Understanding Social Psychology Across Cultures

Engaging With Others in a Changing World

2ND EDITION

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Why Does Social Psychology Need a Cross-Cultural Perspective?

'The only true exploration, the only true fountain of delight, would not be to visit foreign lands, but to possess others' eyes, to look at the world through the eyes of others.'

(Marcel Proust, *The Prisoner and the Fugitive*, 1905)

Two English-speaking acquaintances meet on a street corner. 'How are you?', says one. 'Terrific', replies the other, 'how about you?' 'Not too bad', says the other. From this conventional interchange, we can infer that the first speaker is probably US American and the second is probably from one of the other Anglo cultures around the world, such as the UK, Australia or New Zealand. They both speak the same language, but the norms guiding opening self-presentations will differ even between these two relatively similar cultural groups. A distinctive aspect of US culture is the value placed on expressing oneself positively, which is not found to the same extent in all other parts of the world. For instance, Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, and Norasakkunkit (1997) found that American students reported being more often in situations that led to feeling positive about themselves, whereas Japanese students reported being more often in situations where they felt critical of themselves. Furthermore the Americans were more likely to feel positive even in situations where the Japanese did not.

   Of course we cannot be sure about the nationality of either party in our imaginary exchange of greetings, because there is tremendous individual variability within any large cultural grouping, and there is also some variability in how a given person chooses to present him- or herself on any specific day. Nonetheless, there are reliable cultural differences around the world in how people do relate to one another, and these differences pose challenges that are increasingly important in a globalising world. If we as social psychologists are to understand these challenges, and provide effective help in facing them, we need to do so in terms of theories and findings that are based on an adequate understanding of cultural variability.

In this book we will outline a social psychology that can help us to understand and cope with the unparalleled processes of social change that are occurring in the world at the present time. This book has three sections. In the first, we lay the conceptual groundwork. In the second, we address major areas of social psychological study. In the third, we consider some major contemporary issues where culturally informed social psychologists can make a contribution. We conclude each chapter with a summary, suggestions for further reading and some study questions. We have also provided a glossary at the end of the book, in which you will find definitions of the technical terms that have proven useful for cross-cultural social psychologists. Terms that are included in the glossary appear in **bold** when they are first mentioned.

Formulating a social psychology that can address a changing world will not be an easy task, as it requires us to focus equally on two important issues that are most often kept quite separate: whom we should be studying, and how we should make sense of social change.

WHOM SHOULD WE BE STUDYING?

Firstly, we need to show how social psychologists can address the diversity of the world's population. Social psychology has most frequently been conducted by focusing on standardised and simplified settings. This type of focus can yield a sharply delineated understanding of what occurs within the few types of setting that are mostly sampled, but it raises problems if we wish to apply those understandings to more everyday settings, especially those that are located in different cultural contexts.

Arnett (2008) reported that in recent issues of six top US psychology journals 68% of samples were from the US and a further 28% were from other Western, industrialised nations. The final 4% were drawn from the rest of the world, whose population makes up 88% of the total world population. As Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) neatly summarised the situation, social psychology is WEIRD – in other words, it has mostly been based on studies of people from the relatively few nations that are Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic. Even within those nations its research findings have mostly been based on studies of relatively young persons who are attending university, and especially on those who are also unusual because they are studying psychology.

Studies on this basis would only be a reliable guide to social behaviour in the rest of the world if people and the ways that they relate to others were much the same everywhere. So where do you, the reader, fit into this pattern? Are you from one of the WEIRD nations, or are you from what Kağıtçıbaşı (2007) calls the Majority World, namely the much larger portion of humankind that is not WEIRD? And how does your situation affect how you think about cultural differences in social behaviour?

Later in this chapter, we examine the evidence showing that studies conducted in different parts of the world often yield different results. In Chapter 2, we then look at how this variability can be systematically described and explained. In Chapter 3, we examine ways in which different cultures have arisen and sustained themselves over the centuries, while also accommodating increasing globalisation. These early discussions raise questions as to how cross-cultural studies

can be done in valid ways, and Chapter 4 provides guidelines on how to identify and conduct studies that can best meet these challenges.

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL CHANGE

Our second major issue is that in the modern world we need to focus on change as much as on stability. Research methods that sample events at a single point in time, as most do, can give us an illusion of social stability, even though our individual experiences tell us that things are in flux. In the central section of this book, we go along with the convenient assumption that we are studying a stable world, in order to provide a cross-cultural perspective on some of the major topics of social psychology. In the third section, we then focus on the ways in which social psychological perspectives can be applied to contemporary issues that are being triggered by increasing cross-national contact through the travel, education, migration, electronic media and trade that have been unleashed by globalisation.

Our focus can be introduced in a few paragraphs. Over the past 10,000 years, human evolution has differentiated a series of relatively small and relatively separate groups that we can describe as societies or cultures. These cultures were adapted to sustaining life in a wide variety of differing and often hostile environments. Depending on how we might choose to define 'culture', several thousand cultures may be considered to have evolved. In the early part of the twentieth century, social anthropologists made detailed ethnographic studies of many of these groups. Their observations have been documented and summarised in the 'Human Relations Area Files' at Yale University, which contain information on 863 cultural groups (Murdock, 1967).

