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997),

is one documenting a country difference (United States vs. India), a religion difference (Christian vs. Hindu), or a socioeconomic difference (first world vs. emerging economy)? What is largely unknown is which cultural variable is most influential. Graham (1992) similarly pointed out that it is often unclear whether ethnicity effects (e.g., Black vs. White) are due to ethnic cultural differences per se or to socioeconomic differences that vary systematically between ethnic groups. What is also unknown is how multiple forms of culture may intersect. In what domains, and between what groups of people, does country trump religion, and when does religion trump country? Do country and religion have synergistic influences? Opposing influences?

Such questions become more likely when the various variables are treated as cultures. Instead of seeing national or ethnic culture as most important, one can ask more textured questions, for which one should sample multiple groups of individuals from within and between cultural groups. There are many good examples of researchers examining multiple forms of culture simultaneously. As mentioned above, Kashima et al. (2004) examined regional differences within two countries. Haidt et al. (1993) examined the moral judgments of high and low socioeconomic status participants in the United States and Brazil. Each of these studies was able to examine how multiple cultures operated and related to each other.

Several methodological suggestions are warranted given the complexity that will result from examining multiple forms of culture. First, I recommend multimethod approaches. People may not have insight into the subtle ways in which different forms of culture affect them, and furthermore they may attribute a certain viewpoint to one cultural influence when it is in fact due to another or to the combination of several. As such, self-report is likely to be affected by cultural norms or even confabulated (Fiske, 2002; Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002; Peng, Nisbett, & Wong, 1997). Another intriguing direction in cultural research would be to examine cultural products, such as art, advertising, and even religious texts. Distinct social classes have their own preferred cultural products (e.g., country vs. rock music), as do different regions of a country (in the recent presidential election, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* endorsed Barack Obama, but the *Arizona Republic* endorsed John McCain). Religions have their own sacred texts and prayers that may reflect and promote differing cultural outlooks (Sethi & Seligman, 1993). A recent meta-analysis on differences in cultural products between individualist and collectivist cultures showed larger, more consistent effects than have been seen in self-report measures (Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008). Another important method in cultural research is conducting experiments that prime relevant aspects of culture (Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000). A middle-class, Jewish individual from Philadelphia might respond very differently to primes consisting of the American flag, the Liberty Bell, and a Star of David.

Second, given the complexity that will result from studying multiple forms of culture, it will be all the more important to establish specific mechanisms for group differences (Betancourt & López, 1993; Heine & Norenzayan, 2006; Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006; Oyserman et al., 2002). Indeed, the mechanisms that explain national/ethnic, religious, regional, and socioeconomic cultural differences are likely to differ—and could include mediators as diverse as self-construal, fear of punishment from God, differences in agency and perceived control, or norms about reputation, to name a few. Establishing these mechanisms will help psychologists understand the effects of culture in a deeper way. That is, a cultural approach to these issues ought to compel us to dig a little deeper, to unpack the effects of variables into the rich meanings, practices, and norms that they entail. "Thick experimentation," with the goal of understanding culture from an insider's point of view, can help to uncover this depth (D. Cohen & Kitayama, 2007).

Last, I recommend greater specificity in how psychologists carve group memberships. Fiske (2002) pointed out that "Asian American" is often treated as a meaningful category despite the fact that this label applies to people from thousands of cultures (and so too for terms like Latino American, African American, and others). Perhaps high versus low socioeconomic status, Jewish versus Christian, and Northern versus Southern are also too coarse a set of labels.

