Culture and Psychology

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Nature and Social Behaviour

- Explaining the psyche
  - A broad term for mind, encompassing emotions, desires, perceptions, and all other psychological processes
- Nature and culture have shaped each other
  - Nature has prepared human beings specifically for culture

Nature and Social Behaviour (cont'd.)

- Nature defined: physical world around us, including its laws and processes
  - Can help explain human behaviour
    - Genes, hormones, brain structure, and other innate processes dictate one's choices and actions
- Evolution, and doing what's natural
  - Over the last two decades, many people have focused on how evolution influences social behaviour

Nature and Social Behaviour (cont'd.)

- Social animals: humans are social animals
  - Seek connections to others
- Being social offers evolutionary benefits
  - Find more food
  - Mate and reproduce easier
  - Alert each other to danger
  - Take care of sick and injured

Nature and Social Behaviour (cont'd.)

- The social brain
  - Social brain theory: animals with bigger brains live in larger, more complex social groups
  - Human brain evolved to enable human beings to have rich, complex social lives
  - Social animals (including humans) accomplish things by means of social interaction

Social Animal or Cultural Animal?

- Social animals
  - Animals that seek connections to others and prefer to live, work, and play with other members of their species
- Cultural animal theory
  - Evolution shaped the human psyche to enable humans to create and take part in culture
- Culture is the essence of what makes us human

Culture Defined

- Important features of culture
  - Shared ideas: brain puts special priority on information directly experienced as shared
  - Culture as a social system: network linking many different people
  - Culture as praxis: depends on shared ideas
  - Culture, information, and meaning: encoding and sharing meaningful information

Food for Thought

- Culture influences what we eat
  - Nature: humans are naturally inclined to eat meat
  - Culture: many religions dictate what food can be eaten
    - Vegetarians may state that it is wrong to eat animals

Nature and Culture Interacting

- Nature and culture shape each other
  - Nature shapes culture, and culture shapes nature
- What makes cultural animals?
  - Being a cultural animal is different than being a social animal
    - Division of labour
    - Shared knowledge and communication
    - Ability to solve disagreements

Are People the Same Everywhere?

- Cultural norms vary
  - Sleeping habits: Americans generally do not sleep with their children in the same room
    - In Japan, it has been reported as being customary for children to sleep with their mother
  - People do share some of the same experiences
    - Most people love their children, try to get enough to eat, and make distinctions between right and wrong

The Duplex Mind

- Two systems
  - Automatic system
    - Outside of consciousness
    - Simple operations
    - Always on, even in sleep
  - Deliberate system
    - Mostly operates in consciousness
    - Turns off during sleep

The Deliberate and Automatic Systems

Deliberate	Automatic
Slow	Fast
Controllable	Outside of conscious control
Guided by intention	Unintentional
Flexible	Inflexible
Good at combining information	Poor at combining information
Precise, rule-based calculations	Estimates
Can perform complex operations	Can perform simple operations
Does one thing at a time	Can do many things at once
Reasoning	Intuition
Effortful	Effortless
Features full-blown emotions	Features quick feelings of like and dislike, good and bad
Depends on automatic system	Can be independent of conscious processing
"Figure it out"	"Go with your gut feeling"

How they work together

- Automatic system makes conscious thought possible

  Serves the deliberate system

Conscious override

- Deliberate system can suppress automatic urges

  Vital to life in culture

Cultural Psychology

- Cultural psychology presupposes many psychological universals
  - e.g., all cultures: feelings; wants; goals; ideas of good and bad, of cause and effect
- Assumptions:
  - Psychological diversity is inherent in the human condition
  - Culture and psyche are interdependent and contribute to each other

Cultural Psychology

- Cultural psychology developed at the interface of anthropology, psychology, and linguistics.
- Cultural psychology focus: Goals, values, and pictures of the world that are made manifest in the speech, laws, and routine practices of some self-monitoring group.
- Increased interest in person-centred accounts, the study of local psychologies, and discourse-centred conceptions of mind, self, body, gender, motivation, and emotion.