Some of the earliest of these anthropological investigations also involved psychologists. Over 100 years ago, a group of social scientists visited the islands in the Torres Straits which separate Australia and New Guinea. One member of the team, the psychologist William Rivers, focused his studies upon the islanders' perceptual processes. You can see an account of some of his experiences in Everyday Life Box 1.1. Look also at the results that he obtained, which are described in Key Research Study Box 1.1.

Some of the early anthropologists also employed psychological terms to describe the whole cultures that they studied and explain the social processes that characterised them. This approach became known as the 'culture and personality' school of thought (Benedict, 1932). For instance, drawing on this perspective, Benedict (1946) asserted that the national character of the Japanese was based on shame, in contrast to that of Western nations that was based more on guilt. She acknowledged that some individuals might not fit the overall pattern, but was primarily concerned with understanding the overall profile of a given society. As is often the case in cultural work, there was a powerful motivation for providing such an understanding – in this case Japan, an unknown foe, had just entered the Second World War against the United States, and the US War Office was eager to know how to deal with its enemy.

This perspective subsequently fell out of favour, partly because it assumed that most members of a culture shared the same personality and partly because there were no established personality measures at the time (Piker, 1998). As we shall see in Chapter 5, there is now some evidence of cultural variability in the distribution of personality traits, but there is also much

Everyday Life Box 1.1   The Torres Straits Expedition

In 1898, a team from Cambridge University visited a set of islands in the Torres Straits, which lie between Australia and New Guinea. The team included three psychologists, of whom the leader was W.H.R. Rivers. Their purpose was to test the hypothesis that, while 'savages' were lacking in higher mental functions, they had superior visual skills. Their studies were impeded by the failure in this very different climatic context of many of the types of psychological apparatus that they had taken with them. Rather than working in a controlled laboratory setting, studies took place in the open with an appreciative audience of spectators. The way in which they explained their studies conveyed strong demand characteristics:

> The natives were told that some people had said that the black man could see and hear better than the white man, and that we had come to find out how clever they were and their performances would all be described in a big book, so that everyone would read about them. This appealed to the vanity of the people and put them on their mettle…
> (Rivers, 1901, cited by Richards, 2010)

One research assistant further encouraged participation by telling islanders that if they did not respond truthfully, Queen Victoria would send a gunboat. The 'control' samples from which data were collected in the UK were poorly matched with the islanders, so that many of the findings must be considered inconclusive (Richards, 2010). Nonetheless, this very first cross-cultural study illustrates many of the difficulties that more recent cross-cultural comparisons must overcome if they are to yield valid conclusions.

As was normal at the time, the research team collected many cultural artefacts, which were then deposited in museums in Cambridge, UK. In 1998, a group of Torres Islanders were invited to Cambridge. The leader of this group expressed pleasure that these artifacts had been preserved, as they had great symbolic meaning, and were no longer found in the Torres Straits islands. Discussions ensued as to where the artifacts should now be located.

variability between individuals. To explain social behaviour, we will need to understand both types of variation.

The fact that anthropologists were able to visit and document all these cultural groups was itself a symptom of an evolutionary process that commenced long before the industrial revolution and has been accelerating ever since. The development of modern technology has steadily increased the speed and ease with which we can travel the world and has virtually eliminated the time within which messages can pass between two points located anywhere on the globe. New technologies and the economic developments that these have engendered have increasingly unleashed a new 'anthropocene'

Ethnicity/Ethnic Group Ethnicity is a problematic concept widely used in some parts of the world to identify sub-cultural groups on the basis of criteria such as ancestry, skin colour and other attributes. A person's self-identified ethnic identity does not always coincide with his or her ethnicity as identified by others.

Key Research Study Box 1.1   Visual Illusions

Despite whatever preconceptions the researchers of the Torres Straits Expedition may have held, they obtained some rather striking results. In particular, they reported that the suscept- ibility to visual illusions varied, depending on the perceiver's **ethnicity**. The islanders were less susceptible than British respondents to the Müller-Lyer illusion, namely the false perception that the vertical lines with outward and inward facing arrow heads in Figure 1.1 differed in length. However, they were more susceptible than Caucasians to the illusion that the vertical line in Figure 1.1 was longer than the horizontal line.
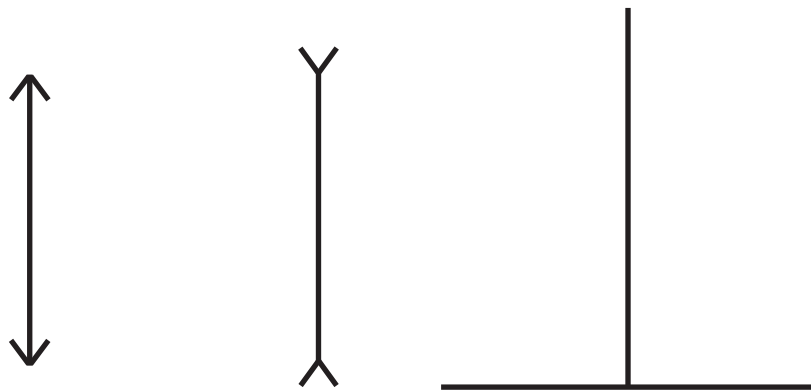
Figure 1.1   Visual Illusions

Susceptibility to various types of visual illusions has been studied extensively by cross-cultural psychologists in more recent times (Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999). The Müller-Lyer illusion is found in societies in which people live in houses with upright walls and square corners. The results are not wholly consistent, but it appears that differential sensitivity to illusions is a product of the particular type of environment in which one lives. The presence or absence of particular types of routine visual stimuli in the environment is thought to give differential encouragement to the development of relevant types of perceptual discrimination.

