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Author(s):

Kagitcibasi, Cigdem; Poortinga, Ype H.

Abstract:

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CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Issues and Overarching Themes

A selection of current and presumably future issues is addressed in four sections. The first section deals with the pervasive controversy between relativistic and universalistic orientations. In the second section, the authors discuss how the notion of culture is used in empirical studies, drawing attention to, among other things, the low emphasis on cross-cultural similarities that emerge from many data sets. The third section addresses three themes that may well become more important in the future, namely questions concerning the degree of coherence in cross-cultural data spanning larger ranges of behavior, the integration of findings from non-Western societies, and an increase in research on human development in cultural context. The fourth section emphasizes the responsibility of cross-cultural psychologists to apply their expertise, especially to problems of economic and social inequality, to contribute to human well-being.

In this final contribution to the special issue, we draw attention to some overarching themes. The authors of each of the previous articles in this issue were asked to address one domain or aspect from the wide array that constitutes the field of cross-cultural psychology. This article will aim at some integration as well as reflect our views on some important current issues and trends in cross-cultural psychology. Our writing, as well as this whole special issue, is necessarily selective, limited as it is by our own knowledge, perspectives, and interests.

The first section deals with the contrast between relativistic and universalistic perspectives. With most of the other authors, we agree that ways are needed to bridge the gap and to formulate positions that allow for both cultural communality and cultural differences. The issue will probably be seen more and more as a fruitless dichotomy, but, somewhat unlike others, we think that the issue, in a sense, will stay because it cannot really be resolved.

The second section deals with the question of how the notion of culture is dealt with in everyday

cross-cultural studies. We focus on three points, namely the rather low emphasis on cross-cultural similarities as compared to differences, the use of culture as an explanatory label, and the tricky problem of how we actually define a culture as distinct from other cultures.

In the third section, we address three trends that are likely to shape the future of cross-cultural psychology in major ways, namely different viewpoints on the psychological coherence of cultures, an increase in contributions from the majority world, and a possible shift in attention from social-psychological topics to ontogenetic development.

The fourth section is about the moral and social justification of the cross-cultural enterprise, namely the scope for application. More and more science is held accountable to society. It may be claimed that as a science focused on the (global) human reality, psychology and particularly cross-cultural psychology carries an even greater social responsibility. We discuss the extent to which this responsibility is realized.

DEFINING BEHAVIOR-CULTURE RELATIONSHIPS

The main theoretical and methodological issue in cross-cultural psychology is how the relationship between behavior and culture should be defined. Commonly, two major positions are distinguished, relativism and universalism. The distinction coincides with the enduring and realistic tensions between a

naturwissenschaftliche and a geisteswissenschaftliche orientation in psychology that can be traced through its entire history (Jahoda & Krewer, 1997). It is equally reflected in the distinction between nomothetic and idiographic approaches in psychology, identified by Allport (1937) who, in turn, referred to earlier sources in philosophy. There are further parallels in the qualitative and hermeneutic versus the quantitative and positivistic approaches in sociology and cultural anthropology. What is common in the idiographic (hermeneutic, emic, indigenous, relativist, cultural, etc.) approaches is an emphasis on the uniqueness of phenomena, as they derive their meanings from specific contexts. The unique individual case has to be studied from within and in its own right, defying comparison. By contrast, the nomothetic (positivist, etic, universalist, culture-comparative, etc.) approaches study what is common and can be compared, not the unique. The distinction emerges in the definition of the object of scientific enquiry, strictness of theories, replicability of methods and procedures, and notions of empirical testing.

Psychology can be said to belong to both of the two major realms, but our history shows that most of us are in one of the two camps with regard to how we define our concepts, what we see as promising methods, and (even) how relevant we consider certain findings. The differences in the contents of the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology and Culture* and *Psychology* form a telling example.

