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Theory and Method in Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Psychology

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Theory and Method in Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Psychology

John Berry
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Abstract

• The field of cross-cultural psychology examines the relationships between the cultural contexts in which individuals develop and now live, and the psychological characteristics they display.
• The field of intercultural psychology examines how individuals with different cultural backgrounds and psychological characteristic engage each other and adapt to each other when living in culturally-diverse societies.
• In both fields, the theoretical position of universalism is helpful. This approach uses three concepts:
  1. Processes: It is considered that all human beings share the same fundamental psychological processes (such as perceiving, thinking, personality structure).
  2. Competence: Cultural experiences shape these processes during the course of development into variable competencies (abilities, attitudes, values).
  3. Performance: Cultural situations then promote (or constrain) the expression of these competencies as performances in appropriate settings.

• Without these basic similarities, there can be no possibility of comparing behaviours across cultures; nor could there be any mutual understanding or mutual acceptance across cultural boundaries when persons of different background interact.
• The application of research findings to promote immigrant wellbeing can only be ensured when they are based in sound theoretical and methodological foundations, including the existence of psychological universals.
OUTLINE

1. Introduction
2. Relationships between culture and behaviour
3. Varieties of comparative psychological research
4. Levels of observation and analysis
5. Ecocultural Framework
6. Cultural Transmission
7. Equivalence and Comparability
8. Emics and Etics
9. Examples of Universals
10. Conclusions
1. INTRODUCTION

• This presentation examines some current theoretical and methodological issues in cross-cultural and intercultural psychology.
• The key question addressed is how to study the relationships between culture and human behaviour.
• Some suggestions for conceptual distinctions are made in order to provide ways to understand the various approaches to this question.
• Then some methodological suggestions are made for carrying out cross-cultural and intercultural research.
• Finally, some empirical examples of possible universals are presented.
1. Introduction:
Comparative Psychological Studies

- Cross-cultural and intercultural psychology seeks to understand the development and display of individual behaviour in cultural contexts.
- This involves more than just assessing behaviour in any or any number of cultures, comparing them, finding relationships, and finally guessing what these relationships mean.
- Comparative psychological research requires a design that:
  - selects cultures for having characteristics that are theoretically relevant to the behaviours to be studied.
  - selects behaviours that are theoretically relevant to the cultural characteristics
  - makes hypotheses (predictions) about the relationships.
  - examines similarities and differences across cultures in the assessed behaviours
  - examines relationships between cultural characteristics and behaviours.
  - assesses the validity of the hypotheses

The goal is to discover valid links between culture and behaviour:
  - that may allow the generation of psychological universals
  - and possibly a global or universal psychology
2. Relationships between culture and behaviour

There are three perspectives on the comparative study of relationships between culture and human behaviour:

1. **Absolutism**: There are no cultural variations in psychological phenomena. Culture is not important in the explanation of the development or display of human behaviour. Comparisons are made easily and without regard to any cultural factors.

2. **Relativism**: All psychological phenomena are so embedded in cultural context that behaviour in each culture must be examined in its own terms. Hence, no comparisons are possible.

3. **Universalism**: Basic psychological processes are common to all human populations. Culture plays an important role in their development and display. Comparisons can be made on the basis of these underlying commonalities, while taking cultural factors into account during assessment.

This presentation accepts the perspective of universalism.
2. Universalism

The theoretical position of *universalism* in cross-cultural psychology is based on two complementary notions:

1. There are numerous findings (Berry et al, 2011) that all fundamental psychological *processes* are present in all cultural populations. Hence, cross-cultural psychology accepts the existence of basic psychological communalities at a deep level of functioning.

2. It also accepts the obvious fact that these basic processes are *developed* and *displayed* in different ways in different cultures.

These underlying process similarities provide a valid basis for making comparisons, while the surface variations in expression provide the range of evidence from which inferences to universals may be made.
2. Universalism

In more detail, universalism makes the following three distinctions and assumptions:

1. Basic psychological **processes and capacities** are present in all individuals in all cultures (e.g., perceiving, remembering, having emotions, and social relations).

2. Cultural experiences interact with these basic psychological features and shapes their development into individual **competencies**, (e.g., attitudes, values, traits).

3. Cultural situations provide the contexts that influence (promote or constrain) the **performance** of these individual competencies.
2. Example of Universalism: Language

1. All human beings have the processes and capacities to develop language and communication. And more than one language can be acquired and used.