Rivers and his colleagues used a great variety of tests, not just those that have been men- tioned here. He was perhaps lucky, in that they chose to include two different tests of visual illusion. Had they used only one, they might have been led toward a false and possibly racist conclusion about the greater susceptibility of one group to illusions.

stage in earth's history (Ruddiman, 2003). This encompasses the period during which human activity has started to affect the global environment. Ruddiman argues that this began with the invention of agriculture, but its effects have become particularly marked over the past two centuries.

Many of the several thousand languages that have evolved out of distinct cultural niches and traditions are in the process of being lost. In parallel with this reduction in linguistic diversity, a few languages are becoming more and more widely spoken. Most of the cultural groups studied earlier by anthropologists are no longer insulated from external influences and many have disappeared in the form first described by anthropologists. Mass media ensure that the cultural products of a few industrialised nations are beamed into all corners of the world. Very large numbers of persons visit other parts of the world, as tourists, as workers for either non-governmental organisations or foreign governments, as students or for business purposes. Large numbers of persons migrate to other parts of the world, some as foreign workers, some as economic migrants, and some as refugees or as victims of political or religious persecution. Even larger numbers of people are moving from the countryside to ever growing cities, with the proportions of humans living in cities rising from 29% in 1950 to 50% today, and expected to reach 69% by 2050 (United Nations, 2010).

So how can we best understand these processes of social and cultural change and stability? The world is now organised as a system not of thousands of cultural groups, but of slightly more than 200 nation states. The geographical locations and human histories of these nation states vary greatly, leading each toward their current circumstances. Nations are politically defined entities, containing a broad range of persons most of whom will share a single nationality, but who may well choose to describe themselves in terms of differing genders, occupations, ethnic origins, religious affiliations and skin colours. In some cases, one's nationality defines one's ethnicity, but skin colour, prior migration history and regional loyalties are frequently involved as well. Whether a nation can be best understood as a society, as a culture or as an amalgam of ethnicities is a question that we shall discuss in the next chapter. Until we reach that point we shall be referring simply to nations, not cultures.

CHOOSING WHAT TO STUDY AND HOW TO STUDY IT

In order to examine the world as it now is, we first need to consider how best to study and describe the existing similarities and differences between groups and between nations. Social scientists have devised many useful ways to do this, each of which can illuminate specific aspects of how people respond to current stability and change. Our perspective stems from **cross-cultural psychology**. Cross-cultural psychologists resemble researchers in most other fields of psychology in that they usually favour research methods that entail quantitative forms of measurement, but they are distinctive in their emphasis on the need to test theories across a broad range of geographical locations in order to test their universality. What is fundamental and basic about human nature, and what is malleable and likely to emerge in a different form, depending on the ways in which particular individuals are socialised in changing nation states? As we shall see, cross-cultural psychologists have developed measures that enable the existing differences between nation states to be dimensionalised and hence compared. But will these differences persist, or will contemporary developments gradually create a global monoculture?

Socialisation is most typically studied as a process occurring during childhood, and in Chapter 8 we will consider the ways in which childhood socialisation processes vary across

nations. However, as individuals move through the lifespan with its various stages and occasionally also from one nation to another, further socialisation processes become equally salient. Multinational businesses seek to socialise their employees to operate within a global organisational culture. Governments

> **Cross-Cultural Psychology** An approach to the study of culture that focuses on comparisons between different groups and testing theories as to why they do or do not differ from one another.

adopt a variety of practices concerning the provision of schooling within multiethnic contexts, and these schools in turn function as agents of socialisation. Political alliances and conflicts create pressures for particular kinds of relationships and social change. Tourists make particular kinds of demands on local residents. People form relationships with, and sometimes marry, partners from nations other than their own. In doing so, they must confront the differences in the assumptions and values to which their prior lives have socialised them. Everyday Life Box 1.2 identifies one such pattern.

Everyday Life Box 1.2   Jan meets Maria

Jan grew up in a Dutch Protestant family. By the time he completed his *doctorandus* degree at a university in the Netherlands, he, like his classmates, was a fluent speaker of Dutch, English, German, and French. He was keen to find a way to express his internationalist values and obtained a scholarship to study at a university in the UK for a doctorate concerning development issues in Brazil. Maria grew up in a Catholic family in Sao Paulo, Brazil. She learned English in school, and after completing a top-graded psychology degree in Sao Paulo, she was delighted to be awarded a Brazilian government scholarship to study for a doctorate in the UK.

The students in the doctoral programme at the UK university were drawn from all over the world. They soon found themselves in a friendship group that included British, American, German, Swedish, and Japanese students. In conversations among friends, they told one another that their different backgrounds were unimportant: they felt a sense of personal freedom. Jan was attracted to Maria's warmth and spontaneity. He said that he could respond to it much more freely when speaking English than he could have in Dutch. Maria was first attracted to Jan because of his evident concern and knowledge about Brazil. They became romantic partners, or as their friends put it, 'an item'.