One's choice of position has important implications for methodology. Insofar as there is nonidentity of psychological processes cross-culturally, there is noncomparability of data. Insistence on the uniqueness of phenomena defies comparison and makes the use of common methods and instruments inappropriate. Thus, the entire enterprise of culture-comparative research collapses if the assumption of a psychic unity of humankind is rejected. Many cross-cultural psychologists do not feel at ease with such a viewpoint. But, even more are uncomfortable with an absolutist position in which the relationships between behavior and underlying processes are assumed to be the same everywhere. For example, no cross-culturalist today would interpret a mean difference in scores on an intelligence battery between samples drawn from two cultural populations as a reflection of a corresponding difference in intellectual capacity.

The two metatheoretical perspectives tend to appear as mutually exclusive, and which one is subscribed to is a matter of academic (even personal) choice. Nevertheless, as psychology ventures to integrate culture into its analyses, there is an increasing need to address and deal with the basic conflict between what Lightfoot and Valsiner (1992) called "the need to conceptualize 'context dependency' of psychological phenomena and the 'context eliminating' theoretical traditions of psychology" (p. 394).

There have been various attempts to bridge relativistic and universalistic approaches. In the 1960s, Berry (1969) already suggested that researchers should move between emic and etic positions to

capture both culture-specific and culture-general aspects of behavior. In a textbook, Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (1992) reserved the term universalism for a position between behavioral universalism (called absolutism) and cultural relativism. They assumed the universality of psychological processes, but these are expressed in different behavior manifestations. More recently, there have been various reactions against the extremely relativistic position carved out for the school of cultural psychology by Shweder (1990).

Examples can be found in our own work in which the complementarity of universal and culture-specific aspects of behavior is emphasized. Kagitcibasi (1996b) has taken up the challenge to link these perspectives in empirical work. She has combined cultural contextualism with universal standards of human development in an intervention study with low-income women and children in Turkey. Poortinga (1992) has argued for a distinction between lawful regularities in behavior and aspects that are essentially unexplainable. Models of nonlinear dynamics (chaos, catastrophes) provide a useful analog. In such models, it escapes prediction and explanation why a specific concrete event is happening, but the range of possible events is clearly constrained by boundary conditions. In the same sense, human behavior is, on one hand, constrained by ecological and sociocultural conditions in a lawful manner, whereas, on the other hand, within these constraints, there is a space of opportunities for culturally and historically unique expressions.

The demarcation and/or integration of cultural context with human universals is a complex and difficult enterprise. In this series of articles, Singelis (2000 [this issue]) stresses the complementary nature of the two perspectives, Aycan (2000 [this issue]) pleads for an extension of industrial and organizational psychology with so-called qualitative methods, and Harkness and Keefer (2000 [this issue]) predict the growth of a global psychology combining sensitivity to culture with valid cross-cultural comparisons. Most directly pertinent is the penetrating discussion by Kashima (2000 [this issue]), who indicates points of convergence between naturalistic and culturalistic approaches. In our opinion, these directions hold considerable promise for the future. Can we conclude with Smith (in press) that cross-cultural and cultural psychology are merging and entering the mainstream and that the polarity between the interpretive cultural/historical and the causal/explanatory approaches is a "mutually irrelevant dichotomy"?

We remain skeptical as to whether we will see the end of the dichotomy in the near future. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to persuade those who firmly take one side in the debate. After all, there are metatheoretical issues involved, and history should teach us the lesson that these emerge time and again (Jahoda & Krewer, 1997). Still, we hope and expect that the dichotomy will more and more be seen as fruitless. We need ways to bridge the gap: to formulate positions that allow for both cultural communality and cultural differences. This promises to enrich our understanding more than dichotomizing and taking sides.

HANDLING OF CULTURE IN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Related to the dichotomy of relativism and universalism are other issues that may not dominate the theoretical discussion so much but nevertheless affect the body of empirical research and application that forms everyday cross-cultural psychology. We mention three topics that bear on the interpretation of findings in cultural or contextual terms.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

In many respects, individuals across cultures have similar emotions and cognitions, and societies have quite similar social-structural mechanisms such as rules for maintaining group solidarity, socialization of children, and so forth; yet these are often ignored. There is a tendency to see similarities as biologically rooted and as falling outside of culture and thus as of no interest to cross-cultural psychologists. The focus is on observed differences, which are attributed to culture.

