

WHAT IS CULTURE?

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YOUNG REVIEWERS:



ARITRO

AGE: 14



DAVID

AGE: 12

In this article, we will explain what culture is and why it is such a complex concept. Culture encompasses many aspects of human life, such as shared beliefs, values, customs, and behaviors. Cultures often vary by region or location, and they can change and evolve over time. Socialization, the process of learning to adapt one's thinking, behavior, skills, and attitudes to fit into a society, is an important way passed on between people as they develop from childhood into adulthood. Finally, we will discuss an important psychological process termed as acculturation, which describes how immigrants and others who move to new locations respond and adapt to new cultures. Studying culture is important especially in today's globalized world where our interaction is not just limited to people from our own culture. Understanding different cultures helps us admire and approve of people belonging to a different cultural system than our own thus fostering collegiality.

CULTURE

The way of life, traditions, and customs that a group of people share, including their beliefs, values, norms, and how they treat each other.

SOCIALIZATION

Is a process through which we learn certain behaviors, beliefs, and values of the society in which we live in.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Do you often notice that you have certain similarities with other kids who go to your school? Or maybe you have noticed that your family does things differently from some of your friends' families? These similarities and differences could be anything from the restaurants you go to, the type of music you enjoy, the movies you watch together... and the list goes on. Although many of these similarities and differences are due to personal choice, as individuals we are influenced by the people, society, and practices that surround us, which, taken together, are called our **culture** [1].

Culture is often based on a particular region or specific location (Mediterranean, East Asian, North European, etc.). Over the course of history, humans all over the world have created many cultures, which have shaped what people think, feel, wish, value, and how they behave. Culture is a very broad and complex concept that includes many aspects of human existence and daily life [1]. It refers to the shared beliefs, values, traditions, social norms, and behaviors of a group of people who share the same living environment in a specific region of the world.

Culture encompasses key aspects of a society, including language, education, religion, government, and the identity and personality of the people who are part of that culture. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's defines culture as "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs" [2]. Simply put, this definition of culture also emphasizes that culture is reflected in both physical elements of a group or society, such as cuisines, fashion, music, dance, literature, or architecture, and also in the non-physical elements such as customs, traditions, beliefs, and values.

Culture does not stay the same—it changes and evolves over time. New beliefs, values, customs, traditions, and practices continually replace older ones. The process of cultural change is faster for societies that are open to outside influences, such as societies that engage in cultural exchange activities with other cultures (for e.g., study abroad programs, hosting an international student), trade with many other countries, or have high levels of immigration.

A key characteristic of culture is that people are not born with it. Culture is learned starting at birth, and the learning continues throughout an individual's life. Culture is passed down from one generation to the next through **socialization**. Socialization refers to a lifelong process by which we learn the values, norms, and behaviors that are appropriate for the society we live in [3]. Socialization occurs through interactions with our family members, friends, teachers, and

role models, and also through TV, the internet, and other forms of communication. Socialization helps our culture to shape our personalities and our identities. Additionally, culture gives people a sense of belonging and fitting into the world. It shapes the way people understand the world and helps them to find stability in their lives, even if they are living in a rapidly changing world.

It is important to emphasize that culture is not the same across any one society. There are subcultures within a larger culture, each with its own distinct beliefs, values, and practices. For example, within a country, there may be unique regional cultures, ethnic cultures, and age-related cultures.

CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY VS. CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Is a branch of psychology that explores how our thinking, feeling, and actions are shaped by our culture.

Cultural psychology is a branch of psychology that studies how culture shapes and impacts human lives. The aim of cultural psychology is to determine what culture is and to identify how it affects people. As most psychological research has focused on cultures and societies that are western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic [4], a key goal of cultural psychology is to include a broad range of cultures and enable them all to contribute to the development of psychological theories that can explain *all* human behavior and experiences. Therefore, cultural psychology examines how cultural factors such as values, beliefs, and social norms shape individuals' thinking, emotions, and behaviors. A key assumption of cultural psychology is that culture shapes the way we think [5] or express our emotions (by painting, writing poems, or composing music, for example) and these things, in turn, shape the cultural environment and therefore impacting it. Put simply, we are shaped by our culture and in turn we shape the culture of our society.

CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Is a branch of psychology that studies how people with different cultural background can think, feel, and behave like each other or unlike each other.

