



 [In what sense can culture affect behavior? by Ken](#) by Louise S. [2012, Jul 26]

Moving through the day.....Seems to me that the interpretive move is itself an exercise of a cultural tradition, and that the attempt to locate the meaning "behind" behavior could fruitfully be considered a form of Western structuralist "mentality." Which gets us into Meng's concerns, as one could ask what is to be gained by exercising one's interpretive tradition? Surely it would not be to "get it right" about a culture (including our own). Here some very interesting questions emerge...frighted with issues of pragmatics, ethics, and politics.

And, is only the routine to be considered culture? Can't we indeed see that all we call creativity is only so within a cultural tradition. I have drawn from the distinction between action and behavior, but am perfectly willing to see this distinction itself as representing a cultural tradition (as behaviorists dont make that distinction at all).

Just what are "ideas, " anyway?

I fear I may not reply to what comes next...at least for some days..packing up the family for vacation...Ken



 [Comment by Rick Shweder](#) by Louise S. [2012, Jul 26]

A not so early morning response to Ken's late night thoughts:

There is still merit to Kant's maxim that concepts without percepts are empty and percepts without concepts are blind.

Culture and behavior are not synonymous - if they were the interpretative study of behavior would be impossible, because the interpretive move (the move to understand the "meaning" of the behavior) is to spell out the ideas about what is true, good, beautiful and efficient that are made manifest and hence revealed through behavior (which is the expressive medium for the ideas). Not all ideas are "cultural" because not all ideas have become customary, routine and made the stuff of an ongoing way of life. Not all behavior is the object matter or subject matter of interpretive analysis (a knee jerk, a pupil contraction, the behavior of our digestive system, etc). That is why "action" (behavior that lent itself to interpretive or symbolic analysis) was distinguished from "behavior" in general in the Parsonian sociological tradition.

If one really believed that behavior and culture were synonymous then one would stop trying to discover the meaning of the behavior because ideas are not behavior. And yes some form of dualism is presupposed. Just as there are two hands drawing each other in the famous Escher drawing of two hands drawing each other some distinctions can still be made even as we criticize the use of "culture" as an "independent variable."

Regards to all,

Rick (Shweder)

 [Comment by Anthony Marsella](#) by Louise S. [2012, Jul 26]

What side am I on? Both, neither,another? Help! One point of view:

Culture can be defined as shared learned behavior and meanings transmitted in life activity settings, often across generations, for the purposes of adjustment, adaptation, and survival of individuals, groups, and/or even nations. These behaviors and meanings are dynamic; they are in constant change in response to individual, social, and environmental forces. Cultures can be temporary (e.g., a culture of a meeting) and/or enduring across generations.

In all cases, every thing involves a context – an ecology of elements and forces. And all cultures are indigeous.

Culture Biological

Person

Environment Psychological

(Imagine dual direction arrows connecting all of these subcomponent). I do not know how to draw them. I do have power point slides

The next point is that Behavior is the ongoing (constant) adjustment to the interaction of person and situation – the old behavior equation of O X E from Lewin. Thus the determinants of behavior reside both within the multi-determined person and the multi-determined situation. The determinants within are constituted from immediate and historical forces.

I know I should not enter this discussion for a 1000 reasons – all of them lessons learned from years in academia. But, it was like an old war horse, who at least for a moment, heard the clarion call, and rose from time-worn legs and snorted. Then had the wisdom to know let others carry on. Incidentally, the ideas shared and and the discussion are exciting.

Tony :=)

 [Comment by Kenneth J Gergen](#) by Louise S. [2012, Jul 26]

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 [Comment by Darrin Hodgetts](#) by Louise S. [2012, Jul 27]

Interesting line of thought Ken.

I also think there is much to be gained from the stance that all psychology is indigenous. We can ask why some psychologies (read Anglo-American) are imported into other contexts or imposed at the expense of local psychologies, which are often delegitimized (symbolic colonialism stuff). The stance also centralizes issues of culture in the whole discipline so that those acting as if they are observing and acting from outside or beyond culture and the world find it more difficult to retain such a view.

Regards
Darrin

 [Comment by John Christopher](#) by Louise S. [2012, Jul 27]

I agree completely with you about this Ken. And in this particular case instead of assuming that there's also something like a "drinking behavior" that gets universally acted out with minor cultural variations, we might start instead by exploring what does it mean to consume alcohol in different cultural contexts. What is the meaning it has, and what functions does it serve? I can't imagine starting to explore these questions and not encountering different cultural presuppositions about what the self is and should be (folk psychologies). While there may be a number of commonalities in what drinking behavior accomplishes (relaxing or disinhibiting states), it's not at all clear from the outset what the person might seek to be relaxed or disinhibited from. There could be really interesting cultural differences in how alcohol is used psychologically and socially that varies quite bit from how the expressive-instrumental self or bounded, masterful self of the US uses alcohol. Anyway a few of my thoughts sitting in a Balinese cafe...

John

 [Comment by Meng-chun Chiang](#) by Louise S. [2012, Jul 27]

Hello all:

What a wonderful discussion on attempting to delimit culture!

Coming from exactly the struggle of attempting to understanding how cultural

manifestations show itself in the context of diaspora, and as a psychologically minded student,

I would like to add a few line to the discussion, first by pointing out the importance of not falling into the trap of thinking about culture as a variable (as everyone seems to agree).

From here, one must ask, how then, can we think about, or rather, imagine culture? If we are to imagine culture, how do we imagine it alongside its intertwining relationship with, perhaps, particular behavior, human psychology, and other infinite aspects of human living?

Hence the idea that all psychology can be understood as a form of indigenous psychology is a very intriguing idea (echoing the decolonizing literature).

So let me take a stab at this imagination,

perhaps an interesting way of imagining would be, how is it that a particular kind of culture manifests itself via a particular kind of drinking behavior, as such, that culture and that drinking behavior now become meaningful (re: John) and interpretable (re: Rick)?

If this is one of the questions we try to answer or attempt to understand, perhaps the study will not be limited to philosophical psychology, to behavioral research (aka, variables), to anthropology, to sociology, etc., but the study will be about, something like, building a web of understanding that one or another factors are co-constituted (and deconstructed, of course) alongside the fluid change of time, of the interpreter, and of the reader. Meanwhile, all of the above are a part of a larger web of culture (as one axis that intersects with time and space).

Writing this piece is giving me some unanticipated adrenaline for a lovely Monday morning in the summer, so I shall stop here and let the dialogue continues.

Nomaste (I bow to you all).

Meng

 [Comment by Dr. Wael MOHAMED](#) by Louise S. [2012, Jul 27]

Dear Colleagues

What a wonderful discussion

I want to turn the discussion to an important issue: Social psychology of Muslim Vs Jew

It is simply a "clashes of civilization"...I know this issue is very sensitive therefore if you agree, we can discuss it in what sense can culture affect behavior. Thus we can understand the Arab-Israel Conflict

Let me know your thoughts

Best
W



 [Comment by Dr. Louise Sundararajan](#) by Louise S. [2012, Jul 27]

Here is another bug, Mohamed. Civilization, like culture, is such an all inclusive term that it's not "simply" this or that, like hormones or behavior. In my book, civilization is even more inclusive than culture—the former is the piles of stuff accumulated in the garage, whereas the latter is a selection from that pile that the insiders find coherent and meaningful.

Regardless of my minor disagreement with your use of words, I think you raised an important question concerning the "clash of civilizations." I join you in the expectation for a lively discussion on this topic.

Louise