The emphasis on differences in behavior is highlighted by van de Vijver and Leung (2000 [this issue]). In culture-comparative research articles, it is often noted explicitly that both similarities and differences

in behavior repertoire were found between samples drawn from two (or more) cultural populations. But authors then tend to continue with the explanation of differences and to ignore the similarities rather than asking to what extent and how culture influences behavior (cf. Aycan, 2000).

There are a number of reasons for this. In the first place, cross-cultural psychology as a field of research has come about as a reaction against the tendency in psychology to ignore cultural variations and to consider them nuisance variables. Historically, the justification for our field lies in the fact that cross-cultural differences exist.

A second reason lies in implicit assumptions about the uniqueness of each culture, derived from cultural anthropology. Descriptions of the Indian self; the Korean mother; or terms such as Japanese *amae*, Greek *philotimo*, or Mexican historic-sociocultural premises are readily used. However, similar patterns observed in other countries often remain implicit. For example, Triandis (1989) noted sentiments similar to the Greek *philotimo* in other cultural groups, and Aycicegi (1993) found the Mexican historic-sociocultural premises (Diaz-Guerrero, 1991) with regard to sex roles to be common in Turkey.

A third reason has to do with methodology, van de Vijver and Leung (2000) describe how research design and analysis in traditional experimental approaches are centered on the testing of the null hypothesis. Interpretable evidence has been found when the null hypothesis can be rejected, preferably with a high level of statistical confidence. The emphasis is now shifting toward the proportion of variance that is explained. This means that we should look more at the size of cross-cultural differences relative to the variation between individuals within cultural samples. This has two consequences. First, the use of homogeneous samples (students) will become less acceptable in the future. Second, the ratio of between-culture variation and within-culture variation will become the main statistic for reporting differences.

CULTURE AS AN EXPLANATORY CONCEPT

The second issue with regard to interpretation that we would like to draw attention to is the loose usage of culture as a label in the explanation of differences in behavior repertoire. To put this somewhat crudely, *amae* is observed in Japan and the Greeks report to be *philotimos* because it is in the nature of their respective cultures. Often, original authors (cf. Doi, 1973; Triandis & Vassiliou, 1972) cannot be accused of such superficiality, but, once a characteristic trait has been described, it tends to be invoked more gratuitously by other researchers in subsequent studies, even if the relationship of the phenomena under investigation to such a trait has never been examined (cf. Singelis, 2000). Even more tenuous are references to culture as a global label (Segall, 1984); if Turkish migrants in the Netherlands have a high rate of psychosomatic complaints, it is because of their Turkish (or Mediterranean) culture. Cultural "explanations" have become so popular and readily available that they tend to preclude more substantial analyses. In this way, important social-structural factors such as social class standing, poverty, and low education levels are masked. This is particularly problematic in those instances in which ethnic minority status overlaps with low socioeconomic status.

DEFINING "A" CULTURE

The third and final issue we would like to mention in this section is the question of how a culture should be defined vis-a-vis other cultures. In cultural anthropology, there are a series of frequently mentioned criteria, including permanence over time, geographical region, language, religion, economic subsistence, self-declared (ethnic) identity, and so on. Obviously, distinctions between cultural populations are critically dependent on the selection of a criterion or a combination of criteria. Going a step further, one can question whether these criteria are still meaningful in a time of global communication and travel and of increasing exchange of information among major parts of the world's population. Indeed, it has been argued that cultural boundaries are essentially fluid (Hermans & Kempen, 1998). This kind of argument forces researchers to consider which constituent aspects of the context are essential to their study. It is hoped that this will weaken the frequent identification of "a culture" with "a country" which

is still a hallmark of much of the contemporary literature.

