

LECTURE ONE - Intercultural Psychology

Key assumption – 1:

- Psychic unity: theoretical assumption
- Underlying set of shared psychic structures (mind, memory and perception)
- African children report things differently to European children
- Interpretation is made in terms of there being a real local difference

Key assumption – 2:

- Cultural equivalence: methodological assumption
- Quasi – experimental (mimics experimental method)
- Two groups treated in an equivalent manner throughout the study (e.g. instructions and timing of testing)
- Drawn from equivalent populations (gender, age, literacy)
- Only difference is cultural background, so differences are attributed to cultural background

Cross cultural replication research:

- ‘Transport and test’: original study is replicated in different cultural settings to see if the same results emerge
- Kolman et al. Journal of Managerial Psychology, 2003 Dimensions of culture developed by Hofstede in 2001 in Western Europe (e.g. power distance, individualism/ collectivism)

Tested in 4 central European countries (University students in business/ economics)

Important differences in value orientations between Western and Central Europe

Back translation:

- Method Translation of text or instructions from original to comparison group
- Translation back from comparison language to original language to see if original meaning is preserved
- Repeated use with several translators: culturally specific and unhelpful phrases can be reduced
 - Equivalence of meaning

Individualism-collectivism (IC):

- Degree to which a culture sanctions feelings of uniqueness or individualism (I), or collective belonging (C)
- Cultures that emphasise ‘I’ over ‘C’: personal autonomy
- Cultures that emphasise ‘C’ over ‘I’: togetherness with other members of the culture

Famous research Dimensions of cultural variability:

- Psychometric measures to assess average differences between groups of people at the cultural level (rather than the individual level)
- Individualism-collectivism dimension
- Power – distance dimension

- Tight-loose dimension

Power-distance (PD):

- Average levels of inequality between higher and lower status individuals within a particular culture
- Useful index of average employer-employee relations across cultures

Tight -loose (TL):

- Distinguishes between cultures whose members observe norms (tight societies) and those that tolerate a greater level of non-compliance (loose societies)

Applications:

- Study of employees in a multinational company (IBM) across 50 nations
- Widely differing IC scores
- US participants: highest I scores
- Venezuela and Columbia: highest C scores (Hofstede, 1980 cited in Stevenson, 2010)

Personality - variation across cultures:

- Central component of personality in China: Ren Qin
- Degree to which individuals participate in a series of social exchanges and reciprocal favour rituals
- Cultural context
- Little sense comparing Australian and Chinese people with standard personality inventories

Limitations of replication research:

- Rather than searching for universals, concentrate on what makes cultures different
- Viewing the differences between cultural groups as part of the findings, rather than something to be controlled
- Recognition that some concepts are culturally constructed

Philosophical origins: Early

- Greeks, Romans and Middle Ages - Minimal travel and communication - Myths, hearsay and fear - Demonising and romanticising of 'exotic' others
- Early scientific expeditions - Baudin's expedition to Australia (1800) - empirical, interdisciplinary field trip - incidental observations of customs and behaviour

Philosophical origins - C19th

- Explanations of temperament, behaviour and diversity became entangled with race (ancestries with distinct skin colour, blood groups, hair texture)
- Racial theories put differences between groups down to biological inheritance (e.g. Eysenck's accounts for observed differences between intelligence test scores and race)
- Now recognise race as a biological concept greatly exaggerated

Philosophical origins: later trends

- Psychology and anthropology separate

- Movement from European origins to international perspectives
- International associations (International Union of Psychological Science)
- Emergence of traditions to challenge global hegemony of US/European psychology
- Indigenous psychologies Possession as normal behaviour
- Being taken over by another being/ spirit

Philosophical origins – C20th

- Empirical methods of psychological experimentation combined with anthropological methods (lengthy immersion)
- Psychological anthropology • Work of Margaret Mead (1928): prolonged fieldwork in Samoa • Cultural construction of gender roles • Subsequent criticisms

Indigenous Psychology:

- Culture-based view of the nature of psychology; move away from universals
- In contrast to biomedical perspectives that presume a universally valid system for classifying mental illness based on symptoms
- Now it is widely understood that there are cross-cultural differences in the meaning of behaviours and their personal implications

Possession as normal behaviour:

- Has been attributed to a variety of psychiatric diagnoses
- However, it can depend on cultural interpretation
- In some cultures where possession is a valued and desired condition and entered voluntarily, there may be no justification for attributing a psychiatric diagnosis
- Possession may be a normative condition with positive psychodynamic functions

Some therapeutic functions:

- The person can become someone else and diversify their sense of self to achieve specific goals
- Can be a process for incorporating various “others” roles
- A form of personal development
- Expanding identity and self-expression

Some examples:

- Transcendent state in some African religions
- Involves enlightenment and harmony with nature and the universe
- The person possesses gods and goddesses and acquires their qualities

Asante, 1984