As their studies progressed, they decided to marry, and to live in Brazil. Jan had done fieldwork for his dissertation in Brazil, and when their doctorates were completed, they married and set up home in Sao Paulo. Maria's mother immediately started to press her to start a family. Jan had initially found Maria's family delightfully welcoming. However, he soon began to feel that their demands on Maria and their all-encompassing sociability were smothering his individuality and interfering with their time together. He expressed his discontents to Maria in the open manner to which he had been socialised, but it did not seem to have any effect. She sighed and said in Portuguese, 'That's the way it is'. He began to realise that he had not only married Maria, but had also chosen to live in a context that challenged his whole sense of who he was. If his relationship was to survive, he would need to talk and interact with Maria in ways that had not seemed necessary in their student days.

Psychologists mostly treat individuals as the focus of their studies. Their research methods are better adapted to doing so than those that are mostly employed by sociologists, anthropologists or economists. However, it has been apparent from the early days of psychological research that social context is also very important in determining how people behave. An early pioneer in this field was Vygotsky (1934/1962). Vygotsky studied peasant communities in Central Asia, focusing upon the development of thought and language. He emphasised the manner in which learning derives from the socio-cultural context within which the child develops. For instance, the child acquires language skills from the more competent practitioners with whom he or she interacts. These models provide illustrations of ways of speaking and thinking that are slightly more complex than those the child has yet mastered, but still within its 'zone of proximal development'. The child first learns to speak in the new ways observed from his or her socialisation models, and then internalises these skills. This focus on cultural transmission within the cognitive development of children has been an important precursor to contemporary **cultural psychology** (Rogoff, 1990; Cole, 1996; Heine, 2007; see also the recommended Further Reading by Valsiner, 2003).

Vygotskyan cultural psychology is no longer distinctively focused upon children, but highlights the reciprocal process by which everyday interactions between individuals transmit and reformulate our sense of what goes on around us and how to behave within that field of sense. This interplay between individual and context will be important throughout this book. Cross-cultural psychologists differ from cultural psychologists in their somewhat stronger preference for obtaining measures both of the individual and of the broader contexts such as nation that they inhabit, but there is an increasing convergence between the two perspectives (Markus & Hamedani, 2007).

Cultural Psychology An approach to the study of culture that emphasises the interrelatedness of persons and their specific contexts. This requires culturally appropriate research methods and makes no assumption that results will be cumulative or will lead to the identification of causal relationships.

Indigenous Psychology An approach, whose goal is to achieve an understanding of a particular national or cultural group, using concepts that are developed locally rather than drawing on those provided from mainstream psychology.

Various critiques of the research methods favoured by mainstream psychologists have been formulated. In some nations, researchers have argued in favour of the development of '**indigenous**' psychologies, abandoning experimental methods and using instead those that are more compatible with local cultural norms (Sinha, 1996). Table 1.1 summarises these three approaches, as well as some more specific approaches to the study of culture that we shall also be examining.

So what happens when I from my nation meet you from yours? Will some aspects of the cultural milieu within which you and I have been socialised make it difficult for us to relate effectively with one another? Will we make adjustments to our interpretations of one another, our language use and our actions

Table 1.1   Psychological Approaches to the Study of Culture

Name	Goal	Focus	Example	Coverage in this Book
Cross-Cultural Psychology	Show how the culture affects behaviour	Values, beliefs, self-conceptions	Comparisons between national groups	This is the major focus of this book
Cultural Psychology	Show how the self and the social system are interdependent	Qualitative and quantitative studies	A very wide variety of approaches under this heading	Some coverage in most chapters
Indigenous Psychology	Identify psychological processes without starting from US concepts	Single-nation qualitative and quantitative studies	Taiwanese indigenous psychology movement	Chapters 4 and 10
Cognitive Toolkit Approach	Show the consequences of different cognitive processes	Analytic versus holistic cognition	Attention and perception	Chapter 6
Eco-cultural Approach	Show how the environment can shape cultural differences	Ecological factors that precede human influence	Hunter-gatherer societies versus agricultural societies	Chapter 3
Dynamic Constructivism	Show how a changed context elicits different cultural orientations	Experimental studies	Studies of biculturals	Chapters 6 and 13
Intercultural Psychology	Understand the interactions between different cultures	Intergroup relations	Acculturation of migrants	Chapters 11–14

towards one another? Whether or not this comes about will contribute to the success or failure of that particular interaction. Whether failures or successes are typical of the interactions of you and me as individuals will determine the quality of our individual life experiences and the success of our joint enterprise.

Everyday Life Box 1.3 illustrates some of the intercultural issues than can arise. In one respect, this box is unusual in that the English speaker in the episode described was able to speak the language of the other party. Native English speakers frequently underestimate the

extent to which mastery of language is a prime contributor to failed cross-cultural interactions. Whether successes or failures are more typical of the millions of interactions that occur between members of two nations will contribute to the further evolution of those nations' cultures. Will they merge, polarise or remain as they are? What level of contact between nations can be expected to leave them as separate, self-sustaining entities and what will facilitate their integration? Which groups within nations will carry the challenge of interacting across national cultural borders?