2. Cultural experiences influence which language(s) an individual will become competent in.

3. Cultural and social situations will influence which language(s) a person will use in any particular situation.
2. Relationships between culture and behaviour

Another distinction is between:

*cross-cultural* psychology; and

*intercultural / acculturation* psychology.

In the first, the focus is on cultural populations that are *independent* of each other (see Berry et.al. 2011)

In the second, the focus is on those that are *in contact* with each other, either internationally, or within plural societies (see Sam & Berry, 2006).

In both, the comparative method is used to discover some general principles of human behaviour while taking cultural context into account.
3. Varieties of Comparative Psychological Research

- Not all research that is carried out with different cultural populations are *cultural* in the sense that they incorporate cultural factors in their design.
- Some are *international*, simply being carried out in different societies, without much regard to cultural features that may contribute to similarities or differences.
- For example, international studies of reading, math or science achievement provide scores for cultural populations.
- *Generalisations* are possible (e.g., “in East Asia, math scores are higher than in Europe”).
- However, *explanations* are not possible. At best, *post hoc* proposals (e.g., the history of literacy, or affluence of a society) can be suggested to account for variations.
3. Varieties of Comparative Psychological Research

- Following the contact/non-contact distinction, we can observe two other kinds of comparative research.
- In the first, we have the classical *culture-comparative* study, comparing performance (e.g., on abilities or values) across populations.
- In the second, we have *intercultural* or *acculturation* research (e.g., the study of immigrant adaptation).
- In both kinds of study, it is possible to provide:
  - *generalisations*, if done comparatively, and
  - *explanations*, if cultural features are considered in advance, and used as the basis for the prediction of differences and similarities in performance).
4. Levels of Observation and Analysis in Comparative Research

• In the study of culture-behaviour relationships, we need to be clear about the different level of observation and level of analysis.

• Observation and analysis can be carried out at two levels:
  - cultural group or societal level, and
  - the individual level.

When these two distinctions are crossed, we can generate a typology of different kinds of research designs.
Levels of analysis and observation

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4. Levels of Observation and Analysis in Comparative Research

• In the first type (Holocultural), the data are collected at the cultural level, usually by anthropologists using ethnographic methods, and are interpreted at that level, leading to the typical ethnographic report.

• These cultural observations can also be related to each other, comparing various customs or institutions across cultures, leading to holocultural studies (e.g., using the Human Relation Area Files).

• Such studies have revealed broad patterns of co-variation among elements of culture. For example, childrearing practices (ranging on a dimension from those emphasising ‘assertion’ to those emphasising ‘compliance’) correlates with ecological factors (such as subsistence economy) and with social structural factors (such as hierarchy in social relationships).

• However, no individual psychological data are collected in this type of study; they serve to provide basic contextual information for studies in cross-cultural psychology.
4. Levels of Observation and Analysis in Comparative Research

- In the second type (Aggregation), the data are collected at the individual level (e.g., using interviews, questionnaires, etc.) with samples of people in a population.
- These data are then used to create scores for each culture, by aggregation, from the individual responses. Here the level of observation is the individual, but the level of analysis is the culture.
- Culture (or country) scores can claim to represent the population if individual data are from representative samples of individuals.
- Such country scores can be related to other aggregated scores, or to independent country indicators, such as GNP.
- They can also be related to other independent cultural descriptions obtained with holocultural research methods (type 1).
- These aggregated country scores are sometimes used in correlations with individual scores on very similar scales (e.g., in countries with a high national Collectivism score, individuals usually score high on a Collectivism scale).
- That is, the same set of data is used twice in the correlation: once at the individual level of observation and once at the cultural level of analysis.
- This practice may lack sufficient independence in conceptualisation and measurement to be entirely valid.
4. Levels of Observation and Analysis in Comparative Research

- In the third type of study (Individual Difference), data are collected at the individual level, and remain at that level for analysis. These are the common and basic kinds of study used by psychology more generally.

- Mean scores are calculated for a particular test, and the relationships among scores are correlated or factor analysed.

- The vast majority of these individual difference studies are not used in cross-cultural comparisons, and remain focused on distributions and relationships among variables within one population.

- However, when cross-cultural (or cross-ethnocultural group) comparisons are made, they are usually of these mean scores, sometimes taken to represent only the sample, but also sometimes taken to represent the culture as a whole (c.f, aggregation studies).

- These cross-cultural comparisons remain at the individual level of observation and analysis; cultural factors are not usually invoked in any attempt to explain mean score differences that may be obtained.

