Cultural Psychology, Socialization, and Individual Development in Changing Contexts

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Abstract

This essay discusses two major emerging trends in the study of culture and psychology. One trend can be observed in the reconciliation of cross-cultural and culture-indigenous approaches due to conceptualizing culture in a value- and norm-oriented framework of cultural meaning and cultural minds. A second trend is based on questions of culture learning and socialization, reconciling the nature–nurture debate. Developmental studies integrating biological and socialization conditions in cultural contexts are complemented by selected studies on culture-specificities of self-regulation, prosocial behavior, caretaker's implicit theories on parenting, and intergenerational relations. The meaning-making function of socialization is seen as a major process in culture learning and the development of cultural mindsets. I conclude with questions regarding socioeconomic, demographic, and cultural changes, suggesting a major research goal for an emerging science of cultural psychology: to provide a scientific basis for better understanding culture-psychological conditions and consequences of fundamental ongoing changes related to cultural diversity and to accelerating intercultural connections.

Globalization has widened the options for cultural encounters, cultural affordances, and constraints, challenging the status of regional and national cultures and the respective cultural values and identities. These options are related to multiple problems intensified by multiple forces of change, for example, climate, demographics, migration, religious conflicts, and technological transformations. The impact of ongoing demographic, social, economic, political, and cultural changes are affecting socialization conditions in the family, in school, and on the labor market, thereby shaping individual development. Resulting effects on the individual's self- and

world-view and on cultural values and practices will influence the living and socialization conditions and the cultural contexts of the present and the next generation.

Though questions regarding human development in changing cultural contexts have not been a central focus in psychology, cultural psychology may provide some clarifications. Cultural aspects of human behavior and development have recently stimulated an increasing number of culture-informed studies aiming to better understand the relations between culture and developmental processes, testing mainstream theories in non-western contexts, and acknowledging the diversity of populations and related cultural practices and values. Studies on cultural differences and similarities in human development are widening the perspective beyond the European–American cultural context, attempting to overcome an ethnocentric bias. The millennium even started with the expectation of a "cultural revolution in psychology" (Ng & Liu, 2000), assuming a global, culture-informed international psychology.

Despite the many forms of culture and various definitions of culture in the psychological literature, cultural psychologists conceive of culture as possessing some temporal stability, certain boundaries, and some predictive value as a source of variance for human behavior. Culture is transmitted over time and generations, characterized by adaptive interactions between humans and the environment, and consisting of shared components (Lehman, Chiu, & Schaller, 2004). This conceptualization raises the question for cultural psychology regarding how culture and human development are related.

The aim of this essay is to discuss selected emerging trends in research on the interrelations between psychology and culture focusing on human development. In the first part, I will give a brief overview on main debates and emerging approaches in cultural psychology. In the second part, I will discuss models, controversies, and selected empirical research on socialization and human development in cultural contexts. I will conclude with suggestions regarding an expansion of research topics for an emerging science of cultural psychology.

OVERVIEW ON MAIN APPROACHES IN CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Cultural psychology describes and explains intra- and inter-individual processes and human development, including cultural learning, in cultural contexts. Cultural psychology as presently emerging from debates between cross-cultural and culture-psychological (and indigenous) main approaches does no longer regard culture as a fixed categorical variable. Culture is rather

seen as a dynamic, fluid, and complex process, consisting of polyvalent elements related to cultural values and practices and contributing to cultural variations in human development.

  Culture-comparative (cross-cultural) psychologists focus on how cultural factors shape individual development and behavior, aiming for better understanding psychological phenomena of individuals in diverse cultures, attempting to clarify universalities and refine and broaden psychological theories (Triandis, 1994). Comparisons among diverse cultures are to increase the explanatory power in testing psychological theories and to ensure ecological validity. Cross-cultural studies on similarities and differences in relationships between the cultural context and the development of human behavior conceive of culture as a complex environment for psychological processes, including human development. The concept of culture underlying the cross-cultural approach has often been criticized as too broad for psychological studies. Given the many definitions, components, and the unclear boundaries of cultures, Poortinga (2015) has suggested to abandon the concept of culture, proposing to specify "cultural" characteristics for cultural psychological comparisons, for example, choosing objective indicators on the national level such as the gross domestic product (GDP). However, cross-national comparisons show that global economic measures are only partially useful to predict psychological phenomena (e.g., well-being; Oishi & Gilbert, 2016), whereas measures on the national context related to socialization and cultural values (e.g., World Values Surveys; Human Development Index, HDI) are more useful for testing cultural psychological assumptions (Bond, Lun, & Li, 2012; Mayer *et al.*, 2015; Trommsdorff, 2009). For example, socialization emphasis on self-directedness versus other-directness characterizing one's national culture partially predicts well-being (Lun & Bond, 2016). Global indicators of the cultural context may obscure relations between distal contextual factors and individual developmental outcomes. Thus, mediators and moderators on the macro-, meso-, and micro-level should be included for enhancing predictive power of models for individual development. Examining multiple cultures (multilevel analyses) and different forms of culture simultaneously may reveal which cultural variables and which of their relations are the best predictors for developmental outcomes (Mayer *et al.*, 2015). Testing the functional equivalence of indicators and proximal variables, both embedded in longitudinal designs, would be most preferable for explaining developmental processes.

