

# The Study of Culture, Ethnicity, and Race in American Psychology

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*The study of culture and related concepts, such as ethnicity and race, in American psychology are examined in this article. First, the conceptual confusion and ways in which culture, ethnicity, and race are used as explanatory factors for intergroup differences in psychological phenomena are discussed. Second, ways in which to study culture in mainstream psychology and to enhance hypothesis testing and theory in cross-cultural psychology are illustrated. Finally, the importance of examining sociocultural variables and considering theory in ethnic minority research is addressed. In general, it is proposed that by including theory, conceptualizing, and measuring cultural and related variables, mainstream, cross-cultural, and ethnic research can advance the understanding of culture in psychology as well as the generality of principles and the cultural sensitivity of applications.*

Culture and its significant role in human behavior have been recognized for many years, as far back as Hippocrates from the classical Greek era (see Dona, 1991) as well as near the beginning of psychology as a discipline (Wundt, 1921). More recently, a number of authors have questioned the cross-cultural generalizability of psychological theories (e.g., Amir & Sharon, 1987; Bond, 1988; Pepitone & Triandis, 1987), some arguing for the inclusion of culture in psychological theories (e.g., Harkness, 1980; Rokeach, 1979; Smith, 1979; Triandis, 1989). An abundant literature demonstrates cultural variations in many areas of psychology that can guide such theoretical efforts (see handbooks edited by Triandis et al., 1980, and by Munroe, Munroe, & Whiting, 1981; see also Berman, 1990). Most recently, the need to study culture in psychology was highlighted in an American Psychological Association (APA) report on education (McGovern, Furumoto, Halpern, Kimble, & McKeachie, 1991). Because of the changing demographics in the nation as well as in the student population, McGovern et al. indicated that an "important social and ethical responsibility of faculty members is to promote their students' understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and class issues in psychological theory, research, and practice" (p. 602).

Despite the historical and contemporary awareness concerning the importance of culture among a number of scholars, the study of culture and related variables occupies at best a secondary place in American (mainstream) psychology. It appears to be the domain of cross-cultural psychology and is often associated with the replication of findings in some remote or exotic part of the world. In the United States, it is often associated with the study of ethnic minorities, which is as segregated from mainstream psychology (see Graham, 1992) as is cross-cultural research. There seems to be a widespread assumption that the study of culture or ethnicity contributes little to the understanding of basic psychological processes or to the practice of psychology in the United States.

The general purpose of this article is to share some of our preoccupations and views concerning the status of the study of culture and related concepts, such as race and ethnicity, in psychology. Our main concern is that whereas mainstream investigators do not consider culture in their research and theories, cross-cultural researchers who study cultural differences frequently fail to identify the specific aspects of culture and related variables that are thought to influence behavior. Consequently, we learn that cultural group, race, or ethnicity may be related to a given psychological phenomenon, but we learn little about the specific elements of these group variables that contribute to the proposed relationship. The limited specificity of this research impedes our understanding of the behavior of a group or groups. In addition, it serves to limit the delineation of more universal processes that cut across cultural, ethnic, and racial groups. In this article, we promote the study of culture. This is not to say that culture is the single most important variable in psychology. It is one of many factors that contribute to the complexities of psychological processes, and it is obviously important to the understanding of culturally diverse pop-

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ulations both inside and outside of the United States. In addition, even though the higher uniformity of cultural elements makes it less obvious, cultural factors also play an important role in the behavior of mainstream individuals. Thus, our focus will be on culture, some of the problems that in our opinion preclude progress in our understanding of its role in psychology and some propositions on how to overcome them. To illustrate our points, we draw from research in the social and clinical domains; these reflect our areas of expertise.

As a general approach, we propose that both mainstream and cross-cultural investigators identify and measure directly what about the group variable (e.g., what cultural element) of interest to their research influences behavior. Then, hypothesized relationships between such variables and the psychological phenomenon of interest could be examined and such research could be incorporated within a theoretical framework. We believe that an adherence to this approach will serve to enhance our understanding of both group-specific and group-general (universal) processes as well as contribute to the integration of culture in theory development and the practice of psychology. Our focus is on the general approach rather than on specific methodological issues already treated elsewhere in the literature (see Brislin, Lonner, & Thorn-dike, 1973; Lonner & Berry, 1988; Triandis et al., 1980, Vol. 2).

