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**IDV 850**

**Mini Paper #1: Culture and Society**

**The field of sociology/anthropology/cultural development is filled with a number of theories and theorist each attempting to explain “culture” and “society.” Which theorist, of the many, and associated theory, best explains cultural development? Why does this theory and theorist have more explanation power than the others? Give examples throughout and define terms as needed.**

To identify a single best theorist who explains cultural development raises a challenge of how such an identification is operationalized. Minkov (2012), for example, put forth 27 “major” studies for which he establishes criteria for study selection such that all had to involve at least 20 countries for comparison and also needed to demonstrate replicability, and academic reliability. Moore (2012) chose 17 anthropologists to review in his book and made his criteria to center on intellectual merit of the work, work that continued to be relevant today, and that the theorists dealt with key central issues of anthropology. Similar to these authors, it is important here to articulate the criteria for selecting the theorist that best explains cultural development.

This exercise of developing criteria reveals a certain bias for, Minkov identified researchers that also complied with his logical positivist framework and Moore identified anthropologists whose work was relevant today, which only allows for exploration of current paradigms. As such, it is important to recognize that similar biases may be present in criteria selection here as well. Establishing that up front allows for moving into the proposed rationale. Certain elements should be present in identifying the best theorist to include broad study of multiple cultures using the same measure for comparison, cross-validated findings and replicability, scholar and peer acceptance of proposed theory, a clear definition of culture associated with the theory, measurable and testable hypotheses, and comprehensive framework that does not merely hone in on singular aspects of culture such as gender differences or linguistic differences. Additionally, it is important

that the theorist provide for the applicability of findings to translate into real world utility. Of the nearly fifty theorists reviewed in both Minkov and Moore, one stands out that fulfills these criteria: Geert Hofstede.

Geert Hofstede is best known for his large study of IBM employees for which he sampled over 88,000 respondents in 71 countries. Hofstede sought to better understand the different values and beliefs across the sample and identify the stable and predictable patterns across them. In research design, some key considerations included question structure and selection, comparability across countries, sample size differences by country, sample selection, translation of surveys, and objectivity. Hofstede purposely did not propose any hypotheses or notions about what would emerge from the data in terms of cultural dimensions and he also leveraged the research design to address potential bias in the data. The rigor followed by Hofstede produced a common and reliable measure for comparison of different cultures that allowed for cross-validation of findings and replicability. Many researchers have developed their own measurements of culture against which they have been able to compare their findings to Hofstedes (i.e., Bond, 1987; Peterson & Schwartz, 2002; Schwartz, 1994). This has reinforced the theoretical framework that emerged from the cross-cultural analyses and has also demonstrated scholar and peer acceptance of his work.

Because Hofstede took an empiricism before theory approach (Minkov, 2012), it allowed for the identification of patterns that emerged from the data, which served as input to formulate Hofstede's framework and also solidify a definition of culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 2010). While this definition is broad, putting it forward with his framework is one reason his work offers greater clarity than other theorists in that his point of departure is clearly stated, serving as additional reinforcement of replicability. In this way, Hofstede conducted an

exploratory analysis leveraging theory in his survey design but allowing for analysis to shape the patterns and dimensions subsequently.

Hofstede et al (2010) list five dimensions of culture: 1) Power distance, or hierarchical distribution of power; 2) Collectivism vs. Individualism, or different emphases within a culture on group focus or individual focus; 3) Femininity vs. masculinity, or how a culture values characteristics that reinforce gender differences; 4) Uncertainty avoidance, or tolerance for ambiguity; and, 5) Long-term vs. short-term orientation, or following Confucian teachings to propel societal and economic aims. These dimensions clearly defined and operationalized by Hofstede and can be readily applied in practice. For example, the North American culture is very much an individualistic one where “I” is used in contrast to “we,” where the nuclear family prevails as opposed to the extended family, or where “equal rights” are valued in lieu of significant class structure differences. In contrast, Indian culture is very much collectivist, where the contribution to the good of the whole is valued as is family unity. India, as a rising world power, however, maintains significant contrasts in class such that over 25% of the larger population live on less than \$1.25/day (the international poverty line). While the collectivist culture sounds romantic and socially responsible, it is also a culture that, according to Hofstede et al., is a predictor of large class structure differentials. Another example pertains to the notion of uncertainty avoidance. Because of modernization and globalization, identity can be fluid and on a larger scale than personal identity can challenge entire civilizations. Post Cold War, for example, the shift from a known order to an unknown one paved the way for identity crisis and a clamoring to shed ambiguity and define a new order (Huntington, 1996). Religion was one of the anchoring aspects of cultures that saw resurgence to help bind them to an identity (i.e. *revanche de dieu*). Civilizations and their cultures are significantly impacted by the prevailing religion that

provides guidance as to what morals and values subscribers should hold and also what other cultures to tolerate. For example, Huntington (ibid) writes about Confucius-Islamic connection that can facilitate cooperation between East Asian countries (e.g., China, Japan, or Korea) and Muslim countries (e.g., North Africa). At a time when the world order is uncertain, having a common language, through religion, is seemingly helpful for building national identities and fostering cooperation across cultures.

Hofstede's dimensions of culture contribute in a substantive way to understanding what culture is from a theoretical and empirical stand point. In addition, the ability to apply his theory is made possible by the rigor that was applied to his research because then any inferences or extrapolations can rest on valid and reliable findings. For example, Hofstede (2012) posits that individuals make choices based on norms and standards and whether those norms make certain choices desirable or undesirable. Thus, if raised in a culture of prejudice, it is likely one will support those prejudices and find them desirable unless otherwise exposed. This is an expression of culture at the individual level. State culture drives responses as well. For example, post-9/11, President Bush needed to respond to the prevailing attitude of sadness, anger, and desire for revenge. The American culture supported that country leadership should demonstrably retaliate because of the enjoyed sense of security and notion that the U.S. is a global power that should not be challenged. Of course, the American culture also supports the need for consumption and excess, so the Gulf War supported both cultural imperatives of the State. Hofstede (2010) would say that this type of common problem that commands cooperation lends to development or reinforcement of culture. These examples demonstrate that Hofstede's theory is flexible and applicable to serve real world utility.

Overall, Hofstede serves as a great example given the articulated criteria, of a theorist who contributes to the explanation and articulation of cultural development. Much of the challenges found in cultural understanding come from the lack of clear operationalizations (Minkov, 2012) or common definitions (Moore, 2012) as well as theoretical rabbit-holes (ibid) that subtract from any explanatory power. Hofstede blends qualitative exploratory analysis with quantitative analysis and a robust empirical approach to supply the field with a theory that is testable, reliable, replicable, and applicable.

Hofstede, Geert, Gert Jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010.

S.Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster (1996)

M. Minkov, *Cross-Cultural Analysis: The Science and Art of Comparing the World's Modern Societies and Their Cultures*, SAGE Publications, Inc (2012).

J. Moore, *Visions of Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theories and Theorists*, AltaMira Press; Fourth Edition edition (May 24, 2012).