  A different approach promoted by *culture and indigenous psychology* has emerged from criticism of functionalist cross-cultural studies. Different from the nomothetic culture-insensitive paradigm of mainstream psychology,

culture and indigenous psychologists are interested in cultural meanings (Geertz, 1973) and interpretative schemes (Shweder, 1985), assuming interdependencies between culture (in its historically based complexity) and the human mind. Cultural dynamics are seen as constitutive of and intertwined with (but not as external influential factors of) human development, while better knowledge on interrelations between culture and psychological processes helps to understand the meaning of cultural and psychological phenomena (Bruner, 1990; Eckensberger, 2010; Geertz, 1973). The meaning-focused approach makes use of symbols and verbal accounts of subjective interpretations, beliefs, and intuitive theories. It also studies cultural practices to clarify how individual and collective actions connect for shared goal achievement.

Hofstede (2001) has initiated a third approach, a *cultural-dimensions psychology*, emerging from value-based conceptualizations of culture. He suggested to measure "cultural dimensions", classifying national cultures based on the mapping of cultural value dimensions (e.g., individualism–collectivism). Conceptually reducing "culture" to psychological traits serving as cultural indicators for cultural comparisons has yielded an enormous rise of cross-cultural studies, partly using the research tool of the representative World Value Surveys. Schwartz's theory on the universal content and structure of values (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990) promoted the comparison of the variability of large cultural entities, such as nations and specific universally valid values between individuals. Further dimensions of cultural variability—"loose–tight cultures"—are reflecting attitudes toward norms. "Tight" nations foster strong norms and a low tolerance of deviant behavior; "loose" nations prefer weak norms and a high tolerance of deviant behavior (Gelfand *et al.*, 2011). Value- and norm-based cross-national studies face problems to distinguish the cultural and individual level of values. Also, cultural variations should not be limited to national and geographic borders. Artificial or politically imposed national borders do not necessarily indicate "national-equals-cultural unity." Adding to the complex nature of culture, diverse levels of interconnected elements (e.g., institutions, political, ethnic, and religious groups) complement and advance the theoretical scope of cross-cultural research in terms of intracultural studies. In his discussion on "many forms of culture", Cohen (2009) suggests several "cultural markers", for example, region, socioeconomic status, and religion. Overall, this approach contributes to an improved psychological understanding of the meaning of culture and bridges the seemingly divergent approaches conceiving of culture as an external variable influencing human development (cross-cultural view) versus culture as interrelated with human development (culture-indigenous view).

On this basis, a fourth approach has been emerging, *cultural psychology.* Regarding culture and self as mutually constitutive is part of the basic idea of Markus and Kitayama (1991), assuming that cultural patterns and social structures are related to fundamental psychological processes. Assumed interdependencies of culture and the self can explain cultural differences in emotion, cognition, motivation, and behavior. Social situations common in a culture reinforce culture-specific tendencies such as independence or inter-dependence. Based on the concept of the cultural model of self-construal, the preference for independence or interdependence and their relations to other psychological phenomena allow going beyond national borders, identify cultural subgroups, and test cultural differences and similarities. This theorizing allows the study of the meaning of individual's behavior in a value- or norm-based framework which serves to connect the cultural context and individual development including self-construals and related self- and world-views. Markus and Kitayama's (1991) theory on cultural models of self-construal are thus further reconciling cross-cultural and indigenous approaches, allowing for a cultural psychological approach to human development. Conceptually related to the cultural model of self-construal is the "culture-as-situated cognitions" perspective by Oyser-man (2015, 2017). This situational dynamic approach predicts that activating one aspect of an individualist or collectivist position may activate other related aspects, assuming the following: Human cognition is contextually activated; human culture has developed from the survival necessity for interpersonal relations; culture is a functional, universal, and set of practices to solve basic problems in cooperation with others. Cultural mindsets function as associative networks, emerging during development and influencing the person's subjective meaning of their experiences. Across societies, variations of the individualistic and collectivistic cultural mindsets are related to specific practices. While individualism and collectivism (as universal cultural mindsets) have been experimentally activated through priming in diverse societies, Novin and Oyserman (2016) and Oyserman (2017) have proposed "honor" as third universal cultural mindset also functioning as a meaning-making framework, influencing cognitions and judgments. Honor as focal concern in collectivistic cultures, where individuals are focusing on an external evaluation of the self (in contrast to dignity as an intrinsic value of the self in individualistic cultures), can be activated outside of the laboratory influencing behavior (Gelfand et al., 2015). Differences in focus of promoting an honorable person and preventing a dishonorable person are defined through different linguis-tic pathways, revealed in rational models of negotiation (in the United States) contrasted to relational models of honor (Egypt) (Gelfand *et al.*, 2015).

CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY OF SOCIALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL MINDSET

In the following, I discuss socialization conditions for cultural learning and the development of a cultural mindset from the perspective of cultural psychology. Socialization research as part of cultural psychology aims to study the relationships between the cultural context and human development assuming interrelations between biology, culture, and psychological processes.

BIOLOGY AND CULTURE

The nature–nurture debate on the primacy of biological or of environmental factors in development has affected cultural psychology of socialization from its early beginnings. Recent approaches in cultural psychology of socialization do no longer ignore the biological properties, recognizing at the same time the ecological and cultural environment of the developing child. Human development is seen as based on biological and evolutionary processes; sociocultural activities stem from interactions among biological and sociocultural phenomena. A revision of the formerly "nurture"-focused view assumes effects of genes, biology, and heredity on infant development influencing parenting and ecological factors, thus acknowledging interactive processes between the environment and the caretakers' and child's biology and psychology (German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, 2014).

In her observational study on biological, social, and cognitive changes in infant development, Greenfield (2002) illustrates the relations between the cultural environment and the biological nature of the infant. Biologically based sensitive periods for development are "respected" by culture and reflected in implicit caretaker's ethnotheories of development. "Culture shapes development" through cultural practices stimulating neuromuscular pathways, the foundation for cognitive development adaptive to the cultural tasks. Cultural norms for infant care "reinforces biology", for example, newborn's motor behavior. The level of physical activity continues into adulthood, reinforced by cultural norms. The transmission of cultural norms and biology to the next generation are facilitated by a restrained movement environment for the unborn baby ("culture appropriating biology"). Further, culture and biology are mutually adaptive for survival in a dangerous environment (late infant walking). "Culture selects from biology" means that the environment reinforces certain elements of the infant's biologically grounded capacities, depending on environmental affordances and constraints—the foundation for differentiated cultural socialization.

These descriptions touch issues of cultural neuroscience, studying learning and related brain changes, sensitive periods (when neural development increases susceptibility to environmental influences), and epigenetic effects due to prenatal experience or in early infancy, influencing the individual's development over the life span and possibly also the next generation. Cultural neuroscience, having shown that psychological differences between cultures are linked to biological processes (e.g., neural activation), is analyzing the joint function of cultural and biological processes in human development and behavior and the constituent role of culture in biological processes. In their review, Sasaki and Kim (2017) discuss evidence regarding culture and gene (gene–environment and gene–culture interactions), physiological processes (neuroendocrine and immune responses) in different cultures, and neural processes related to cultural differences in psychological outcomes. Their overview supports the notion that "certain genotypes may endow people with greater predispositions to be influenced by cultural values, expectations, and norms." (p. 8). Thus, the assumption that influences of the environment depend on biological factors can be specified: genes predispose persons to be more or less susceptible to influences from cultural socialization. Persons carrying the environmental susceptibility genes show stronger cross-cultural differences, for example, reporting a more independent orientation in the United States, and a more interdependent orientation in Japan (norm sensitivity hypothesis) (Kitayama, King, Hsu, Liberzon, & Yoon, 2016). To summarize, the gene–culture interaction model as suggested by cultural neuroscience views culture and biology as basically embedded in human development.

SOCIALIZATION IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Assuming that meaningful input from the sociocultural environment is necessary for biological functions in human development, our focus now is on the contexts of development. Matsumoto (2001) suggests a broad contextual view on culture learning and socialization: " … culture may be learned through situated cognitive schemas and structures related to specific contexts, and that cultural meaning is constructed across these contexts as individuals develop social cognitive abilities that allow for such construction to occur." (p. 193). This is in line with Bruner's (1990) postulation that understanding the subjective meaning of the respective variables is most important. The task is to "translate" the cultural and the subjective meaning of socialization practices and developmental outcomes in a way that it can be incorporated in an integrated theory.