Because culture is closely intertwined with concepts such as race, ethnicity, and social class, and because conceptual confusion has been an obstacle for progress in this area, it is important to first define culture and point out its relationship to these related concepts. Hence, we first focus on these definitions and conceptual problems. Then, we address some of the limitations of cross-cultural and mainstream psychology and suggest ways in which to infuse the study of culture in mainstream research and both experimentation and theory in cross-cultural research. Finally, we illustrate ways in which to study cultural variables and discuss the importance of infusing theory in ethnic minority research.

## Definitions

Variations in psychological phenomena observed in the comparative study of groups identified in terms of nationality, race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status (SES) are often attributed to cultural differences without defining what is meant by culture, and what about culture and to what extent is related to the differences. This is so common, even among cross-cultural psychologists, that it has led to the criticism that little research in cross-cultural psychology actually deals with culture (e.g., Rohner, 1984). Thus, an important problem is the lack of a clear definition and understanding of culture from a psychological perspective.

## Culture

A number of psychologists interested in the study of culture agree that the confusion concerning its definition has been an obstacle for progress (e.g., Brislin, 1983; Ja-

hoda, 1984; Rohner, 1984; Triandis et al., 1980). Although it would be desirable to have a definition that everyone agrees upon, as noted by Segall (1984), consensus is not absolutely necessary to advance knowledge. Even without consensus, progress is possible if, as we propose, cultural research specifies what is meant by culture in terms that are amenable to measurement.

After reviewing the elements found in the anthropological and cross-cultural psychology views of culture, Rohner (1984) proposed a conceptualization of culture in terms of "highly variable systems of meanings," which are "learned" and "shared by a people or an identifiable segment of a population." It represents "designs and ways of life" that are normally "transmitted from one generation to another." We consider this conception as equivalent to that proposed by Herkovits (1948), who conceives culture as the human-made part of the environment. Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of Rohner's formulation is the explicit statement of aspects such as the learned, socially shared, and variable nature of culture.

Within the context of this general conception of culture, we consider Triandis et al.'s (1980) reformulation of Herkovits's (1948) definition as the most practical one for the purpose of our work. In addition to differentiating between the objective and subjective aspects of Herkovits's human-made part of the environment, Triandis's formulation is quite explicit about the psychologically relevant elements that constitute culture. According to Triandis, although physical culture refers to objects such as roads, buildings, and tools, subjective culture includes elements such as social norms, roles, beliefs, and values. These subjective cultural elements include a wide range of topics, such as familial roles, communication patterns, affective styles, and values regarding personal control, individualism, collectivism, spirituality, and religiosity.

When culture (or subjective culture) is defined in terms of psychologically relevant elements, such as roles and values, it becomes amenable to measurement. Moreover, the relationship of the cultural elements to psychological phenomena can be directly assessed. Hence, it is possible to deal with the complexity of the concept and at the same time pursue an understanding of the role of culture in psychology. By incorporating the conceptualization and measurement of specific cultural elements, the comparative study of national, ethnic, or cultural groups is more likely to contribute to the understanding of the role of culture than are the typical comparative studies (see Poortinga & Malpass, 1986).

## Race

Scholars and pollsters often use the concept of culture interchangeably with race, ethnicity, or nationality. For example, in surveys or research instruments, individuals are often required to indicate their race by choosing one of a combination of categories including race, ethnicity, and national origin (such as Asian, American Indian, Black, Latino, and White). Latinos, for instance, can be White, Black, Asian, American Indian, or any combination thereof. We are particularly concerned about the

loose way in which culture, race, and ethnicity are used to explain differences between groups. This not only limits our understanding of the specific factors that contribute to group differences, but it also leads to interpretations of findings that stimulate or reinforce racist conceptions of human behavior (see Zuckerman, 1990).