Broad view of Eastern and Western cultures

Aspect	Western Societies	Eastern Societies
Core Value	Individualism	Collectivism
Independence Means	Self-reliance, personal freedom	Fulfilling duties within the group
Social Behavior	Assertiveness, self-promotion	Modesty, harmony, group cohesion
Family Expectations	Early separation, nuclear families	Multi-generational households

Theory / Scholar	Key Ideas
Triandis' Theory (2012)	Explores how ecology, family structure, and cultural diffusion influence individualism and collectivism. Highlights differences in cognition, emotion, motivation, and communication. [1]
Markus & Kitayama (1991)	Proposed the concept of independent vs. interdependent self-construals. Individualists see the self as distinct; collectivists see it as embedded in relationships.
Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions	Identified individualism vs. collectivism as one of six dimensions of national culture. Used in cross-cultural psychology and organizational studies.
Social Identity Theory	Suggests that collectivist cultures foster stronger in-group identification, while individualist cultures emphasize personal

Individualism and Collectivism: Psychological Implications

Self-concept: Individualists define themselves by personal traits; collectivists by group affiliations.

Emotion regulation: Individualists may prioritize self-expression; collectivists may suppress emotions to maintain harmony.

Cognition: Individualists tend to focus on objects and categories; collectivists on relationships and context.

Interpersonal relationships: Individualists value independence; collectivists value loyalty and duty.

Individualism

A cultural orientation where personal goals and self-expression are prioritized over group goals.

Key Traits:

- Emphasis on autonomy, freedom, and personal achievement
- Identity is shaped by personal traits and choices
- Decisions often reflect individual preferences and rights
- Common in Western cultures like the US, UK, and parts of Europe
- Psychological Implications:
- Greater self-esteem and personal responsibility
- More emphasis on uniqueness and innovation
- Emotional well-being tied to personal success

Example: In individualist cultures, startup founders may be celebrated for pursuing a personal business idea (individual vision, skill, success).

Critiquing Individualism

Increased isolation:

- An overemphasis on self-interest can result in a lack of empathy, weaker social support networks, and feelings of loneliness or isolation.

Undermines social cohesion:

- Focusing solely on individual goals may reduce the collective responsibility and mutual support needed for a stable and harmonious society.

Potential for status-driven bias:

- Vertical individualism, which prioritizes social status, may contribute to a tendency to belittle outgroups to feel personally superior.

Collectivism

A cultural orientation where individuals prioritize the group's goals over their own.

Key Traits:

- Emphasis on community, family, and social harmony
- Identity is shaped by group membership (e.g., nationality, ethnicity, workplace)
- Decisions often consider group benefit and social obligations
- Common in many Asian, African, and Latin American cultures
- Psychological Implications:
- Higher conformity and cooperation
- Stronger in-group loyalty
- Emotional well-being tied to group success

Example: In collectivist cultures, work/career decisions might be driven by a sense of duty to the community rather than personal recognition.
Prioritizing collectivist corporate cultures and worker co-operatives.

Critiquing Collectivism

Suppression of individual needs:

- A strong emphasis on collective goals can lead to the suppression of individual needs and rights, potentially hindering personal autonomy and freedom.

Exacerbated intergroup bias:

- Some argue that certain forms of collectivism, especially vertical collectivism, can foster prejudice and discrimination against outgroups by promoting ingroup superiority.

Critiquing the concept of Individualism and Collectivism

Conceptual weaknesses:

- The concepts of individualism and collectivism are often oversimplified, lacking sufficient conceptual clarity and empirical evidence to serve as robust explanatory tools for cultural differences.

Empirical and methodological issues:

- Research on individualism-collectivism often suffers from problematic factor structures in measurement tools and inconsistent empirical findings.

Reductionist view:

- The individualism-collectivism dichotomy overlooks universal values that can serve both individual and collective interests, leading to a narrow view of human motivations and societal structures.

Ignores internal complexity:

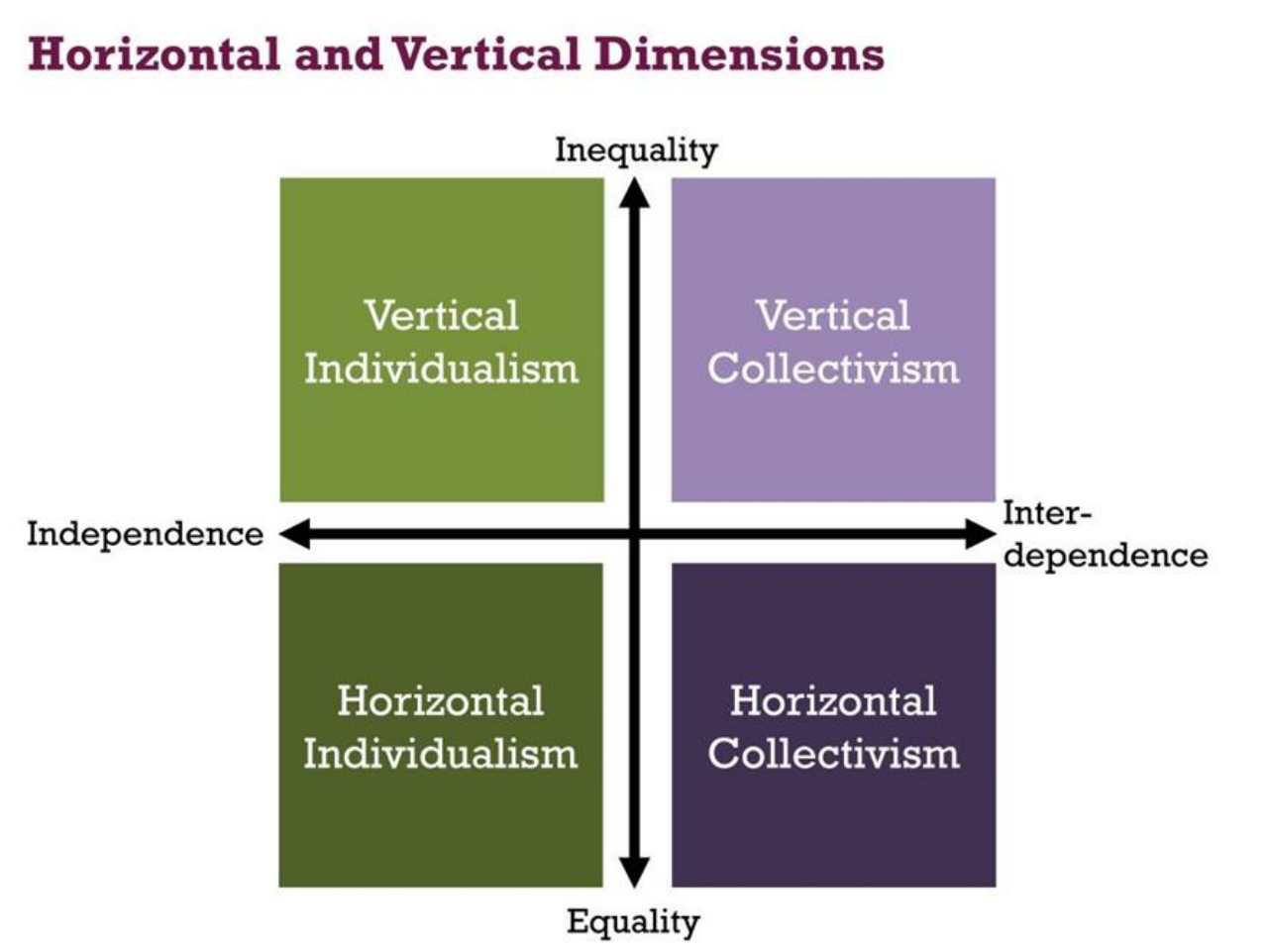
- They fail to capture the nuanced reality of cultures, societies, and even individuals who may embody both individualistic and collectivistic traits simultaneously.

Individualism and Collectivism: Dimensions

Different societies and positions in these societies – different effects of individualism and collectivism

Four orientations:

Vertical Collectivism; Vertical Individualism; Horizontal Individualism; Horizontal Collectivism



Vertical Collectivism (VC)

Focus: Emphasizes hierarchy, tradition, and authority within the group.

Individual Role: Individuals are expected to subordinate personal desires to the goals of the group and accept the established social hierarchy.

Examples: Nations like Korea and India are often cited as examples where group well-being and self-sacrifice are highly valued.

Horizontal Collectivism (HC)

Focus: Values cooperation and interdependence but emphasizes equality among members within the group.

Individual Role: People are seen as equal to other group members, and social harmony is achieved through shared responsibility and a sense of belonging.

Examples: The Israeli kibbutz is a classic example, showcasing shared responsibility and communal living.

Vertical Individualism (VC)

Focus: An autonomous individual who seeks personal achievement and status, recognizing that a hierarchy of success naturally exists.

Individual Role: People are encouraged to strive to be the best and gain distinction through competition, while still maintaining their independence.

Examples: Cultures like the United States often exhibit traits of vertical individualism, where individual status through competition is valued.

Horizontal Individualism (HC)

Focus: Emphasizes autonomy, uniqueness, and self-reliance but also a strong belief in equality among individuals.

Individual Role: People are seen as independent and distinct but are not motivated by a desire to gain high status over others; they aim to "do their own thing" in a world where everyone should be treated equally.

Examples: Countries like Sweden and Australia are often associated with this orientation, valuing both self-reliance and egalitarianism.