Everyday Life Box 1.3   *'C'est Trop Anglais, Monsieur'*

Paul was a British senior manager, negotiating to sell machinery to a large French organisation. A series of meetings took place in Paris, with Paul often being the sole representative of the British firm, meeting a group from the French side. Paul felt the negotiations were going well, and commented that he was 'getting a feel for the French' and was taking the chance to improve his French language skills. He worked hard at anticipating the possible problems that might arise in reaching an agreement and was confident that there were none. Preparing for the next stage in the negotiation, Paul arranged for a standard legal contract to be prepared, founded on the points agreed in previous meetings. There was no difficulty in the French partner translating the document into French. At the next and decisive meeting, Paul was shocked when the French team rejected his draft contract: *'C'est trop Anglais, Monsieur'* ['It's too English'], they said. Paul was astonished.

After some time, Paul made contact with a French business consultant, trying to find a way forward. Taking account of the points that emerged from their discussion, he was able to reopen negotiations with the French company and agree a contract without further difficulty. The consultant highlighted six issues that had contributed to the initial failure to secure a contract:

1. Paul had neglected the importance of hierarchy in France and had not ascertained whether those with whom he was dealing had been given the appropriate authority to reach an agreement.
2. Paul had assumed that the contract terms were not affected by cultural differences and simply required a literal translation from English to French.
3. The draft contract was written in a way that reflected the English preference for indirectness and flexibility. It contained non-specific phrases indicating, for instance, that possible future events would be handled by such procedures 'as may be agreed from time to time'. To the French, this undermined the basis for the creation of trust.
4. Paul had not arranged for the British and French lawyers who were involved to meet and discuss the much greater need for precision that existed in the French legal code.
5. The contract was lengthy, specifying many unlikely eventualities, but was also so vague that the French would not be able to find specific codified elements within it that they could contest.
6. Paul had taken responsibility for the project overall, whereas it was important for the French to have representatives for the various specialisations involved. Consequently, Paul appeared to the French as more of an amateur, compared to their specialist strengths. While Paul had seen his solo trips to France as an effective way to cut costs, to the French it had appeared that by not sending a full team, the British were not giving them respect and investing sufficient resources in the collaboration to guarantee their sincerity and ensure its success.

Source: Harper & Cormeraie (1992)

The main concern of the later sections of this book is with the social psychological consequences of contemporary modes of transport and communication. These consequences are most evident (and have been most studied) among those who travel both between nations and from the countryside to the cities, as well as among those who communicate globally. In reviewing what is happening among this section of humanity, we must also remember that these processes may barely touch those persons within all nations who continue to live in great poverty. Indeed, aspects of modernity, such as the spread of HIV/AIDS, the long distance transportation of basic commodities such as food, minerals or timber, and the global arms, sex, and drug trades, may well be accelerating the growth of poverty and the gap between rich and poor, along with environmental degradation. A full understanding of what is universal about human nature requires that we focus not just on how humans cope with the context of modernity, but also on how they cope within a context of poverty and disparities in the distribution of a cultural group's wealth (Wilkinson, 1996). If these are the agendas that define our future, we can start by mapping how social psychologists have begun to develop the expertise to make a useful contribution.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN CROSS-CULTURAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Although the fieldwork of pioneers such as Rivers, Vygotsky, and the social anthropologists contributed substantially to the early stages of cross-cultural psychology's evolution, the most distinctive approach characterising mainstream psychological research has long been an emphasis on some form of experimental method. Psychologists have favoured the experimental method because it offers the best chance for determining causal relationships between variables. Simplified settings are required if one is to set up an adequately controlled experiment, but this simplification has mostly been seen as a price worth paying for the development of a truly scientific psychology, one that can establish causal relationships.

Many of the key figures in the foundation of modern social psychology favoured experimentation, particularly those who practised in the USA. The political turbulence of the 1930s in Europe led to prominent researchers such as Kurt Lewin and Muzafer Sherif seeking refuge in the United States. Other key figures including Fritz Heider and Solomon Asch had migrated there a little earlier. Furthermore, although the origins of social psychology were European, as a consequence of the widespread destruction and dislocation surrounding the Second World War, the practice of social psychology was for a time largely confined to the USA (Farr, 1996).

Lewin, Sherif, and Asch all espoused theories that emphasised the effect of the immediate social context on social behaviour. The generation of US researchers that succeeded them sought ways to illustrate these effects of context experimentally. In order to do so, they created simplified and often dramatic settings in which experimental participants were exposed to various kinds of social pressures. Over the years, these procedures and the theories that they had been designed to test have become more sophisticated, but they all seek to explore the variable impact of the surrounding social field on those persons interacting in that setting.

A series of stages can be identified through which North American social psychologists and those from other parts of the world have sought an understanding of the similarities and differences between the outcomes of their studies. Table 1.2 summarises these stages in the way that Bond (2009) has described them. Initially, US researchers initiated collaborative work with researchers from other parts of the world, attempting to replicate the results that they had obtained back home.

Table 1.2   Stages in the Development of Cross-Cultural Psychology

Stage	Aristotelian	Linnaean	Newtonian
Activity	Replicate US studies in other nations	Mapping the world in terms of psychological variables	'Unpackaging' reasons for the differences that are found
Focus	Comparing against existing US results	Major variables such as values, beliefs, self-concept and aspects of personality	Theories that have arisen from results of earlier cross-cultural studies
Methods used	US measures unchanged	Measures based on major variables, but increasingly tested for local validity	Measures based on theories of cultural difference
Coverage in this book	Chapter 1	Chapters 2 and 5	Throughout later chapters

As we shall see, these studies often yielded problematic results. As social psychology was practised more widely around the world, a second stage became apparent. Large-scale studies sampling many nations became available, as a basis for classifying the ways in which national groups might differ from one another in terms of major psychological attributes such as values, beliefs and personality. The first of these studies (Hofstede, 1980) classified nations along four dimensions, the best-known of which was individualism-collectivism. The third, 'Newtonian', stage in this process is one where social psychologists from different nations are increasingly collaborating on an equal basis, and drawing on theories and methods that are explicitly formulated to explain the cultural differences identified. We shall consider these second and third stages in later chapters.