Jones (1991) recently argued that the concept of race is fraught with problems for psychology. For example, race is generally defined in terms of physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial features, and hair type, which are common to an inbred, geographically isolated population. However, the classification of people in groups designated as races has been criticized as arbitrary, suggesting that the search for differences between such groups is at best dubious (Zuckerman, 1990). Specifically, there are more within-group differences than between-group differences in the characteristics used to define the three so-called races (Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid). Also, studies of genetic systems (e.g., blood groups, serum proteins, and enzymes) have found that differences between individuals within the same tribe or nation account for more variance (84%) than do racial groupings (10%; Latter, 1980; Zuckerman, 1990). This indicates that racial groups are more alike than they are different, even in physical and genetic characteristics. Still, too often in the history of psychology, race has been used to explain variations in psychological phenomena between the so-called racial groups, without examining the cultural and social variables likely to be associated with such variations (e.g., Allport, 1924; Barrett & Eysenck, 1984; Jensen, 1985). We agree with Zuckerman (1990) that the study of racial differences in psychological phenomena is of little scientific use without a clear understanding of the variables responsible for the differences observed between the groups classified as races. We consider racial group or identity inadequate as a general explanatory factor of between-group variations in psychological phenomena. We encourage researchers to give greater attention to cultural elements, as discussed earlier, as they may prove fruitful in understanding behavioral differences associated with racial groupings.

Although we focus on the cultural and social variables associated with racial grouping, we do not imply that biological factors associated with such groupings are of no scientific interest. These biological variables are important, for example, in the study of group differences in essential hypertension, for which Afro-Americans are at a higher risk than Anglo-Americans (Anderson, 1989). From our perspective, what is of scientific interest is not the race of these individuals but the relationship between the identified biological factors (e.g., plasma renin levels and sodium excretion) and hypertension. Moreover, even if a cause-effect relationship is demonstrated between these biological variables and hypertension, one cannot attribute this relationship to race because of intraracial variability and interracial overlap with regard to the biological variables (Anderson, 1989). Psychological stress or factors such as diet, life-style, and objective and subjective culture could be responsible for the racial-group

differences in the biological factors. Also, this difference may not be observed in a group of the same race in another part of the world or under different living conditions.

In summary, we suggest that when behavioral variations are studied in relation to race, the so-called racial variable under study should be defined, measured, and the proposed relationships tested. The role of specific cultural and social variables could be clearly separated from that of biological and other variables. The area of research will determine the relative importance of any one of these variables. The important point is that the research be on the relevant variable and not on racial groupings alone.

### **Ethnicity**

The concept of ethnicity is also associated with culture and is often used interchangeably with culture as well as with race. Usually, ethnicity is used in reference to groups that are characterized in terms of a common nationality, culture, or language. The concept of ethnicity is related to the Greek concept of *ethnos*, which refers to the people of a nation or tribe, and *ethnikos*, which stands for national. Hence, ethnicity refers to the ethnic quality or affiliation of a group, which is normally characterized in terms of culture. However, the distinction between these two related concepts is an important one for psychology. Although cultural background can be a determinant of ethnic identity or affiliation, being part of an ethnic group can also determine culture. As members of an ethnic group interact with each other, ethnicity becomes a means by which culture is transmitted. According to Berry (1985), because an ethnic group is likely to interact with other ethnic groups, such interactions should not be ignored as possible sources of cultural influences. Hence, it is important that comparative studies of ethnic groups identify and measure cultural variables assumed to be responsible for observed differences in psychological phenomena before such differences are attributed to culture on the basis of group membership. This issue is particularly important in the United States today because, beyond face-to-face interactions, interethnic communication takes place through the mass media.

We believe that the study of variations in psychological phenomena between ethnic groups is relevant as far as the specific variable of theoretical interest is measured and related to the relevant psychological phenomena. In addition to the specific cultural elements, there are a range of ethnic-related variables, such as ethnic identification, perceived discrimination, and bilingualism. Increased specification with regard to what about ethnicity is of interest could reduce the confusion and conceptual problems in this area (for an illustration of research in this direction, see Sue, 1988; Sue & Zane, 1987).