For many aspects of behavior, countries constitute a level at which the ratio of between-group variation and within-group variation is high; in other instances other levels are more relevant. One example of a pervasive variable that shows regional variation within many countries is the amount of iodine in the drinking water. By contrasting pairs of villages, Bleichrodt, Drenth, and Querido (1980) showed that iodine deficiency leads to impairment of cognitive development even in individuals who do not show signs of goiter. In short, blank indicators such as "the" Japanese or "the" American culture are insufficient; populations need to be described (and sampled) precisely in terms of what we want to know. Nowadays, we rightly show interest in the cultural level as opposed to the individual level of analysis. But perhaps a question should be added, namely, which cultural level?

THREE FUTURE TRENDS

ORGANIZATION OF BEHAVIOR IN CULTURAL CONTEXT

The major question here is to what extent various aspects of culture hang together in a meaningful way; this is the question of coherence of culture as discussed by cultural anthropologists of the question of generalization of differences as discussed by cross-cultural psychologists.

The conception of culture underlying most of the anthropological literature is that of a coherent whole in which everything hangs together with everything else. Most ethnographies attempt to portray coherence in the psychological existence of the population studied. However, this conviction is not quite compatible with the relativist principle of some cultural anthropologists that from their science, no predictions about the future can be expected. In a system with coherent organization, internal interdependencies as well as their consequences should be evident. Yet, replication research in ethnography has shown, so far, many large discrepancies and few agreements (Kloos, 1988).

At the other extreme is the notion that a culture is a mere collection of conventions that are historically grown and can best be conceived of as arbitrary agreements about how to act in certain situations, which norms to apply, and what to believe (Girndt, 1997). Such agreements can be explicit or implicit. Laws and traffic rules are explicit. Eating with knife and fork or with chopsticks is an example of an implicit agreement; it has never been subject to consultation.

As a team of authors, we have our own agreements and disagreements. Let us first mention a point on which we have strong agreement, namely, the importance of culture as context for behavior. We are both convinced that many cross-cultural differences in behavior are a more or less direct consequence of the economic and socioeconomic conditions under which people live. Economic wealth or poverty of a nation has far-reaching consequences. It determines whether there will be high quality medical care for a sick infant, whether you can risk being fired for saying something that displeases your superior, whether you have access to a court of law when treated badly by civil authorities or the police, and so on. Economic well-being is a compound variable; in particular, it is highly correlated with number of years of school education. In the section on applications of cross-cultural psychology, we come back to the global inequalities reflected in the north-south divide.

We tend to disagree among ourselves when it comes to the internalization of differences in context (Kagitcibasi, 1999; Van den Heuvel & Poortinga, 1999). Poortinga is inclined to argue that the validity of broad generalizations has never been demonstrated satisfactorily. Earlier broad conceptions--such as social evolution theory, culture and personality concepts as advanced by Mead (1934) and Benedict (1934), the presumed absence of a faculty for abstract thinking in illiterates--all have been abandoned. Similarly, the coherence of a dimension like individualism/collectivism can be questioned, both for conceptual and empirical reasons (Fijneman, Willemsen, & Poortinga, 1996). According to Kagitcibasi, errors made in the past should teach us lessons but should not deter us from searching for underlying dimensions to explain behavioral outcomes. Theory development necessarily involves generalization. What is important is that generalizations are based on sound empirical evidence and are open to disconfirmation.

Moreover, the empirical record of studies on individualism-collectivism is impressive even though there is room for improvement (Kagitcibasi, 1997). Also, in this series of articles, most authors leave no doubt that in their view, conceptions with major dimensions are the models of choice for cross-cultural psychology.