New Kinds of Cultural Variation

A final reason to widen our view of forms of culture is that it would inevitably suggest new kinds of interesting cultural variation. As reviewed above, culture affects not only between-country differences in individualism versus collectivism, or independent versus interdependent self-construal, but also moral judgment and moral reasoning, agency, relationality, defense of honor, as well as within-country differences in aspects of individualism and collectivism. Broadening our view of the domains affected by culture can even have an impact on well-studied theories in psychology. Here I consider one example, terror management theory (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989). Terror management theory proposes that people respond to reminders of their mortality by affiliating with their own cultures and by derogating people from other cultures. Beliefs about death and the afterlife differ markedly among religious cultures. Whereas some attention has been paid to religious beliefs in terror management (Dechesne et al., 2003; Norenzayan, Dar-Nimrod, Hansen, & Proulx, 2009; Norenzayan & Hansen, 2006), there are many interesting but unanswered questions about group differences. Whereas fundamentalist Christian culture strongly emphasizes belief in the afterlife, Judaism does not, at least not in quite the same way. Perhaps fundamentalist Christians will not show ethnocentrism following mortality salience insofar as their death anxiety may be buffered or eliminated by belief in life after death. Furthermore, which cultural identities will mortality salience affect, and in which contexts? A Jewish American from Philadelphia who prefers Macintosh computers can probably be made to derogate the New York Yankees, or Christians, or PC users, by mortality salience primes.

Closing Remarks

It is of enormous importance that psychologists of all stripes have a deep understanding of culture. I have lamented the fact that psychology has focused on some important cultural differences, but not others. By considering different forms of culture, we can generate a richer understanding of culture, which may introduce clarity to the welter of definitions of culture, advance our thinking about cultural specificity and universality, change our understanding of multiculturalism, add needed texture to our research on culture, and inspire us to study new domains of psychological function.

Expanding which cultures and what dimensions of culture psychologists study will have broad implications for clinical practice, basic research, and applied issues. From a clinical perspective, practices that seem strange and even pathological should be viewed in a different light if they are integral to cultural identity. Indeed, American Psychological Association ethics rules specify that psychologists must respect cultural backgrounds, including religion (American Psychological Association, 2002; Whaley & Davis, 2007). For example, a belief that substances miraculously change form could be seen as pathological. However, when such a belief is theologically appropriate (e.g., the Catholic belief concerning the transubstantiation of the communion wafer into the body of Jesus), the belief ought to be viewed as much more normative (Siev & Cohen, 2007). Nevertheless, even appropriate religious beliefs can be seen by clinicians as pathological, particularly if the religion is not mainstream (O'Connor & Vandenberg, 2005). Furthermore, members of different religions may show different clinical concerns. For example, thought–action fusion (believing that one's thoughts are as morally important as one's actions, and that thoughts will be actualized) may be of more concern to people whose religions attribute as much moral or religious significance to thoughts as to action. In fact, Jews show lower levels of the moral aspects of thought–action fusion than do Christians (Siev & Cohen, 2007).

From a basic science perspective, there are many psychological processes that vary in profound ways within and across cultures, including self-construal, attribution, holistic versus analytic thought, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, locus of control, cognitive consistency, moral judgment, and other processes (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). Hofstede (1980) classically identified multiple dimensions of cultural differences, including power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. Understanding culture therefore has critical implications for understanding behavior in business contexts, schools, families, friendships, and even responses to strangers in crowded urban contexts. This becomes most important given the prevalence of intergroup conflict in recent history. Conflicts emerge across different kinds of cultural identities. There is national conflict, ethnic conflict, religious conflict, class conflict, and regional conflict within nations.

Last, from a practical or applied perspective, there are many domains that can be much better understood by appreciating the role of culture, such as in educational settings, organizational settings, and health settings. Just to take one example, I briefly consider some implications of the above discussions for health psychology. It is well established that people of lower social class suffer from poorer health, and this is often understood to reflect factors such as lower education (and hence lower knowledge about healthy lifestyles) and worse access to medical care. Although these factors are surely part of the explanation, perhaps other cultural factors come into play as well. As lower socioeconomic status individuals more highly value resilience in the face of adversity, as opposed to focusing on altering their environments, perhaps lower social class people are less likely to seek out solutions to their health problems or even to feel that this is the most appropriate avenue to deal with them. Rather, they may seek to adapt to their health problems with integrity. Furthermore, religiosity and socioeconomic status are negatively correlated, and people of low socioeconomic status may feel that their illness is God's will and has some greater meaning and that their task is to discover this meaning. The intersection here of socioeconomic status and religion points to the complexity and richness that can be gained from appreciating the multiple forms of culture that govern behavior.

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