Cross-cultural psychology is a branch of psychology that compares the behavior, thought processes, emotional processes, and experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds [6]. For instance, cross-cultural research has established that the emotions we feel, as well as how we regulate them and express them, are related to our cultural background [7]. In some cultures, for example, it may be considered appropriate to express one's emotions openly, while in other cultures it may be considered appropriate to keep emotions hidden. By studying such cultural differences, cross-cultural psychologists can gain a better understanding of differences in human behavior based on differing cultural backgrounds. This knowledge is very important so that people can understand how to behave appropriately in places with cultures different from their own. In general, cross-cultural psychology aims to identify universal psychological processes that are *shared* by people from all cultures, as well as to identify cultural variations in psychological processes.

ACCULTURATION: AN IMPORTANT TOPIC IN CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

ACCULTURATION

When a person from one culture learns about a new culture, and their actions and thoughts become more like the new culture. This often happens when people move to a different place.

Acculturation refers to the social and psychological process that immigrants and other cultural minorities face when they attempt to find balance between their own culture and the culture of their new society, by adapting to new social norms, values, customs, rules, and expectations.

A psychologist named Berry [6] came up with four ways that people might respond to a new culture. In **Figure 1**, Lena is an example of someone who grew up in one culture which is her native culture but now lives in a new place with a different culture (called the host culture). Lena's acculturation could have one of four patterns:

Figure 1

Psychologist, John Berry explained the four acculturation patterns in people (for e.g., Lena) adapting to living in different cultures: Lena grew up in one culture but now lives in a new place with a different culture termed as "host culture." Green represents her native culture, while blue represents host culture. Lena's acculturation is illustrated through four different patterns. When she mixes her green and blue culture, it's called "integration." If she wears only blue clothes, she portrays assimilation. Lena sticks to her green-only clothes in "segregation." But when she doesn't feel like she belongs to either culture and wears whatever she wants, that's "marginalization."

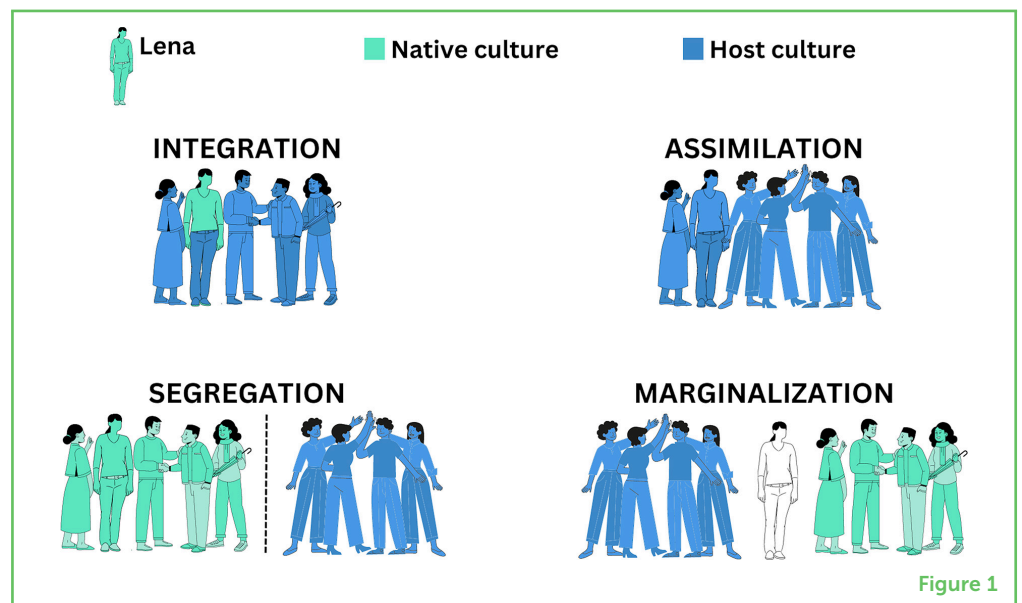


Figure 1

Integration: Lena learns new things from her host culture but keeps parts of her native culture. She has found a way to mix both cultures together. An example of integration could be when students from different backgrounds and cultures work and play together in the same classroom, participating in activities as a diverse group.

Assimilation: Lena completely adopts all norms, traditions, and behaviors of the host culture and probably interacts only with people from the host culture. A real-life example of assimilation would be a family moving to a new country, where they learn the language, customs, and traditions of their new home. However, they give up all important aspects of their own culture such as language, traditions, or food.

Segregation: Lena keeps her native culture and refuses to adapt to the host culture. She only interacts with people from her native

culture. A real-life example of segregation would be a neighborhood or community where individuals of the same ethnicity predominantly live together, resulting in limited interactions with people from other backgrounds.