THE INTEGRATION OF INDIGENOUS MOVEMENTS

In retrospect, it is easy to see how cross-cultural psychology, as it emerged in the past 50 years, was strongly influenced by the theories and implicit notions of the day found in Western psychology. In early cross-cultural research, the applicability of Western methods was often questioned, but hardly that of Western concepts. Indigenous approaches, in which local concepts were defined, have emerged only more recently, after the establishment of psychology as a discipline outside the Western world. It should be noted that these approaches differ widely among themselves when it comes to assumptions about the nature and extent of cross-cultural differences (Adair & Loving, 1999; D. Sinha, 1997). Nevertheless, by taking local concepts as a starting point, indigenous approaches tend to lean toward relativism, at least as an initial position. The article by Kim, Park, and Park (2000 [this issue]) illustrates this point.

A first impetus for the trend toward indigenous psychology has been the search for local relevance, mainly stressed in the majority world. Western domination in psychology and a pure-science approach have been rejected and replaced by contextually meaningful and relevant problem-oriented approaches (D. Sinha & Holtzman, 1984). A second impetus has been theory driven, namely, to use indigenous psychological knowledge in reaching universals. Commonalities among indigenous realities can point toward universal patterns (Berry, 1984; Chinese Culture Connection, 1987).

It is possible to differentiate an indigenous orientation as a means from indigenization as a goal. The former is an approach mainly for uncovering the diversity in human behavior to enrich and improve psychological theory and explain the diversity. Though at this stage, it is not quite clear how other indigenous bodies of knowledge can be integrated with the currently dominant indigenous psychology of the West, some beginnings may be noted in integrative constructs deriving from indigenous thinking and research, such as nurturant-task leader (J. B. P. Sinha, 1980), socially oriented achievement motivation (Agarwal & Misra, 1986; Yu & Yang, 1994), relationship harmony (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997), and autonomous-relational self (Kagitcibasi, 1996a). The latter orientation, with indigenization as a goal, amounts to developing a psychology for each diverse cultural reality. In our opinion, the former promises to enrich psychological inquiry, but the latter carries the risk of producing an unwieldy and basically incomparable body of knowledge.

ONTOGENETIC DEVELOPMENT

In the first edition of the Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology, Heron and Kroeger (1980) pointed to the central role of ontogenetic development. Still, Keller and Greenfield's (2000 [this issue]) complaint that the volume of culture-comparative research on developmental issues is small continues to be valid.

Ontogenetic development is an area of cross-cultural study that can provide a much-needed interface between organism and context. In fact, human development, broadly defined, is the process of interaction between genetic factors and the overall context or culture. Cole's (1996) evolutionary-historical-ontogenetic view of human development attempts such an integration. A cross-cultural comparative approach promises to provide a further understanding of the organism-context interface and the relative contribution of each to behavioral outcome more than any unicultural approach. This is because comparative research increases contextual variation.

Particularly in life-span development work, the naturwissenschaftliche and geisteswissenschaftliche orientations are combined by considering both cohort and historical period effects as well as age-related maturation (Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 1998; Elder, 1998). What is needed here is

to bring in a more explicit cultural or cross-cultural perspective to complement the historical. In this way, variations across both time and space (culture) are addressed. Such an approach would avoid dichotomizing the contextual and the universal as forced alternatives (Gergen, 1973, 1994). It would furthermore make a strong case that a developmental psychology has to be contextual (historical/cultural) if it is to be adequately scientific (Smith, in press).

Much current theorizing in cross-cultural psychology has to do with questions concerning different culturally defined types of selves (such as independent-interdependent). Often, the answer involves descriptions or taxonomies--for example, along the individualism-collectivism dimension--of variations in behavior and psychological processes (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The analysis is at the individual level, with variations in self resulting in variations in emotional or behavioral outcomes. However, this is mainly a descriptive analysis.

If we ask the next question, how these group differences in self come about, we are at a different level of analysis. Context-based developmental processes and socialization are invoked to understand how variations in self emerge in different socioeconomic-familial contexts. Keller and Greenfield (2000) address the evolution-context interface in the development of independent and interdependent self patterns.

