



Dimensions of cultural differences: Pancultural, ETIC/EMIC, and ecological approaches

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ABSTRACT

We investigated the factorial structure of four major domains in social psychology (personality traits, social attitudes, values, and social norms) with an emphasis on cross-cultural differences. Three distinctive approaches—pancultural, multigroup, and multilevel—were applied to the data based on 22 measures that were collected from 2029 participants from 73 countries. First, in a pancultural approach, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted on the entire sample of participants, disregarding country of origin. Second, in the multigroup (etic/emic) approach, nine societal clusters were fitted using a four-factor model. Several tests of invariance were applied to assess equivalence across the cultures. Finally, a multilevel approach was used to assess the structure at the individual-level and at the between-country (ecological) level. Our results show that the four-factor solution emerges from the cultural domains, and this is supported by all three approaches. The factors are Personality/Social Attitudes, Values, Social Norms, and Conservatism. In the multilevel analysis, only two factors emerge at the ecological (between) level as opposed to four factors at the individual (within) level, but due to methodological difficulties, their status needs to be studied further. We discuss our findings in terms of the inside-out view of social interactions.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary cross-cultural research appears to be at a crossroads. While cross-cultural studies using an anthropological approach are likely to continue, much of the work in the future will benefit from recent developments within the field of social psychology. Large-scale studies employing complex survey sampling methodology will become more common. Also, for most of the cross-cultural work, the use of psychometrically sound instruments will be a requirement and more than likely will rely on Internet delivery. This trend is aided

by political globalization and the desire of many governments to compare the educational achievements of their students with that of students in other countries. As a consequence, we can now expect to see an increase in the number of studies that are based on large numbers of participants from many different countries taking multiple psychometric measures. What theoretical issues of interest to political science and cross-cultural psychology can be addressed in the presence of such a multivariate nested structure of data? And, what methodological challenges exist in the face of data structured in this way?

The introductory section of this paper is organized in two parts. First, we define culture in terms of social-psychological constructs while pointing to current substantive issues raised by political scientists and cross-cultural psychologists. We focus on personality, social attitudes, values, and social norms since these appear salient in human interactions at the level of individuals, micro-groups, and broad national and international organizations. Second, we illustrate methods that can address the issues of interest to those doing cross-cultural work by outlining different approaches for examining the structural equivalence of what is being measured across populations.

1.1. Culture as a social-psychological construct: universals vs. society specifics

For an anthropologist, “Culture is to society what memory is to individuals” (see Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). The essential aspect is

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that it includes what “has worked” and was worth transmitting to future generations. This is related to the views of those working in other disciplines. In psychology, the term “culture” refers to an accumulated set of shared beliefs, values, and social norms which impact on the behavior of a relatively large group of people (cf. Lustig & Koester, 2003). That echoes the views of a political scientist Adda B. Bozeman (1975) who referred to culture (and civilization) as “values, norms, institutions, and modes of thinking to which successive generations in a given society have attached primary importance” (Huntington, 1997, p. 41). The development of instruments to measure these constructs is often carried out within a single society. Cross-cultural work represents an extension to at least two or, increasingly, many countries. There are two lines of inquiry that motivate contemporary cross-cultural research.

From the point of view of *political science*, it is important to consider the possibility that there exists a “universal civilization” as suggested by V. S. Naipaul (1990). His writings have been interpreted to imply that there is a general cultural coming together of humanity and increasing acceptance of common values, orientations, practices, and institutions shared by peoples across the world. This view of global culture, it has been argued, supplements and supplants cultures of different societal clusters across the globe. The opposing view, expressed by Huntington (1993), is that Western concepts differ fundamentally from those prevalent in other cultures and civilizations and that crucial concepts differ across distinct cultures. Huntington (1997; p. 40–42) criticized the idea of a universal civilization as being (1) profound but irrelevant (i.e., it can be interpreted to suggest that all people have similar notions of what is right or wrong, but it cannot explain history and therefore behavior); (2) relevant but not profound (i.e., it can be interpreted to suggest that cultures and civilizations—as opposed to barbarians—are characterized by the presence of common features such as literacy and cities, but this distinction has been present throughout history); and (3) irrelevant and superficial (if it is taken to refer to values and doctrines held by many people in Western cultures and by a relatively small number of people in the rest of the world).