Marginalization: Lena does not feel like she belongs to either culture. She does not want to be associated with either her native or the host culture. A real-life example of marginalization would be an individual who experiences rejection or exclusion due to their disabilities or religion. Imagine if someone was told they were not religious enough in their own culture, and then in the new place they moved to, people said they were too religious. This can make them feel like they don't fit in anywhere, just like Lena. It is like being stuck in the middle, not belonging to either group, and it can be tough for anyone, especially for kids.

Research on acculturation has shown that it is challenging and can cause a tremendous amount of stress and related physical and mental health issues—especially for segregated or marginalized immigrants. Cross-cultural research has also shown that the reason a person immigrates is a key determinant of how much stress they feel during acculturation. For example, refugees who are forced to leave their native culture for safety reasons experience roughly 50% more acculturative stress than do immigrants who are not in danger in their old culture but still make a choice to leave. Cross-cultural psychologists use these findings to develop ways to help immigrants and other cultural minorities navigate the acculturation process more smoothly.

Let's talk about two kinds of psychology: cultural psychology and cross-cultural psychology. Cultural psychology says that our experiences and actions are mostly shaped by our own special culture. So, when we compare how people from different cultures act, we must be careful because they might act differently because of their culture.

On the other hand, cross-cultural psychology looks for things that are the same for everyone, no matter where they're from. It tries to find out if there are feelings and actions that people all around the world have in common. But it also looks at how cultures can make these things a bit different. So, it's like exploring what makes us the same and what makes us unique because of where we come from.

GLOBALIZATION

The connection of people across the world to each other that makes us feel closer. This can happen through things like technology, trade, and culture.

WHY UNDERSTAND OTHER CULTURES?

Now that you understand culture and cross-cultural psychology, you may ask, "Why do we spend so much energy trying to understand culture?" The short and simple answer is **globalization**. Look around you. Do you find that your school, classroom, or sports team has

DISCRIMINATION

When a person is treated unfairly or differently because of their race, gender, religion, or other characteristics. This behavior is unfair and very hurtful.

PREJUDICE

When a person has unfair opinions about a group of people or judges a person based on things like stereotypes or biases. This is also not right and unfair.

people from diverse cultures? The answer is most likely yes, and this is true for many other aspects of society besides school. To thrive in a globalized world, we must understand each other's cultures.

When people from different cultures share the same living environment, workplace, school, classroom, or sports team, it is natural to see differences in customs, values, and beliefs. These cultural differences can often lead to misunderstandings and conflicts if not handled with respect, appreciation, and open-mindedness. **Discrimination** and **prejudice** [8] often stem from a lack of understanding of cultural diversity. When people respect cultural differences and value cultural diversity, they are empowered to communicate and interact with one another successfully and to build positive relationships with individuals from other cultural backgrounds. Historical examples and scientific research show that understanding and respecting each other's cultures is a key condition for a peaceful, prospering society that contains people with diverse cultural backgrounds.

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YOUNG REVIEWERS



ARITRO, AGE: 14

Hello! I am an exuberant violist and enjoy playing with the local youth orchestra. Summer gives me the opportunity to play tennis with friends and go on long kayaking trips with my family. I love traveling and was able to travel to Austria to tour and play music with my orchestra in summer.



DAVID, AGE: 12

I am 12 years old and really like to read, to learn and to write. I also enjoy to listen Hip-Hop music, to build Legos, and to watch comedy and horror movies. Currently, I do not do many sports but I would love to learn martial arts, I used to swim and wrestle. I also try to collect comic books of every genre.

AUTHORS



AKSHATA R. NAIK

Akshata went to college in Mumbai, India and moved to Michigan, United States where she got her Ph.D. degree in physiology. She currently teaches medical students at Oakland University and enjoys teaching middle and high-school kids about science during summer. Akshata loves to read, write, paint, dance, and travel with her husband and her kids.



STEPHANIE BAKER

Stephanie completed her studies at Boston College in Psychology with a particular focus in Biological Psychology. She is interested in how people can improve their wellbeing by connecting to themselves and their communities. Stephanie served as chair of her local cultural council for years whose mission was to expand access, improve education, and encourage excellence in the arts, humanities, and interpretative sciences. This sparked her love of promoting science education for kids. Stephanie currently works in data analytics at the Boston Symphony Orchestra and in her free time enjoys music, bakeries, running, and gardening.

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