Whiting and Whiting (1975) have suggested a socialization model on the relations between the individual and the environment. The ecological

multilevel model by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) discusses the permeable boundaries between the individual, the micro-, and the macro-level of society. However, these contextual models on interactions between the person and environments have not been designed to identify the socialization process and the cultural meaning of the contexts for cultural learning. Super and Harkness's (1986) conceptualization of the "developmental niche" provides a framework that includes both objective-structural and subjective aspects of the child's development and cultural learning. The major components of the niche are the physical and social setting, the customs of child care and child rearing, and the psychology of caregivers, all embedded in the larger environment and interacting with each other and with the child. This approach has stimulated cultural psychologists to study caretakers' subjective beliefs and the meaning of parenting as cultural mindsets in diverse cultures aiming to understand cultural differences in the function of socialization (Friedlmeier, Schäfermeier, Vasconcellos, & Trommsdorff, 2008; Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007; Schwarz, Schäfermeier, & Trommsdorff, 2005; Trommsdorff, Cole, & Heikamp, 2012). Further, a focus on the cultural meaning of socialization conditions has contributed to question the generalizability of biological-based developmental phenomena such as attachment (Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, & Morelli, 2000) or motivation (Kornadt, 2002).

SOCIALIZATION OF SELF- AND EMOTION REGULATION IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Self-regulation is a major developmental task in all cultures, organizing impulsive automatic behavior in ways that fit with predominant cultural values and foster successful developmental outcomes. Strategies for self-regulation differ across cultures, situations, and inter-individually, depending on the activation of different cultural mindsets, influenced by individual needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence that vary cross-culturally in relative importance (Rothbaum & Trommsdorff, 2007; Trommsdorff, 2009). Examples from observational studies of German and Japanese mother–child interactions reveal effects of domain specificity and bidirectional influences between caretaker and child moderated by the cultural context prioritizing independence/interdependence. These factors influence a mother's sensitivity interacting with her disappointed child, revealing culture-specific qualities (Friedlmeier & Trommsdorff, 1999; Kornadt, 2011; Trommsdorff & Friedlmeier, 2010). When the child fails to solve a task, Japanese mothers, rather believing in a malleable self (growth mindset), encourage the frustrated child to continue, thereby reducing the child's disappointment, avoiding to harm her self-concept. German mothers rather believing in an entity self (fixed mindset), acknowledge the

child's failure, reinforcing the child's disappointment. Thus, socialization and cultural learning of emotion regulation are related to cultural mindsets regarding autonomy/relatedness (Kagitcibasi, 2007), self-construals of independence/interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1998), and fixed/growth mindsets (Dweck, 2006), influencing the development of self- and world-views.

The function of self- and emotion regulation for prosocial behavior has been revealed in observational studies on preschool children, who interact with another person suffering from a misfortune. Depending on the cultural model of independence or interdependence, children experience different qualities of empathic distress and emotion regulation ability. The cultural model of independence (focusing on separateness of self), less relevant for Japanese and Malays, enables Germans and Israelis to regulate their (other-focused) distress and engage in prosocial behavior (Trommsdorff, Friedlmeier, & Mayer, 2007). These culturally different emotion-regulation strategies fostered by respective self-construals and cultural learning affect the cultural mindset and the subjective meaning of the "objectively" comparable situation in different cultural contexts.

Due to the cultural variability in emotion socialization, caretakers' naïve theories (as aspect of the "developmental niche") allow the assessment of the cultural meaning of mothers' strategies for their children's emotion regulations (pro- or reactive sensitivity) in different situations (Park, Trommsdorff, & Lee, 2012; Trommsdorff & Cole, 2011; Trommsdorff *et al.*, 2012). Proactive sensitivity and minimization strategies are more preferred in cultures prioritizing interdependent values (Nepal or India), while reactive sensitivity and maximization strategies fit with cultural values prioritizing independence (United States and Germany). Korean mothers experiencing major transitions and value change favor both minimization and maximization strategies. Future research may focus on sociocultural change influencing socialization, cultural learning, and transitions in cultural mindsets, possibly profiting from cultural neuroscience for improving the measurement of self- and emotion regulation.

INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS IN CHANGING CULTURAL CONTEXTS

Challenged by ongoing demographic and cultural changes in all parts of the world, another focus of our cultural psychological studies was on the changing value of children and intergenerational relations, including a wide range of countries based on large sample sizes and multiple sites within countries. The model of intergenerational relations, which assumes that culture-specific parent–child relations influence processes of value transmission (Trommsdorff, 2016), and Kagitcibasi's (Kagitcibasi, 2007) family

model predicting emotional interdependence as converging from family values of independence and interdependence have guided our research. The studies have revealed cultural differences and similarities in associations among cultural factors of socialization, grandparent–parent–child and peer relations, well-being, (given and received) support, and the transmission of values between three generations in transitional, industrialized, and traditional cultures (Mayer & Trommsdorff, 2010; Mayer, Trommsdorff, Kagitcibasi, & Mishra, 2012; Schwarz *et al.*, 2012; Trommsdorff, 2012, 2016; Trommsdorff & Mayer, 2012). Further, relations among culture, values, religion, and life satisfaction of adolescents have provided novel insights in possibly emerging cultural constellations and socialization conditions (Mayer & Trommsdorff, 2012; Trommsdorff, 2012, 2015).

Since our study designs are not genetically informative, our research on intergenerational transmission of values could not account for variations in susceptibility to environmental influences, especially to the quality of parenting. Growing evidence on epigenetic processes based on prenatal maternal experience (German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, 2014) should be acknowledged in future transmission research, by also taking into account interactions between such biological factors and culture. Further studies are needed on biological factors underlying transmission effects, using longitudinal designs to assess interactions between contextual, especially cultural, and individual factors in socialization and cultural learning.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A major question of this essay was on how cultural psychology may contribute to culture-sensitive socialization research and to a better understanding of interrelations between culture and human development, thereby promoting the emergence of an integrative science of cultural psychology. So far, the debate on differences between cross-cultural and culture-indigenous psychology has resulted in the joint endeavor to study the cultural meaning of psychological phenomena by interrelating culture and psychology, thus strengthening the impact of cultural psychology. Further, the reconciliation of the nature–nurture controversy has identified socialization research and cultural learning as a major part of cultural psychology. Further research focusing on generalizability of results, conceptual replications, and improving methodological sophistication (van de Vijver, 2015) beyond verbal assessments may partly integrate biological, evolutionary, anthropological, and sociological approaches in a science of cultural psychology.

At present, cultural psychology can serve as a scientific guide for stepping beyond our own culture and out of our familiar environment, rethinking long-standing practices, gaining deeper insight in cultural diversity, and

improving our understanding of foreign cultures. However, new challenges arise for cultural psychology facing fundamentally changing contexts, due to massive demographic, climate, social, and technological changes related to cultural diversity and to accelerating intercultural connections. Culture-bound socialization affecting cultural learning, cultural mindsets, and meaning-making may influence further cultural and societal changes.

Facing these changes, an emerging goal of cultural psychology and culture-sensitive socialization research may be to provide a scientific basis for better understanding the cultural and psychological conditions and the consequences of ongoing fundamental changes for human development in diverse cultures. This needs solid theoretical and methodological approaches for analyzing interrelations between psychology and culture; moreover, it needs the willingness to study world-wide changes in collaboration with experts from the respective disciplines in natural, social, and human sciences. Pursuing these goals would be a major step in emerging as science of cultural psychology.

These goals will induce shifting toward research on dynamic processes, going beyond the present focus of examining modes of psychological functions across various sociocultural contexts. The focus would then be on specifying conditions and consequences of changes in the development of cultural meanings linked to changing cultural contexts. This focus will engage cultural psychology in various topics like culture-sensitive research on changing intergenerational relations, segmented integration of immigrants, resolution of conflicts in cultural encounters, and the impact of climate and technological change, religion, education, and family values on individual and cultural development. For example, the demographic changes are not only related to aging and decline of populations in some countries and population increase with growing numbers of unemployed youth in other countries. Rather, questions arise regarding the cultural meaning of such changes, and how these are related to cultural self- and world-views and to individual development over the life span.

In times of sociocultural changes and cultural encounters, the awareness of multidimensionality of cultures and the multi-faced self may improve cultural learning. Further, acknowledging the function of cultural mindsets and meaning-making in socialization will be fruitful for comparative cultural psychology of human development. Collaborating with neuroscience may encourage studies on the development of the cultural brain and gene expression in diverse cultures and in changing sociocultural contexts, promoting life span research on the development of individual and cultural adaptation to risky sociocultural contexts, considering differential susceptibility to environmental influences (for better or for worse). In sum, recent progress in cultural psychology suggests further innovative theoretical and

methodological advancements fostering an emerging science of cultural psychology.

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