### **Social and Related Variables**

The effect of variables such as the social system and socioeconomic level on behavior can also be confounded with the influence of culture, race, and ethnicity (for a discussion, see Rohner, 1984). Some authors do control for the effects of socioeconomic variables. For example,

Frerichs, Aneshensel, and Clark (1981) found that the prevalence of depressive symptoms was significantly different for Latinos, Anglos, and Afro-American community residents. More Latinos reported significant levels of depressive symptoms than did the other ethnic groups. However, when controlling for SES-related variables (e.g., employment status and family income), the ethnic effect disappeared. This suggests that ethnicity, and possibly culture, are of little or no significance in the prevalence rates of depression, whereas SES, that is, economic strain, is viewed as being more significant.

Although this approach has the advantage of reducing the likelihood of misattributing to culture the influence of SES, the possibility of confusion still exists. It is possible, for instance, that cultural influences are not identified and are wrongly attributed to SES. We see at least two instances in which this can happen. First, in societies with a history of ethnic or racial discrimination, segregation may result in significant overlap between culture and SES. For example, in the United States the majority of Anglos are represented in higher social strata, whereas the majority of Latinos are represented in lower social strata. Thus, by methodologically or statistically controlling for SES, the cultures are also separated, and the variance associated with culture is removed along with the effects of SES. This may then lead one to wrongly assume that culture does not play a role.

Second, even if two social classes are represented in each of the two cultures, the economic, social, or living conditions of a segregated lower class that includes both cultural groups may generate beliefs, norms, or values specific to that social strata. These cultural elements associated with lower SES may become significantly different from that of other groups (e.g., the middle class) of the same ethnic group. Although it is possible that some cultural elements associated with ethnicity are consistent across the different SES levels of a given ethnic group, it is also possible that there are beliefs, norms, and values that are common to an SES level across cultural (ethnic) groups. Hence, even when social classes are compared within the same ethnic group, cultural elements unique to a lower strata may be wrongly attributed to SES—that is, income or educational level—when in fact they reflect cultural or subcultural elements—that is, beliefs and attitudes associated with lower class reality.

Sobal and Stunkard (1989) illustrated this point with regard to obesity and socioeconomic status. They argued that the prevalence of obesity in developing societies is a function of structural elements in society, such as the availability of food supplies, and “cultural values favoring fat body shapes” (p. 266). The former reflect SES-related variables, whereas the values associated with body shapes may be more cultural in nature, even though the cultural beliefs are associated with social strata. The work of Sobal and Stunkard is consistent with our recommendation to measure the specific proximal variables thought to underlie a given behavioral phenomenon. By doing so, the comparative study of social as well as cultural groups will be able to better identify the specific social variables (e.g.,

income, educational level) as well as cultural elements (e.g., values, beliefs) that are relevant to the behavioral phenomena of interest.

In summary, we encourage investigators to think carefully about the group of interest, whether it be cultural, racial, ethnical, or social, and go beyond the group category to the specific factors that underlie the group category. By doing so, studies will be able to identify what about culture, race, ethnicity, or social class is related to the psychological phenomenon of interest. We argue that cultural variables, specifically social roles, norms, beliefs, and values, are likely to contribute significantly to the effects of these demographic variables. However, culture is only one dimension. Depending on the research problem and the interests of the investigator, more biological or social variables could also be assessed. The important point is that further specification will likely lead to a greater understanding of the roles of culture, race, ethnicity, and social class in psychological phenomena.

### **Limitations of Mainstream and Cross-Cultural Psychology**

The need to study and understand culture in psychology represents a major challenge to mainstream and cross-cultural psychology. A review of the literature reveals important limitations in the ways both mainstream and cross-cultural psychology have responded to this challenge. On the one hand, the study of culture has largely been ignored in mainstream psychology and is often seen as the domain of cross-cultural psychology. Usually, theories do not include cultural variables and findings or principles are thought to apply to individuals everywhere, suggesting that psychological knowledge developed in the United States by Anglo-American scholars using Anglo-American subjects is universal. Even in areas such as social psychology, in which the importance of variables such as norms and values is particularly obvious, there is little regard for the cultural nature of such variables (Bond, 1988).