A further question is why a certain kind of socialization occurs in a particular socioeconomic context (and not in another) and, hence, when a change in this process of self-development may be expected. To deal with such a question, we need to delve into the functional underpinnings of socialization as the interface of society and family. We need to understand how family interaction patterns and socialization values are influenced by the socioeconomic and cultural context and how these, in turn, affect child rearing. Any changes in context would have implications for changes in the chain of relationships.

For example, Kagitcibasi (1996a, 1996b) has proposed a model of family change that analyzes the development of different types of self within different family interaction patterns. The latter, in turn, are seen to be characteristic of different societal contexts, with implications for shifts in the family self patterns as a consequence of changes in socioeconomic conditions. Underlying the model are adaptive/functional links between individual, familial, and societal realities. The model serves as a heuristic device in providing answers to both the how and the why questions with regard to human development in context. The pervasive socioeconomic changes that are occurring globally can thus be taken into consideration in discovering any possible corresponding patterns of change in human development.

(UNREALIZED) POTENTIAL FOR APPLICATION

Wealth and well-being are unevenly distributed within and between countries. Psychologists who want to maintain the high moral standards of their profession (e.g., American Psychological Association, 1992) cannot ignore this injustice. This holds all the more true for psychologists who pride themselves on having a wider, cross-cultural perspective. In this section, we address the question of what psychologists can and should do to ameliorate inequalities in the world, which are often indicated as a contrast between north and south. We mention three overlapping points: using psychology for industrial development, bringing culture into health and education, and making contributions to human development.

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

In the complex interrelationships of economic, social, and educational factors, factors relating to work and work organizations are of great importance. Perhaps the onset of forms of individual and societal change that are associated with industrialization can be initiated by information and technology transfer.

But, to a large extent, these developments will have to be endogenous (cf. Kim et al., 2000). So far, globalization has been profitable mainly (if not only) to those groups that control the means of production.

Industrial technology and the structure of (international) organizations are hardly related to cultural variables; although a product of human culture, they show few differences between countries. But, the functioning of organizations is in many ways dependent on the psychological characteristics of the people involved (Drenth & Groenendijk, 1984). Differences in traditions, work experience, relationships in organizational hierarchies, and numerous other personal and interpersonal factors necessitate a culture-informed approach. The need for industrial development in majority world countries makes the expansion of industrial and organizational psychology to these countries valuable (Aycan, 2000). The limited extent to which this has happened so far suggests that we can speak here of unrealized potential.

BRINGING CULTURE INTO EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Benefits of education at both the societal and the individual level are well documented. For example, economists point to the significance of investment in education, particularly basic education, for economic growth (McGranahan, 1995). At the level of the individual, much research points to the positive contribution of schooling to cognitive competence (Ceci & Williams, 1997; Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999). In particular, number of years in school appears to be a crucially important variable in low-income contexts. There is evidence pointing to a causal relationship between schooling and IQ that cannot be explained on the basis of higher IQ children choosing to stay in school longer (Ceci & Williams, 1997; Harnqvist, 1968; Heckman, 1995). There are also competence-building and empowering effects of schooling, especially for women (Min, 1994).

Given the pervasive, positive evidence, a strong advocacy for increased schooling in the majority world is needed. Psychologists should be in the forefront of advocacy efforts, especially in the majority world, for policies to increase investment in "education for all" (United Nations Children's Fund, 1993), which is hardly the case. This is another example of the as-yet-unrealized applied potential of cross-cultural psychology--influencing policy. It appears that many psychologists are not quite aware of the far-reaching policy implications of their knowledge and expertise. There is a need to strengthen the voice of advocacy of psychologists with regard to the policy implications of their findings. Of course, working toward increased schooling for all does not mean endorsement of poor-quality schooling. Formal education in formerly colonized, low-income countries often tends to be of poor quality and culturally irrelevant (Serpell, 1993). Cross-cultural psychologists should play a role both in rendering school education culturally relevant and in promoting literacy as a universally desirable set of skills.