Key Researcher Box 1.1   Solomon Asch

Solomon Asch was born in Poland in 1907, but moved to the USA when his parents migrated there in 1920. He received his PhD from Columbia University in 1932. He was an early pioneer of the use of experimental method in social psychology. In his most famous study he sought to show that individuals can stand out against pressures to conform. In the late 1940s, the intellectual community in the USA was under threat from a witch hunt led by Senator McCarthy, who targeted and pilloried those believed to have espoused communism in the 1930s. Ironically, Asch's experiment has subsequently almost always been interpreted as a study of conformity rather than of independence, even though 62% of participants did successfully resist group pressure to yield to the majority.

Replications

Replicating research studies is a crucial element in the establishment of their validity. Even within a single nation, it is not always the case that the results of a study would prove

replicable, since there are many ways in which one sample of participants in a study might differ from another. Perhaps the most widely replicated experimental study in social psychology has been Asch's (1956) conformity study. Asch showed that when a group of experimental accomplices repeatedly gave unanimously incorrect judgments as to which of several lines matched another line, naïve experimental participants rather often also gave incorrect responses.

R. Bond and Smith (1996) have reported a **meta-analysis** of 134 published Asch conformity effects. Of these effects, 97 had been obtained with US respondents, while the remainder were drawn from 16 other nations. Bond and Smith used the US data to estimate the effect of vari-ations in the types of experimental procedures that were used, the type of respondents, and the date of the study. They were then able to dis-count these sources of variance when examining the amount of influence that occurred within the studies done outside North America. As Figure 1.2 shows, the degree of group influence on conformity responses was less within Europe than it had been in the United States, but it was greater in the rest of the world than it had been in the United States.

> **Meta-Analysis** A statistical technique for sum-marising the results of a large group of related studies. Even though the studies may have used different measurement scales, each can be ana-lysed to yield an 'effect size', which is an estim-ate of the extent of change reported on whatever measure was used, minus the change found on any control or comparison group.
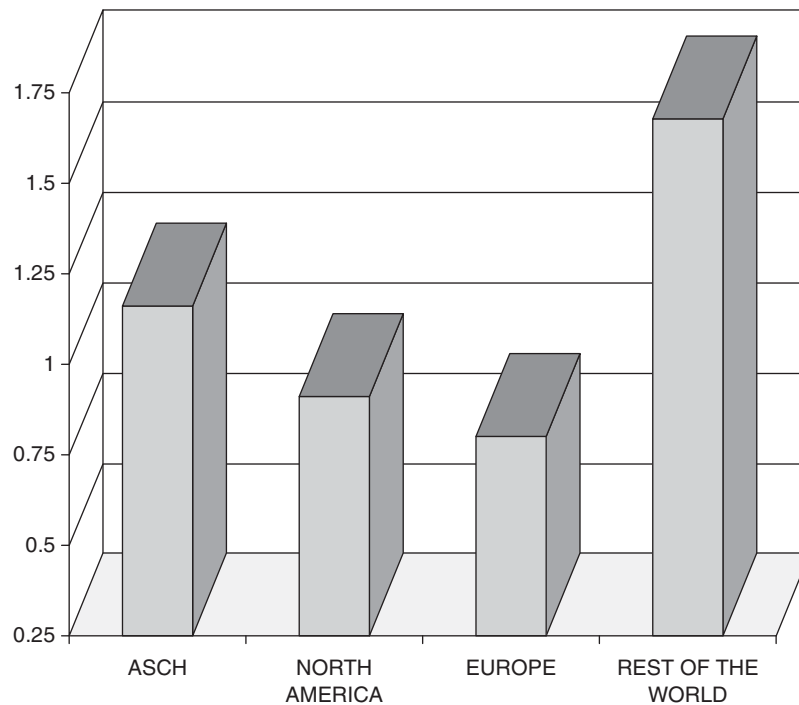

Figure 1.2   Average Effect Sizes Found in Asch Replication Studies

The results of this extensive analysis pose two questions. Firstly, it appears that a standard experimental procedure produces different results in different parts of the world, even after all variations that could be detected within a great number of US replications have been discounted. We need a theory to explain why this change in effect size might occur. Cross-cultural psychologists have studied systematic variation in behaviours, beliefs, values and attitudes around the world and have discovered some major dimensions that can help us to understand how people think, feel and act in different parts of the world. Bond and Smith tested various relevant culture-based explanations and we shall return to this study after cultural dimensions have been introduced in Chapter 2.