On the other hand, cross-cultural psychology, normally segregated from mainstream psychology, has focused on the comparative (cross-cultural) study of behavioral phenomena, without much regard for the measurement of cultural variables and their implications for theory. Attributing to culture the differences observed between countries or groups assumed to represent different cultures ignores the complexity of culture as well as the cultural heterogeneity of nations or ethnic groups (see Berry, 1985). Moreover, it tells us little about the role of culture in human behavior. Without a theoretical focus, cross-cultural research has little connection to mainstream psychology, thus maintaining its segregation.

Although there is no simple solution to the noted limitations (see Lonner & Berry, 1986; Malpass, 1977; Reyes-Lagunes & Poortinga, 1985), we believe that the following two approaches would help psychologists to enhance the study of culture: (a) Begin with a phenomenon observed in the study of culture and apply it cross-culturally to test theories of human behavior, and (b) begin

with a theory, typically one that ignores culture, and incorporate cultural elements to broaden its theoretical domain. The former might be considered a bottom-up approach; one is beginning with an observation from the study of cultures and moving toward its implications for psychological theory. The latter might be considered a top-down approach; one is beginning with theory and moving to observations within as well as between cultures, examining the role of culture and searching for universals.

Triandis and associates' research illustrates a bottom-up approach to cross-cultural research. Drawing from anthropological research that identified dimensions of cultural variations, they proposed the following steps: (a) Develop measures of such dimensions, (b) assess different cultures along the dimensions so that the cultures could be placed on a continuum of a designated dimension, and (c) test predictions relating the cultural dimension and behavioral phenomenon across cultures. These steps are evident in the work of Triandis et al. (1986) on collectivism versus individualism. They first developed a measure; second, they assessed students from Illinois and Puerto Rico along this dimension. Then, as expected, this dimension was found to be related to behaviors such as cooperation and helping (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Not only did they find differences between U.S. mainland students and Puerto Rican students with regard to helping and cooperation, they also found that the cultural dimension of collectivism versus individualism accounted in part for these differences. Thus, in line with the bottom-up approach, the observed cultural phenomenon, in this case individualism-collectivism, has served to inform theoretical accounts of helping and cooperation.

The research of Betancourt and his associates serves to illustrate a top-down approach to the study of cultural influences. They began with a theory and took steps to incorporate cultural factors in the theory. In a first study, Betancourt and Weiner (1982) examined the cross-cultural generality of an attribution theory of motivation (see Weiner, 1986), specifically assessing whether the relationships between the dimensional properties of attributions and related psychological consequences differed for Chilean and U.S. college students. Evidence for both cultural generality and cultural specificity was found. The relationship between the perceived stability of a given causal attribution and expectancy of future success was similar for both groups, suggesting that this part of the theory has cross-cultural generality. The influence of perceived controllability of attributions for a person's achievement on interpersonal feelings and reactions was less important for Chilean students than for students from the United States; this part suggested cultural specificity. For example, although Chileans tended to like the person more when success was due to controllable than to uncontrollable causes, the effect of controllability over liking was significantly lower than for the students from the United States. Chileans tended to like the successful individual, regardless of whether the cause of his or her achievement behavior was perceived as controllable (e.g.,

effort) or uncontrollable (e.g., aptitude). On the other hand, U.S. students more systematically liked the person according to the degree the achievement behavior was perceived as within the person's volitional control.

In explaining these findings, Betancourt and Weiner (1982) suggested that the generality observed in the relationship between perceived stability of causes and expectancy of success was a reflection of the logic of cause-effect relationships (e.g., if A is the cause of B, and A is stable, B should also be stable). They also suggested that when such logic applies, we might expect psychological principles to be fairly universal. However, in the case of perceived controllability and its relation to interpersonal feelings and behavior, elements of the culture such as norms and values are thought to play a role.

Recall that we have criticized comparative studies of cultures as insufficient in that the aspects of culture responsible for the observed differences are not identified or measured, nor are the relationships between these and the corresponding psychological phenomena demonstrated. From this perspective, Betancourt and Weiner's (1982) study was appropriate as a first step, but limited in that cultural variables responsible for observed variations were not identified and measured. Hence, one may not conclusively attribute differences to cultural factors.