Cross-cultural psychology can also contribute to health applications globally, as stressed by Harkness and Keefer (2000). With recent shifts from purely medical to broader, biological-social-behavioral conceptualizations of health, the salience of health behavior has greatly increased. Whereas psychology's relevance for health was previously recognized mainly in the area of mental health, a much broader interface is being recognized today, encompassing different aspects of health. This is even more the case with the shift in focus from treatment of disease to prevention of disease and promotion of health. Thus, there is a growing need for psychological conceptualizations, assessments, and indicators of health that are also culturally valid. Cross-cultural perspectives are therefore more relevant than ever before. Applications cover wide ground, from increasing the impact of health education on changing attitudes and behaviors to the production of health in the household.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Human beings are born with biologically endowed potential, but what is made of this potential is the workings of their life experiences in cultural context. In the reality of life, socialization and enculturation do not only entail the realization of potential by offering opportunities for deployment but also imply constraints because of economic hardship, lack of education, and restrictive cultural beliefs and practices. However, promoting human potential and competence is rather low on the research agenda of academic psychology. This type of work often involves field interventions, which many psychologists shy away from so much that applied research in many cases has moved out to departments or centers of human development and family studies, public policy studies, education, and the like. It is on the

agenda of various disciplines, including human resources management (Hudson, 1993; Jaques & Cason, 1994), and it is addressed by development studies conducted by sociologists and economists (Beaulieu & Mulkey, 1995; Becker, 1993; Levinger, 1996). Psychology lags behind, particularly with regard to policy-oriented research in the majority world, where the needs are more serious.

In societal development, human aspects are coming to the fore, reflected in levels of literacy and schooling, gender equity, health, employment, and so on, together constituting what is called human development at a macro level (United Nations Development Program, 1997). There is a need for the expertise of cross-cultural psychologists, for example, to assess the psychological aspects of human development, somewhat like the quality of life construct. Similarly, there is a great need to establish age-related developmental norms to parallel the existing (physical) growth norms for children. These would be of crucial importance in screening developmental risks in contexts of socioeconomic disadvantage. A major challenge is integrating universal indicators with a culturally sensitive orientation

(cf. Harkness & Keefer, 2000). Assessment, including the construction, translation, and adaptation of tests, questionnaires, and observation schedules, is an area where cross-cultural psychology has accumulated conceptual and methodological knowledge (van de Vijver & Leung, 2000).

There are many other areas with potential for application. A volume of the recent Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology (Berry, Segall, & Kagitcibasi, 1997) provides reviews of application areas including intergroup relations, crime and warfare, and acculturation. Unfortunately, we have not been able to include these in this special issue. Among them, issues of acculturation and minority status come to the fore. Multiculturalism will have serious problems as long as social class and power differences overlap with ethnic differences and as long as prejudice continues even though shifting from overt to "subtle prejudice" (Pettigrew, 1998) in societies where overt discrimination is politically incorrect. Again, cross-cultural psychology can and should contribute. With massive internal and international migration, many formerly unicultural societies have become multicultural. Indeed, virtually

all societies today are multicultural; in Harkness and Keefer's (2000) words, "cross-cultural variability has become local variability."

Perhaps the most direct form of application as a contribution to human well-being is through intervention programs. Such programs can address diverse problem areas including early education, health, nutrition, parenting, literacy, and so on. They can target different groups (children, adults, families, women) and can be directed toward goals such as early enrichment for young children, building competence, changing behaviors and attitudes, and so forth. Psychologists cannot change existing inequities in society. However, they can help to improve the proximal human environment to promote human well-being, particularly of children growing up in poverty, and to counteract some of the debilitating effects of social and economic disadvantage. In all instances, the special contribution of a cross-cultural approach is the integration of universalist and culture-sensitive perspectives.