From the point of view of *cross-cultural psychology*, the aim is to uncover universal, species-wide constructs that are common to all human beings and those constructs that are specific to a particular society. In contrast to the political science approach, the cross-cultural psychologist's aim is not to examine the hypothesis of a single culture and the existence of many different cultures is “a given”. The distinction between universal and culture-specific terminology in cross-cultural psychology was motivated by findings from anthropological and linguistic studies. In linguistics, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states that there is a systematic relationship between the grammatical categories of the language a person speaks and how that person both understands the world and behaves in it. Given the multitude of languages in existence, this controversial hypothesis provided justification for the idea of cultural relativism. The suggestion is that psychological processes and structures vary in fundamental ways in different cultural contexts and, therefore, are beyond comparison. However, Segall, Lonner, and Berry (1998) point out that the extreme cultural relativism hypothesis is not widely accepted—both universal and culture-specific issues remain important. Cross-cultural psychologists use the term *etic* to refer to comparative, across-cultures studies and *emic* to refer to careful, internal exploration of psychological phenomena in local cultural terms (Segall et al., 1998). Recent developments in multivariate statistical methodology (e.g., multigroup factor analysis) allow for the simultaneous examination of etic and emic aspects of behavior.

It is possible to use empirical evidence to address issues of interest to both political scientists and cross-cultural psychologists. In the following sections, we briefly describe the data that will be used for this purpose and consider relevant methodological approaches.

1.1.1. Social-psychological domains of culture

Some information about the structure of the data to be reported in this paper is available in Stankov and Lee (2007) where the analyses were carried out on the aggregated data set, ignoring country-level information. The present paper goes beyond previous work in focusing on multigroup and multilevel analyses.

Stankov and Lee (2007) present findings from a battery of 43 scales covering constructs from the four domains that have been of particular interest to cross-cultural psychologists and have shown theoretically interesting cultural differences but, as it happens, have never been examined in a single study. Our focus is on four broad multidimensional domains rather than on what appears to be narrow areas. For example, even though there may be significant cross-cultural differences in anxiety, we do not include a separate measure of anxiety in this study since the Neuroticism scale from the Big Five provides a reasonable approximation. We also exclude some of the constructs (e.g., self esteem) that may have shown cross-cultural differences but have been questioned at the conceptual level (see Baummeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs, 2005).

Although there exist studies in the literature that have a larger number of participants who come from a comparable number of countries, there is no single empirical study to date that covers all four of the following domains:

1. *Personality* is a collection of emotion, thought, and behavior patterns unique to a person. In our Internet surveys employed in the present study, statements related to personality are preceded (framed) with the instruction, “Describe the way you think, feel, or act.”
2. *Social attitudes* are states of mind and feelings toward a specific object or social interaction. They are captured by statements that elicit the expression of beliefs about what is true, real, or good in social situations (cf. Saucier, in press). In our Internet surveys, statements related to social attitudes are preceded with the instruction, “To what extent do you agree...”
3. *Values* are guiding principles (standards) about some desirable end-state of existence (Rokeach, 1973; see also Schwartz, 2003). They are criteria people use to evaluate others, themselves, actions, and events. In our surveys, statements related to values are preceded with the instruction, “How important as a guiding principle...”
4. *Social norms* represent a set of beliefs or perceptions about the expected standards of behavior that are sanctioned and enforced, sometimes implicitly, by the society. In our surveys, statements related to social norms are preceded with the instruction, “In my society...”

The present study uses as a foundation work that is multivariate in nature, that has been carried out cross-culturally, and that focuses on processes crucial for the psychological definitions of culture. The study employs five instruments that satisfy these conditions. For the assessment of *Personality* we employ a version of the Big Five (Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness) measures from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP). Much of the recent cross-cultural work on personality has been carried out with the NEO-PI (see McCrae, Terracciano, & Members of the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project, 2005; Terracciano et al., 2005). For the assessment of *Social Attitudes* we employ two instruments. Toughness and Maliciousness are based on the work of Stankov and Knezevic (2005). Another four scales are based on Saucier's (2000) work. They are: Alpha (conventional religious beliefs); Beta (non-politically correct motives for behavior); Gamma (Western democracy beliefs); and Delta (personal spiritualism). *Values* are measured by the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS; see Schwartz & Bardi, 2001), which include eleven values: Power, Achievement, Hedonism, Stimulation, Self-direction, Universalism, Benevolence, Tradition, Conformity, Security, and Spirituality. Exploratory factor analysis of this scale produces two

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