Secondly, it is necessary to consider what to call the specific experimental effect that Asch obtained. The results are almost always referred to as conformity. However, in differing cultural contexts, it is possible that the same behaviour may have different meanings. One possible way to investigate the meanings of a behaviour is by asking those who engage in that behaviour why they are doing it. Asch did so and obtained a variety of answers from his US respondents. Some said that they thought their eyesight must be defective; others wanted to avoid embarrassment by giving 'wrong' answers publicly. We lack similar interview data from other nations. One possibility, supported by subsequent research (Singelis, Bond, Sharkey, & Lai, 1998) is that respondents may have given incorrect answers not to save themselves from embarrassment, but to save the others from embarrassment! Confronted with a group of people who were obviously giving wrong answers, someone who valued sensitivity and a concern for others might choose to reduce other people's humiliation by tactfully also giving wrong answers (Hodges & Geyer, 2006). We need to take care to ensure that the terms we use to describe social behaviours do not contain hidden assumptions that reflect our own cultural values.

These different interpretations of behaviour become an important issue in intercultural interactions in many modern multicultural societies. Imagine yourself having to interact with a woman who is dressed in a *burqa* (the clothing worn by many women in some Islamic nations that completely covers the body) and a *niqab* (the face veil that covers the face and only reveals the eyes). You may have your personal thoughts and opinions about this person, her reasons for wearing this type of dress, and her behaviour that may appear strange to you (e.g., her not wishing to shake hands, her expectation of being accompanied by her husband on all visits). Yet your interaction partner may have very different reasons for her behaviour. The interpretation of behaviour in intercultural interactions is a major source of misunderstandings and we shall return to this issue in Chapter 11.

Other very well-known US studies have also been quite often repeated outside the USA, and as with Asch's findings also demonstrate significant variability around the world. For instance, Milgram's (1961) study of obedience to a destructive authority figure has been repeated in 12 other countries (Blass, 1999), most recently as part of a television game show in France (Beauvois, Courbet & Oberlé, 2012). Although the compliance effect was obtained in all studies, the actual levels of obedience that were found have been varied. Many other well-known US studies have been repeated in new locations, and the results have sometimes been non-significant and on occasion even in the opposite direction from those obtained in the United States. One reason

that may contribute to this is that the measures developed are assumed to be valid in other locations. Measures of this type are referred to as imposed-**etic**, because they assume universal applicability. Locally-developed measures are referred to as **emic**. The meaning and origin of these terms are discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

Amir and Sharon (1987) attempted to estimate the magnitude of the problem of non-replicability. Rather than focus on famous studies, they selected six studies that had been published in major US social psychology journals and attempted to replicate their results, using both high school and university students within Israel. They deliberately selected studies whose design and methods would be appropriate to Israeli respondents. The six original studies had yielded 37 significant effects. Amir and Sharon succeeded in replicating only 16 of these outcomes within both their Israeli samples, and nine more within just one of their samples. They also found 27 significant effects that had not been found in the original studies. Thus it appears that the replicability problem is very substantial, even when assessed in two cultural systems like those of Israel and the USA that many would regard as relatively similar.

> **Emic and Etic Studies** Emic studies are those that draw material from the immediate context being studied and make no assumption about the cultural generality of what is discovered. Etic studies are those that make a provisional assumption that the phenomena being studied are universal and attempt to establish their validity everywhere.

A particularly striking instance comes from studies of the so-called social loafing effect. These have shown that, in the USA, individuals put less effort into a task when working with others than when working alone. Karau and Williams (1993) reported a meta-analysis of 147 social loafing effects obtained within the USA and 15 obtained in Pacific Asian nations. On simple tasks, such as clapping one's hands or shouting, social loafing effects were obtained equally in Pacific Asia and the United States. On more complex tasks, the Pacific Asian studies showed a complete reversal: people worked harder when they were in groups than when they were alone.

Subsequent studies by Earley (1993) provided further insight into these results. Earley studied managers working on tasks in the USA, China and Israel. Both the Israeli and the Chinese managers worked harder when they believed that their tasks were part of a group effort, whereas the Americans worked harder when they believed that they were working alone. In addition, some of those participants who thought that they were working in a group were led to believe that the group comprised others known to them, whereas other participants were told that they were working with strangers. The enhanced social effort expended by the Israelis and Chinese was found only when working with one's own group, not with strangers. This study begins to provide clues as to the nature of the cultural differences that may explain the reversal across nations of the social loafing effect, and will be explored further after we have considered the key concept of collectivism in Chapter 2. An key pioneer in developing and popularising this concept and the research methods required to investigate it validly has been Harry Triandis, as we note in Key Researcher Box 1.2.
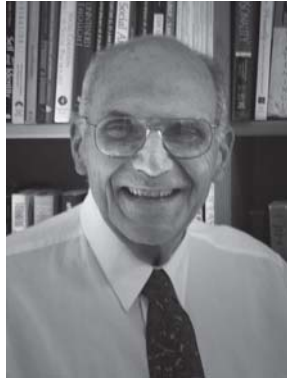
Key Researcher Box 1.2   Harry Triandis

Figure 1.3   Harry Triandis

Harry C. Triandis (b. 1926) grew up on the Greek island of Corfu. During the Second World War the local schools were closed and he taught himself by reading the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He obtained a bachelor's degree in engineering in Canada, but transferred his interest to psychology, gaining a PhD in social psychology from Cornell University in 1958. Moving to the University of Illinois, he developed a cross-cultural perspective on the use of semantic differential questionnaires to map the meaning of concepts. His early understanding that cultural differences are best thought of as differences in assigned meanings was summarised in *The Analysis of Subjective Culture* (1972). He pioneered the development of a network of cross-cultural psychologists, was one of the first presidents of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology, and was the chief editor of the *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology* (1980). More recently, his many publications did much to popularise interest in individualism and collectivism. He also pioneered the development of questionnaire measures of self-construal, as well as the use of experimental priming in studying the consequences of self-construal and methods of training in cross-cultural skills. His publications have been cited more than 40,000 times. Many leading contemporary cross-cultural psychologists were his students at the University of Illinois.