- Occasionally post hoc ‘cultural’ explanations are proposed to account for mean score differences. Studies of personality traits (e.g., emotions or conformity) are of this type.
4. Levels of Observation and Analysis in Comparative Research

• The fourth type (Ecocultural) represents a hybrid, combining elements of the first and third types. Here, cultural-level findings (the first type, from ethnographic sources) are taken and examined for their relationships with individual-level data (from the third type, individual difference studies).

• Sampling of cultures can provide a range of variation in contexts, and allow the prediction of variations (similarities and differences) in individual psychological development and behaviour.

• Since the two sets of data are independent of each other (due to their different levels of observation and analysis), it is valid to examine relationships between them.

• Examples of these are the ecocultural studies of cognitive style where ecological and cultural information is used to select cultural groups (as contexts for development), followed by predictions and assessment of individual behaviour in these various settings.
Methodological Issues

• The practical requirements of carrying out comparative psychological research (in either cross-cultural or intercultural psychology) are difficult to meet.

• Following are some tools that have been developed and used in such research:
  1. Ecocultural framework
  2. Equivalence and comparability.
  3. Emic and etic approaches
The ecocultural approach to studying cultural and psychological phenomena is based on the view that groups and individuals develop their customary and individual behaviours as adaptations to the demands of their *ecology*, as they live in particular ecosystems.

Hence, similar habitats should give rise to patterns of social institutions and behaviours that are shared, common ways of living.

The approach also considers *sociopolitical* influences on the population from outside the local habitat (e.g., acculturation, via schooling, religion) to be important sources of social and psychological development.

These two sets of external influences will alter the basic cultural and psychological features of people.
5. Ecocultural Approach

- The ecocultural approach is considered to be value neutral.
- In ecological anthropology, customary behaviours are seen to adapt to the demands of the ecological context; thus cultural forms will be developed that meet these needs.
- In psychology, individual behaviour is seen to adapt to both the ecological and cultural contexts; thus individual behaviours will be developed to meet the demands and constraints of these contexts.
- Any criteria for evaluating customs and behaviours are internal to the ecosystem in which they arise.
- Hence no external value judgements or absolute criteria may be used.
5. Ecocultural Approach

- The Ecocultural approach considers that understanding the relationships between cultural contexts and human behaviour requires that both contexts and behaviors be assessed independently.

- **Contexts** are seen as complex networks of inter-related ecological, cultural, biological and sociopolitical variables.

  **Behaviours** are similarly viewed as complex sets of inter-related variables.
5. Ecocultural Framework

[Diagram with nodes and arrows showing relationships between ecological context, biological adaptation, cultural adaptation, sociopolitical context, ecological influences, genetic transmission, cultural transmission, acculturation, observable behaviors, inferred characteristics, background variables, process variables, psychological variables, population level, and individual level.]
A key component of the ecocultural framework is the set of transmission variables between ecological contexts and population adaptations (on the left side of the framework), and individual psychological development (on the right side).

In essence, we need to examine the various ways in which cultural and biological features of populations become incorporated into the repertoire of individuals.

Our view is that culture is both out there (lying in wait for individuals whether they be neonates or immigrants), and in here (incorporated into the psychological makeup of individuals through transmission).

Four such transmission variables are identified:
- direct ecological influences (without any explicit cultural mediation)
- genetic transmission from parents to offspring,
- cultural transmission within the culture, and
- acculturation (through sociopolitical influences impacting from outside the culture).

- The interplay between cultural transmission from within a person’s own culture, and from outside cultures has been conceptualised as a complex set of inter-related processes.

- These relationships, and lines of cultural transmission to the developing individual are portrayed in a cultural transmission framework.

- I focus on cultural and acculturation forms of transmission.
6. Cultural Transmission Framework

CULTURAL TRANSMISSION
(ENCULTURATION AND SOCIALIZATION)
FROM OWN CULTURE

OBLIQUE TRANSMISSION
FROM OTHER ADULTS AND INSTITUTIONS

VERTICAL TRANSMISSION
FROM PARENTS

DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL

ACCULTURATION FROM OTHER CULTURES

OBLIQUE TRANSMISSION
FROM OTHER ADULTS AND INSTITUTIONS

HORIZONTAL TRANSMISSION
FROM PEERS

HORIZONTAL TRANSMISSION
FROM PEERS
6. Forms of Transmission From Own Culture: Enculturation

* On the centre and left side of the figure, we have the case when the developing individual is involved with only one culture.