To more directly test the specific cultural element that might underlie the noted difference, Betancourt (1985) first reviewed the cross-cultural literature on attribution processes in an effort to identify possible cultural dimensions that might contribute to explaining further these findings. Key studies were identified that suggested that the perception of control and the effects of causal controllability are culturally determined. Specifically, the relationship observed in the United States between controllability for success and failure and reward and punishment (Weiner & Kukla, 1970) was replicated in Germany (Meyer, 1970) but was not fully replicated in Brazil (Rodrigues, 1981). In addition, Salili, Maehr, and Gillmore (1976) only partially replicated in Iran the findings of Weiner and Peter (1973) concerning developmental aspects of the proposed relationship between controllability of attributions and interpersonal judgment.

The findings from these key studies, in conjunction with the work of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) on dimensions of cultural variation, suggested that the cultural dimension of "control over nature versus subjugation to nature" (control-subjugation) was potentially relevant. When the results on the control-subjugation value orientation are compared for the countries noted in the cross-cultural attributional research, Germany, a country in which results are replicated, scores high on control, as does the United States, whereas Brazil, Chile, and Iran, where variations are observed, score low on control.

A series of studies was then designed (e.g., Betancourt, Hardin, & Manzi, 1992) to investigate the control-subjugation value orientation and related cultural beliefs in relation to the attributional components of a model of helping behavior (Betancourt, 1990). Although no cross-cultural comparison took place, within-culture measures

of the control-subjugation value orientation were used to examine the influence of value orientation on the attribution process, as well as the relationship between controllability of attributions and helping behavior. In addition, the manipulation (activation) of beliefs associated with this value orientation demonstrated how it relates to the other components of the helping behavior model.

The research by Betancourt and associates progresses from mainstream social psychological research and theory to the study of cultural variables relevant to the theory and search for universals. They identify a specific cultural element hypothesized to be related to the cognitive process and behavior under study and then test the relationships. Their findings indicate that value orientation influences attributional processes. Accordingly, attention to values in attribution theory may serve to broaden the scope and universality of the theory. This is an example in which attention to culture may serve to enhance theory development in mainstream research. In addition, the work of Betancourt et al. (1992) has methodological implications. Although these authors could have taken a cross-cultural or between-groups approach by selecting cultures that vary with regard to value orientation, they chose a within-culture approach. Specifically, they measured differences on the theoretically relevant cultural dimension and tested its relationship to helping. This research suggests that cultural variables can be studied within a single culture and that research with mainstream subjects can also examine culture.

The main limitation of mainstream theories is that they ignore culture and therefore lack universality. The limitation of a segregated cross-cultural psychology is that it fails to use experimentation and develop theory. Two approaches were described above (Betancourt et al., 1992; Triandis et al., 1988) to illustrate how these limitations might be overcome. We submit that progress will follow if mainstream investigators include cultural elements in their research and theory and if cross-cultural researchers incorporate the measurement of cultural variables within a theoretical network.

### **Limitations of Ethnic Minority Research**

Ethnic minority research shares conceptual problems similar to those of cross-cultural psychology. Direct measures of cultural elements are frequently not included, yet cultural factors are assumed to underlie ethnic group differences. Furthermore, ethnic minority research often lacks sufficient attention to psychological theory. It appears that investigators of ethnicity are more inclined toward description than testing theoretically derived hypotheses. In this section, we examine ethnic minority research as it pertains to the study of psychopathology. We draw attention to the importance of directly examining the cultural basis of psychopathology and suggest ways to incorporate psychological theory.

Like cross-cultural research, a typical cross-ethnic design compares a given set of variables across samples of two ethnic groups. In the study of ethnic differences in psychopathology, such research is frequently based on

community or clinic surveys of psychological distress or rates of mental disorders. Usually, methodological or statistical controls are included to rule out the effects of socioeconomic status, age, and other sociodemographic variables that could possibly be related to the given dependent variable. If group differences are found with these controls in place, then the investigator frequently argues that the differences between Asian Americans and Anglo Americans, for example, reflect cultural influences. In other words, the observed group differences are thought to be the result of differences in the groups' cultural values and beliefs.