Interventions usually start at a small scale, but they have the potential to influence national policies and develop toward large-scale implementations. For example, in Israel, concerted efforts are put into intervention programs to promote the social integration and competence of recent international immigrants from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as to influence policies (Feuerstein, 1991; Tzuriel & Kaufman, 1999). In India, a great deal of policy-relevant research is conducted to study the life conditions and promote the well-being of women and children (Borooah et al., 1994; Saraswathi & Kaur, 1993). Kagitcibasi's (1996b) intervention work with low-income women and children in Istanbul has developed into a nationwide, nonformal preschool and adult education program in Turkey. It is important to note that intervention work with socioeconomically disadvantaged groups can never be a quick fix but rather requires intensive investment of time and effort, together with culturally sensitive partnership with the people involved.

A CAVEAT

The above application areas are chosen to show the potential of cross-cultural psychology to contribute to the promotion of human well-being. However, there are some complex issues involved in applied work that may not be readily apparent. These issues are debated especially with regard to policy advocacy, and there are no clear answers (see Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1992). In particular, there are ethical concerns and questions with regard to the level of expertise or knowledge psychologists should

have to justify their involvement. There are differences of opinion with regard to the achievements of (cross-cultural) psychology, ranging from rather positive ones such as those held by Harkness and Keefer (2000) to quite critical ones (e.g., Poortinga & Lunt, 1997). Here, we are explicitly stressing the potential for applications and are asking the following question: Is this potential realized enough?

With respect to professional ethics, psychologists should act in a socially and scientifically responsible manner and be aware of the limitations of their accumulated knowledge. Psychological explanations of behavior have their limits; they may at times be proxies for, and overlap with, economic and social-structural variation. The north-south divide is real and powerful. Often, economic factors are strong predictors of behavioral variations among populations, as, for example, found with regard to "the pace of life" in 31 countries (Levine & Norenzayan, 1999). Nevertheless, psychology has a role to play and has accumulated substantial knowledge, though the knowledge has often not been conclusive. What is important is that we realistically assess our strengths and weaknesses and, at the same time, be cognizant of different levels of analysis and the need for collaboration with other social scientists and policy makers.

As for the ethical question of whether psychologists have the right to impose their knowledge and values on others, there is no easy answer. Value-based applications ranging from the imposition of absolutist standards to relativistic laissez faire can form unacceptable practices in the name of culture and seriously challenge applied cross-cultural research. Two practical precautions can help. The first is to involve both local experts who are informed by indigenous knowledge and outsiders with expertise. The second is to involve the target persons of an intervention or the research subjects as participants sharing in the decision making. These measures are bound to help, but we should also accept the fact that applied research cannot be value-free, make our values or opinions explicit, and be open to challenge by those with contrary opinions.

CONCLUSION

The importance of culture for psychology ultimately rests with how much of the behavior repertoire can be better understood with the notion of culture than without it. In this sense, the status of culture appears as an empirical issue. The present set of articles makes it clear that such a position by itself does not tell us how we can best approach the study of behavior in cultural context. There are many differences of opinion on theoretical and methodological issues, indicating that our understanding of the subject area of behavior and culture is limited. At the same time, the importance of cultural context nowadays appears to be beyond debate in psychology, both as a science and as a profession. This provides a firm basis for the future. How this future will be shaped remains to be seen. Our task today and tomorrow is to improve on what we have, to optimize our conceptual and methodological tools to develop a better understanding of human phenomena, and to aim at contributing globally to human well-being.

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By Cigdem Kagitcibasi, Koc University, Istanbul, Turkey

Cigdem Kagitcibasi is a professor of psychology and dean of the school of arts and sciences at Koc University, Istanbul, Turkey. She is a past president and honorary fellow of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology and vice-president of the International Union of Psychological Science. She has received awards for distinguished scientific contributions from the American Psychological Association and the International Association of Applied Psychology. Her research interests include human development and self and the family in the cultural context, with both theoretical and applied perspectives

Ype H. Poortinga teaches cross-cultural psychology at Tilburg University, the Netherlands, and (part-time) at the University of Leuven, Belgium. His empirical research has been on a range of topics, with consistent attention to methodological and metatheoretical issues in the interpretation of cross-cultural differences. He is a former secretary-general and former president of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology as well as an honorary member of the association.

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