* There are three sources of influence:
  - the individual’s parents (*vertical transmission*);
  - other adults who are members of the same society (*oblique transmission* from other adults and institutions in the society);
  - and other individuals of the same age (*horizontal transmission* from peers).
6. Forms of Transmission From Another Culture: Acculturation

On the centre and right side, we have the case when individuals are involved with another culture as well (such as for colonised indigenous peoples, immigrants and ethnocultural group members). Again, there are three sources of influence:

- parents who have begun to experience acculturation within their society of settlement (vertical transmission);
- other members of the same indigenous or immigrant group (oblique transmission);
- and other individuals of the same age from the same group (horizontal transmission).
6. Interactive Relationships

- Although the arrows in this framework are unidirectional (towards the developing individual), in reality they are often reciprocal.
- There is now ample evidence that social relations are highly interactive.
- For example, children are known to influence their parents, peers, and the institutions of the societies in which they live.
6. Cultural transmission

• This framework can be used to discover the extent to which each source of transmission may be responsible for any particular behaviour.

• For example, the relative contribution of each form of transmission on family obligation values of obligation, or of cultural (ethnic and national) identity can be examined.
7. Equivalence and Comparability

Three notions of equivalence and comparability are fundamental to making cross-cultural comparisons:

1. *Functional equivalence*- phenomena are equivalent and can be compared when their functions in culture or behaviour are the same.

2. *Conceptual equivalence*- concepts and their measures need to have the same meaning in all cultures in the research.

3. *Metric equivalence*- mathematical relationships among elements in the data need to be similar.

4. *Comparability* exists when these form of equivalence have been established.
7. Functional Equivalence

- When a cultural custom or individual behaviour can be shown to have the same function in different cultures, the comparisons can begin.
- For example, population control can be by way of:
  - sterilisation,
  - female infanticide,
  - abstention,
  - abortion, or
  - redistribution of children among families.
7. Conceptual Equivalence

• Meanings of *concepts* and their assessment instruments can be checked during the development of the research material.

• There are a number of techniques available, such as:
  - using the semantic differential,
  - forward and back translation followed by discussion among translators.
7. Metric Equivalence

- When data have been collected, statistical analyses need to be carried out in each cultural sample.
- Correlations are used to examine whether all items relate to each other in the same way.
- Factor analysis of the pooled data reveals the overall (international) structure.
- Factor analysis within each cultural sample reveals whether they are similar to each other, and to the pooled factor structure.
8. Emics and Etics

- One set of concepts and procedures that have been helpful in establishing comparability are the notions of *emics* and *etics*
- These terms derive from linguistics where phonemics and phonetics are distinguished.
- Emics are local and culturally-specific phenomena.
- Etics are culturally-general. They are of two types:
  - Imposed etics - imported from outside.
  - Derived etics - generated from inside.
- Both approaches are required to ‘gain perspective’ on a phenomenon (Pike).
8. Imposed Etics

- As the saying goes, ‘you can only start from where you are’.
- That is, the research question being addressed, and the concepts and the tools that are available are those in the researcher’s own scientific culture.
- So, this is where a study inevitably begins.
- It is often assumed (usually incorrectly) to be a valid point of entry, and is imposed on the phenomena being studied.
8. Emics

- The emic approach requires ethnographic, qualitative and open exploration of the phenomenon in local cultural terms.
- Cultural informants and research assistants are essential.
- This needs to be done in each cultural setting.
- The imposed etic is usually challenged by findings from emic research.
8. Derived Etics

- When many emic explorations have been carried out, comparisons among them may reveal similarities and differences in the phenomena.
- These emic findings can be compared with the imposed etic that was used at the beginning of the research.
- Commonalities among emics and the initial imposed etic can be used to generate a derived etic.
- This derived etic, can then serve as a framework for making comparisons.
9. Empirical Examples

• Three examples of the use of these concepts and methods are presented:
  1. Integration Hypothesis
  2. Multiculturalism Hypothesis
  3. Contact Hypothesis
9.1. Integration Hypothesis

- The integration hypothesis is that when individuals are ‘doubly engaged’ (in their heritage cultures and in the larger society) they will have higher levels of psychological and sociocultural adaptation.
- This hypothesis was examined in the earlier presentation on acculturation and identity.
- Research findings (e.g., from the study of immigrant youth) supported this hypothesis.
9.1. Integration Hypothesis