Often, researchers will discuss the cultural differences that are thought to contribute to the observed differences. It is important to note that the "cultural differences" thought to underlie the observed group differences are frequently not directly measured or assessed. It is assumed that because the two groups are from two distinct cultural or ethnic groups, they differ from one another on key cultural dimensions. This may or may not be the case. Without directly assessing these cultural dimensions, one cannot be sure whether culture plays a role, nor can one understand the nature of the relationship between cultural variables and psychological processes.

In an attempt to more directly assess cultural influences associated with ethnicity, some investigators have been using measures of acculturation. Acculturation typically refers to the degree to which minority groups adhere to traditional cultural practices (in many cases, those practices that are associated with people from their country of origin) or to U.S. cultural practices (for a review, see Berry, 1990). These efforts represent a step forward as they serve to increase the specificity in measuring cultural influences.

The inclusion of acculturation measures are not without limitations. First of all, such measures are usually based on behavioral indices such as language usage (native language or English) and place of birth (country of origin or the United States). At best, these are indirect measures of cultural values and beliefs. It is assumed that individuals of low acculturation are more likely to adhere to traditional cultural values regarding such variables as sex role orientation and collectivism-individualism. This may not be the case for a given sample.

Another reason why acculturation is a poor measure of cultural influences is that it is confounded with acculturative stress, or the stress experienced in adjusting from one culture to another culture (Berry, 1990). Some investigators have attempted to determine whether certain levels of acculturation are related to psychological adjustment and distress, as well as rates of mental disorders (see Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991, for a recent review of Latino research). For example, some researchers find that low-accultured Latinos, in this case Mexican Americans, report more distress than do more acculturated Latinos and Anglos (Vega, Kolody, & Warheit, 1985). It is not reasonable to interpret findings such as these as only reflecting acculturative stress. It seems possible that

the results could also reflect the association between level of distress and specific cultural values, indirectly assessed.

Acculturation indices may serve then as indirect measures of adherence to cultural values, but they may also serve as indices of stress associated with adjusting to the Anglo culture. If an investigator is interested in examining cultural influences, he or she would do best to incorporate direct measures of culture-relevant variables rather than a global measure of acculturation. Furthermore, if acculturative stress is the focus of an investigation, a direct measure of this construct should be included (see Cervantes, Padilla, & Salgado de Snyder, 1991). Without directly assessing cultural values and beliefs and without directly assessing acculturative stress, it is difficult to know the meaning of finding significant relationships between acculturation and psychological variables.

In a recent study, López, Hurwicz, Karno, and Telles (1992) attempted to approximate the goal of directly measuring culture in the study of psychopathology. Drawing from the Los Angeles Epidemiologic Catchment Area database, a large epidemiologic study of the prevalence rates of several mental disorders among Mexican-origin Latinos and Anglos (Karno et al., 1987), López et al. took two significant steps to examine possible cultural influences. First, they chose symptoms as the dependent variable rather than disorders, the dependent variable used in past analyses. Influenced by the work of Draguns (1980) and Persons (1986), they argued that symptoms may be more sensitive to possible sociocultural influences.

The second step was to test hypotheses regarding ethnic differences in the report of specific symptoms and to examine whether specific sociocultural variables accounted for the hypothesized ethnic differences. To develop specific hypotheses, they turned to prior descriptive work of a clinical nature. For example, some clinical observers had noted that Latinos may have the experience of hearing voices, which is reflective of a high degree of spirituality or religiosity and not reflective of psychosis (Abad, Ramos, & Boyce, 1977; Torrey, 1972). Religiosity was also implicated in the relative absence of hypersexuality in the symptomatology of Amish with bipolar disorders (Egeland, Hostetter, & Eshleman, 1983). On the basis of these clinical observations, López et al. (1992) hypothesized that, relative to Anglo residents, Mexican-origin residents would report more evidence of auditory hallucinations, a symptom frequently associated with schizophrenia, and less evidence of hypersexuality, a symptom frequently associated with mania. Furthermore, they hypothesized that religiosity would account for these ethnic differences.