One of the requirements of experimental method is that one needs a supply of participants who will present themselves at a psychology laboratory without too much difficulty and will understand the experimental instructions. This consideration provides one reason why experimental social psychologists have often based their sampling on students. Students differ from the general population in many important psychological respects, even within a single nation. However, there are additional hazards in basing cross-cultural comparisons on student populations: these populations of students will differ greatly across different countries. In Western nations, university education is undertaken by a relatively large percentage of the age cohort. However, in many nations, participating in a university education is achieved only by a small percentage of the age cohort, and is drawn disproportionately from elite families. Comparing such inequivalent student samples may give misleading results. Using other populations that are matched on key characteristics, as was done in Earley's studies, is preferable.

   Thus far we have seen that studies conducted in different parts of the world quite often yield different results. Sometimes this is just a matter of the results of the experimental manipulation being stronger in one location than another, but in the instance of the visual illusions (see Key Research Study Box 1.1), effects found in one location were completely absent from another, and in the case of Earley's study, the effects found were actually in opposite directions. These types of results are not just a challenge to psychological theory, but also a threat to the application of psychological knowledge to practical problems. Some examples of difficulties

that have arisen when research findings were incautiously applied in new cultural contexts are shown in Everyday Life Box 1.4.

Everyday Life Box 1.4

Real world problems can arise when techniques developed and tested in WEIRD nations are applied without adequate forethought in other parts of the world:

- A multinational company produced a research-based specification of the qualifications and achievements that validly predict performance at a given level of seniority. A consultant visiting Venezuela asked how the local implementation of this system was going. He was assured that when promotions were made, 'we know who would be best for the job, so we make up the listing of necessary qualifications and submit them to head office'.
- A company decided to implement '360 degree feedback'. This is a procedure when superiors, colleagues and subordinates all provide comments to an individual on his or her work performance. When such a session was scheduled in Hong Kong, almost all those concerned called in sick on the day scheduled for the workshop.
- A company decided to introduce group participation into a garment factory in Puerto Rico. The use of groups by managers was seen by workers as indicating that management did not know how to manage. Labour turnover increased, because people felt that the company would soon be out of business.

It is useful to know that the results of experimental studies often vary in different contexts. However, if we are to make sense of why this occurs, we need conceptual frameworks that help us to understand why this variation occurs. In the next chapter, we outline the conceptual frameworks that have guided the development of cross-cultural psychology over the past several decades.

SUMMARY

Our purpose in this book is to expose the benefits than can be achieved by extending the range of persons upon whom we base our understanding of social and psychological processes. By providing an up-to-date analysis of the achievements of cross-cultural psychologists, we demonstrate how understandings that are more broadly based can modify and strengthen contemporary social psychology. We also show how these achievements can be used to address the issues raised by the current impact of enhanced global interdependence, mobility and communications.

FURTHER READING

1 Replications in other nations of early US studies are discussed in much fuller detail in Smith and Bond (1998: Chapter 2).
2 Bond, R., & Smith, P.B. (1996). Culture and conformity: A meta-analysis of studies using Asch's (1952b, 1956) line judgment task. *Psychological Bulletin, 119,* 111–137.

3   Markus, H.R., & Hamedani, M.G. (2007). Sociocultural psychology: The dynamic interde-
    pendence among self systems and social systems. In S. Kitayama & D. Cohen (Eds), *Handbook
    of cultural psychology* (pp. 3–39). New York: Guilford.
4   There is an online website that contains short articles written by many of the leading contem-
    porary cross-cultural psychologists. The website was established by Dr Walter Lonner and
    his colleagues at Western Washington University, USA. The Online Readings in Psychology
    and Culture (ORPC) are now provided as a free resource by the International Association for
    Cross-Cultural Psychology and located at Grand Valley State University, USA. Lonner was
    also the founding editor of the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, which is the premier journal
    in this field. The ORPC website can be freely accessed at http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/*orpc*.
    Take a look at the introduction to the website. Specific suggestions for relevant readings taken
    from this website are indicated after most of the chapters in this book.
5   E-books containing a selection of peer-reviewed papers given at recent congresses of the
    International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology are also available online, free of
    charge. These books can be found at http://www.iaccp.org
6   Valsiner, J. (2003). Culture and its transfer: Ways of creating general knowledge through the
    study of cultural particulars. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture.* Available at http://
    scholarworks.gvsu.edu/*orpc*
7   Van Hemert, D.A. (2003). Cross-cultural meta-analyses. *Online Readings in Psychology and
    Culture.* Available at http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/*orpc*

STUDY QUESTIONS

1   How would you describe yourself in terms of nationality and ethnicity? How important are
    these sources of identity to you, compared to thinking about yourself in alternative sources of
    identity, such as age, gender and role? How important are these aspects of your identity to the
    other people with whom you interact on a daily basis?
2   What issues arise for you when you interact with persons of a different nationality or ethnicity?
3   What contemporary problems can you identify where an understanding of culture may
    improve our capacity to improve the situation?