- A recent meta-analysis by Benet-Martinez has shown that this relationship is indeed in evidence.
- In over 80 studies (with over 23,000 participants) integration (‘biculturalism’ in her terms) was positively associated with positive adaptation (‘adjustment’ in her terms).
- From these studies, we may conclude that the integration hypothesis is largely supported.
- This may now be used as a psychological universal.
9.2. Multiculturalism Hypothesis

- The multiculturalism hypothesis is that when individuals and societies are confident in, and feel secure about, their own cultural identities and their place in the larger society, more positive mutual attitudes will result.
- In contrast, when these identities are threatened, mutual hostility will result.
- This hypothesis derives from the Canadian Multiculturalism policy statement that positive intercultural relations “…must be founded on confidence on one’s own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others, and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions…”.
9.2. Integrated Threat Hypothesis

• Parallel research on the relationship between security and intercultural acceptance has been carried out using the integrated threat hypothesis.

• This hypothesis argues that a sense of threat to a person’s identity (the converse of security) will lead to rejection of the group that is the source of threat.

• That is, when individuals and groups experience prejudice and discrimination, they will reciprocate this hostility by rejecting the source of this hostility.
9.2. Threat Meta-Analysis

• In a meta-analysis using a sample of 95 published studies, Riek et al., (2006) found significant correlations between the experience of threat and out-group attitudes.

• They concluded that “the results of the meta-analysis indicate that intergroup threat has an important relationship with out-group attitudes. As people perceive more intergroup competition, more value violations, higher levels of intergroup anxiety, more group esteem threats, and endorse more negative stereotypes, negative attitudes toward out-groups increase” (p. 345).
9.2. Conclusions
Multiculturalism Hypothesis

• We conclude that the multiculturalism hypothesis has largely been supported.
• Various feelings of security appear to be part of the psychological underpinnings of the acceptance of multiculturalism.
• Whether phrased in positive terms (security is a prerequisite for tolerance of others and the acceptance of diversity), or in negative terms (threats to, or anxiety about, one’s cultural identity and cultural rights underpins prejudice), there is little doubt that there are intimate links between being accepted by others and accepting others.
9.3. Contact hypothesis

- The *contact hypothesis* asserts that “Prejudice...may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals.” (Allport, 1954).
- However, Allport proposed that the hypothesis is more likely to be supported when certain conditions are present in the intercultural encounter.
- The effect of contact is predicted to be stronger when:
  - there is contact between groups of roughly equal social and economic status;
  - the contact is voluntary, sought by both groups, rather than imposed; and
  - supported by society, through norms and laws promoting contact and prohibiting discrimination.
9.3. Meta-Analysis of Contact Hypothesis

• Pettigrew and Tropp (2001; 2011) conducted meta-analyses of hundreds of studies of the contact hypothesis, which came from many countries and many diverse settings (schools, work, experiments).

• Their findings provide general support for the contact hypothesis: intergroup contact does generally relate negatively to prejudice in both dominant and non-dominant samples: “Overall, results from the meta-analysis reveal that greater levels of intergroup contact are typically associated with lower level of prejudice...” (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2001, p. 267).

• This effect was stronger where there were structured programs that incorporated the conditions outlined by Allport than when these conditions were not present.
9.3. Conclusions: Contact Hypothesis

- The evidence is now widespread across cultures that greater intercultural contact is associated with more positive intercultural attitudes, and lower levels of prejudice.
- This generalisation has to be qualified by two cautions.
- First, the appropriate conditions need to be present in order for contact to lead to positive intercultural attitudes.
- And second, there exists many examples of the opposite effect, where increased contact is associated with greater conflict. The conditions (cultural, political, economic) under which these opposite outcomes arise are in urgent need of examination.
10. Conclusions

- Comparative psychological research is difficult to carry out.
- Some concepts and methods have been developed over the past 50 years that seek to guide this kind of research.
- When done well, it is possible to find generalisations across all cultural contexts, and may serve as psychological universals.
- Three generalisations have been advanced on the basis of research in cross-cultural and intercultural psychology:
  1. the integration acculturation strategy is generally the one that is associated with more successful outcomes.
  2. when individuals and groups feel secure in their cultural situations and identities, they will be in a position to accept others.
  3. under most conditions intercultural contact will lead to greater mutual acceptance.
10. Conclusions

- These kinds of generalisations may be useful in various applications (such as developing policies and programmes) in a variety of cultural and intercultural situations.
- However, before applying these principles, they need to be checked using the concepts and methods outlined in this presentation.
- If found to be valid in further research, they may constitute universals of human behaviour that can serve the betterment of human relations.