Consistent with their hypotheses, there were significant differences in the reporting of these two symptoms among Latinos of Mexican origin (U.S. born and Mexican born) and Anglos. Furthermore, the patterns of findings are consistent with the hypotheses. With regard to auditory hallucinations, more Mexican-born Latinos reported this symptom (2.3%) than U.S.-born Latinos (1.6%), who reported more such symptoms than Anglos (0.6%). The opposite pattern resulted for hypersexuality:

Mexican-born Latinos (2.2%), U.S.-born Latinos (4.3%), and Anglos (6.8%). Although these findings are consistent with cultural hypotheses—that is, there is something about one or both cultures that contributes to these symptom patterns—there is no direct evidence that cultural elements are responsible for the findings.

To more closely approximate a direct cultural test, López et al. (1992) examined the role of religiosity in the report of these symptoms. Regression analyses revealed that ethnicity is an important variable in the reporting of hypersexuality; however, Catholicism accounts for a greater proportion of the variance. Thus, ethnicity appears to be a more distal variable, whereas religious affiliation is a more proximal variable. In contrast to the report of hypersexuality, religiosity was not found to be significantly related to the report of auditory hallucinations. It might be that the report of auditory hallucinations is more related to spiritual beliefs that may exist independent of religious background.

Although the past Los Angeles Epidemiologic Catchment Area research indicates that there are no ethnic differences in the prevalence rates of disorders such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder (Karno et al., 1987), suggesting that sociocultural factors are unimportant, the López et al. (1992) study indicates that ethnic and sociocultural factors are related to psychopathology as reflected in the report of specific symptomatology. Their findings are consistent with the notion that cultural elements or the values and beliefs of individuals are likely to shape the manner in which psychological distress and disorder are manifest.

This research goes beyond the typical comparative ethnic study by examining specific sociocultural factors that are related to psychopathology; however, it falls short of the ideal study. For example, although Catholicism may represent a more proximal variable to hypersexuality than ethnicity, it is not a direct measure of values and beliefs. Measuring values and beliefs about sexual relations would have provided a more direct assessment of cultural elements. Another limitation is that the relationship between Catholicism and hypersexuality may reflect the reticence on the part of Catholics to report this symptom and not their relatively less hypersexual behavior. Also, this study lacks a specific theoretical base. To incorporate theory, the authors might have linked conceptual processes thought to underlie the given symptoms. One such theoretical framework is offered by Bentall (1990), who posited that hallucinations are the result of impaired reality discrimination. In spite of the noted limitations, this research serves to illustrate the importance of including more proximal sociocultural variables in the study of ethnic group behavior, in this case psychopathology.

## Conclusion

We have discussed some of our concerns about the status of culture in American psychology. We have pointed out three areas of concern that in our opinion represent limitations that preclude the advancement of knowledge



concerning the role of culture in human behavior and the universality of psychological theories. At the same time we have suggested possible ways in which to deal with some of the limitations in these areas. First, we addressed and tried to clarify some confusion in the understanding and use of the concepts of culture, race, ethnicity, and social variables, all of which are often used as general explanatory factors for intergroup variations in psychological phenomena. Second, addressing the limitations of mainstream psychology, we suggested ways in which to infuse the study of culture in mainstream research and theory as well as ways to enhance experimentation and the use of theory in cross-cultural research. Finally, we illustrated ways in which to study sociocultural variables and to consider theory in ethnic minority research. In general, we propose that by clearly conceptualizing and measuring cultural and related variables and by including theory, cross-cultural, ethnic, and mainstream research, we can advance the understanding of the role of culture as well as contribute to theory development and applications.

We believe that psychology as a discipline will benefit both from efforts to infuse culture in mainstream research and theory and from efforts to study culture and develop theory in cross-cultural and ethnic psychology. Specifically, we believe that the advancement of knowledge in this area is necessary for psychology to enhance its status as a scientific discipline and its standards of ethical and social responsibility as a profession. As a scientific discipline, progress in the understanding of culture and its role in psychology would result in more universal principles and theories. As a profession, it would result in instruments and interventions that are more sensitive to the reality and cultural diversity of society and the world. Our hope is that this article may stimulate attempts to overcome the limitations we have noted and advance the study of culture in psychology.

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