Culture and Custom

- A conception of culture that is both

Behavioural

Patterns of behaviour passed through generations

Symbolic

Categories, beliefs, and doctrines underpin and justify socially-acceptable behaviours e.g. what is ‘good’, ‘beautiful’, ‘efficient’…

- Cultural ideas are socially inherited and customary
  - Must be constitutive of different ways of life
  - Must play a part in the self-understanding of members of the community

Constructs for Thinking About Culture

- **Cultural Universal**: What human beings have in common
- **Culture Specific**: Differences based on cultural development and influence

- **Emics**: subjective or insider accounts (aligns with culture specific)
- **Etics**: objective or outsider accounts

- **Ethnocentrism**: Evaluating a culture by comparing it to our own
- **Cultural Relativism**: requiring awareness of the culture in which a behaviour, belief etc. occurs

- **Individualism** and **Collectivism**

Cultural Psychology

'Cultural psychology' is an umbrella term that has been developed in different ways:

Sociocultural research focused on how people construct meaning within specific activities and contexts (e.g. Rogoff)

Discursive approaches focused on hyper-contextual cognitive processes situated within social power structures

- Social psychological approaches that use **comparative designs** to examine divergent psychological processes across cultural contexts (e.g., Markus & Kitayama)

Cultural Psychology

- **Indigenous** psychology (psychologies), which shares the meaning-focused perspective of cultural psychology but draws more heavily on localized knowledge and practices. Less focus on generalizing beyond that context (Shweder, 2000)

- **Cross-cultural** psychology - founded within a universalist model, aiming to identity invariance and commonality in psychological processes (typically those identified in Western contexts) through cross-cultural comparisons. Contrast with Indigenous psychology

- **Ethnic minority** psychology - focused on the meaning and experience of being an ethnic minority within a specific national context. Tends to have an explicit emphasis on power, oppression, and privilege

Coffee break

The Rich Get Researched

- *"The vast majority of [American] psychologists and their students have extremely limited knowledge concerning the work of their international counterparts. In contrast to other disciplines, psychology is a rather provincial discipline dominated by the United States"* (Denmark, 1998, p. 465).
  - English language studies/reporting
- Imbalances in Resources for Psychological Research (Arnett, 2016)
- Psychology has traditionally been a hierarchical field controlled by a relatively small elite group of researchers and institutions
- This performed a major gatekeeping function - restricted access to grants, publications, and jobs.
  - Ethnic minority researchers have been disadvantaged by their lack of 'elite membership'

Indigenous Psychologies

Yang (1997) - eminent Taiwanese theoretician within indigenous psychology movement

Give priority to the study of culturally unique psychological and behavioural phenomena or characteristics

Investigate both the specific content and the involved process of the phenomenon

Make it a rule to begin any research with a thorough immersion into the natural, tangible details of the phenomenon to be studied

Let research be based upon the culture's intellectual tradition rather than the Western intellectual tradition

WEIRD Psychology

- Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic
- The neglected 95%: Why American psychology needs to become less American. (Arnett, 2016)
- Attempts by other cultures to be heard and seen

e.g. ‘We are not WEIRD: Chinese culture and psychology’ (Shiah, 2024):

“By providing a thorough scientific interpretation of Chinese traditions and revolutionizing “WEIRD” psychology and social science, we can pave the way for a transformative movement.” (p.1)

“We decided to increase the visibility of Chinese culture and psychology by publishing our works in an international journal of high reputation, and Frontiers in Psychology became our first choice.” (p.1)

Assumptions and Complexity

- All nations are not the same
  - Western knowledge of differences, including European differences
  - Previous Western assumption that African culture is singular
    - In-group/Out-group bias

- “The formal study of psychology in African universities has been usurped and overdetermined by mainstream Western psychology” (Nwoye, 2015, p.96)

- The emergence of African Psychology:
  - The history of its emergence and evolution
  - Its relationship to EuroAmerican psychology

- “The growth of Africa(n)-centred psychology is hindered by the view that it is singular and static instead of composed of dynamic and manifold orientations.” (Ratele, 2017, p.313)

Complex cultural experiences

- Multi-dimensional cultural groups

  Example: African-American

- Robinson (2010): Black Americans have been splintered into four groups:

1) Mainstream – comprised of the middle-class majority with a full ownership stake in American society
2) Emergent – comprised of individuals of mixed-race heritage and communities of recent black immigrants
3) Transcendent – small elite group with massive wealth, power and influence
4) Abandoned – a pessimistic minority with defeatist dreams