

## 8. THE CULTURAL CHANGES AND THEIR IMPACT ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

**8.1 How and why culture change: Transformation of culture, or cultural change**, to the dynamic process whereby the living cultures of the world are changing and adapting to external or internal forces. This process is occurring within Western culture as well as non-Western and indigenous cultures and cultures of the world. Forces which contribute to the cultural change include: colonization, globalization, advances in communication transport and infrastructure improvements, and military expansion.

**Culture change** is a term used in public policy making that emphasises the influence of cultural capital on individual and community behavior. It places stress on the social and cultural capital determinants of decision making and the manner in which these interact with other factors like the availability of information or the financial incentives facing individuals to drive behavior.

These cultural capital influences include the role of parenting, families and close associates; organizations such as schools and workplaces; communities and neighborhoods; and wider social influences such as the media. It is argued that this cultural capital manifests into specific values, attitudes or social norms which in turn guide the behavioural *intentions* that individuals adopt in regard to particular decisions or courses of action. These behavioural intentions interact with other factors driving behaviour such as financial incentives, regulation and legislation, or levels of information, to drive actual behaviour and ultimately feed back into underlying cultural capital.

The term is used by Knott et al. of the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit in the publication: *Achieving Culture Change: A Policy Framework* (Knott et al., 2008). It shows how public policy can achieve social and cultural change through 'downstream' interventions including fiscal incentives, legislation, regulation and information provision and also 'upstream' interventions such as parenting, peer and mentoring programs, or development of social and community networks.

The key concepts include:

- *Cultural capital* - such as the attitudes, values, aspirations and sense of self-efficacy which influence behaviour. Cultural capital is itself influenced by behaviour over time
- The shifting *social zeitgeist* - whereby social norms and values that predominate within the cultural capital in society evolve in over time

- The process by which political narrative and new ideas and innovations shift the social zeitgeist over time within the constraint of the 'elastic band' of public opinion
- The process of *behavioural normalisation* - whereby behaviour and actions pass through into social and cultural norms (for example, Knott et al. argue that the UK experience of seat belt enforcement established and reinforced this as a social norm)
- The use of customer insight
- The importance of tailoring policy programs around an ecological model of human behaviour to account for how policy will interact with cultural capital and affect it over time

Knott et al. use examples from a range of policy areas to demonstrate how the culture change framework can be applied to policymaking. For example:

- To encourage educational aspiration they recommend more use of early years and parenting interventions, an improved childhood offer, and development of positive narratives on education as well as integrated advisory systems, financial assistance and targeted social marketing approaches.
- To promote healthy living and personal responsibility they recommend building healthy living into community infrastructure, building partnerships with schools and employers, more one-to-one support for wellbeing alongside use of regulation and legislation on unhealthy products, provision of robust health information and health marketing to promote adaptive forms of behaviour.
- To develop environmentally sustainable norms they recommend reinforcing sustainability throughout policy narratives, using schools and the voluntary sector to promote environmental messages, development of infrastructure that make sustainable choices easy, together with a wider package of measures on fiscal incentives, regulation, advisory services and coalition movements.

### **Theories of cultural change**

Various scholars have proposed different theories of cultural change. Thomas R. Rochon proposed a differentiation between three modes of cultural change:

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- value conversion – the replacement of existing cultural values with new ones (ex. changing views of slavery as an acceptable practice to an abhorrent one)

- value creation – the development of new ideas to apply to new situations (ex. emergence of the environmental issues or concepts such as sexual harassment)
- value connection – the development of a conceptual link between phenomena previously thought unconnected or connected in a different way.

### Technological impacts

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Technological innovations can enhance, displace or devalue human existence and culture. *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America* publishes Advances in medical technology have contributed to demographic changes, including increased longevity and decreasing fertility. For example, although China has slowed its population increases through a one-child per family policy, the median age of its people will soar in the next 35 years. *The Most Populous Nation Faces a Population Crisis*, NY Times, May 30, 2004. In some Third World countries, kidneys, eyes and skin are sold in a flourishing market for body parts. The Patenting of Life and the Global Market on Body Parts, in *The Case Against the Global Economy and for a Turn Toward the Local* There is also rising concern amongst many<sup>[quantify]</sup> indigenous people groups over the interrelated issues of genetic patenting and biopiracy. For example, a Guaymi woman was diagnosed with leukemia in 1991.

Whilst in hospital in the city of Panama she had blood samples taken and without her knowledge or free, prior, and informed consent. The cell-line enclosed in these samples was stored, "immortalized", patented, and put up for sale at a price of \$136 US dollars. The scientists involved in this process claimed to have "invented" this woman's cell-line. Their rationale for taking the samples and processing them for patenting was that these samples held "commercial promise" in the scientific world for the discovery of potential medical breakthroughs and that the government encourages the patenting of anything which may have a link to such a discovery.

The main contention in the debate apart from ethical dilemmas over genetic research is the fact that the woman from whom the samples were taken was never consulted about the process, so in effect, the whole process was done without her knowing it was going on or understanding what was happening to her. This presents an additional dilemma alongside the issue of genetic manipulation: freedom of information. There is also the implication of "why her", "why an indigenous Guaymi woman and not a Euro-American". This type of technological case-in-point presents as a more recent dilemma for indigenous groups because commonly, such failure to properly inform insofar as the impact of

either scientific research endeavours or corporate-style development schemes are concerned has historically tended to coincide with policies and paradigms of practice which have their basis in racial discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

On the more positive side, certain technological innovations such as computers, the Internet, and miscellaneous sound and visual recording media have been welcomed and embraced by indigenous peoples as a means of communicating to wider society their concerns about the dilemmas not only faced by them but by the whole world in view of the extent of socioeconomic, cultural and political transformations that have continued to evolve and impact global diversity in far-reaching and often unpredictable ways.

**8.2 Notion of change and cultural evolution:** Over time, the concept of culture has transformed into a more inclusive concept. Although biological evolution may have originally resulted in culture, research suggests that culture is not only a supplement to evolution, but can also influence it.

Ultimately, the category of "culture" is, like all classifications, an artificial distinction. The fact that all human beings have cultures must, at some level, be a consequence of human evolution. However, evolution cannot be used as a way of distinguishing between different cultures, as this is a form of, or can legitimize forms of, racism.

Since culture is dynamic and can be taught and learned, it can facilitate the adaptation of humans to different physical environments and changes in environmental conditions. In this way, culture acts as a supplement to evolution. Cultural relativism posits that cultures are to be considered as bounded wholes and have to be understood in their own terms. Cultures are not better or worse than each other, just different. Recent research suggests that culture can influence human evolution.

## TERMS

### evolution

gradual directional change, especially one leading to a more advanced or complex form; growth; development

### CULTURAL RELATIVISM

Cultural relativism is a principle that was established as axiomatic in anthropological research by Franz Boas in the first few decades of the twentieth century, and later popularized by his students. Boas first articulated the idea in

1887: "...civilization is not something absolute, but is relative, and ... our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilization goes. "

**8.3 Perspectives on dynamic processes of culture:** According to Triandis (2000), cross-cultural psychology tends to deal with static aspects of culture, while cultural and indigenous psychology approaches are more interested in culture dynamics. For a long time, the static approach dominated research and resulted in rich work on cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Triandis, 1995). However, despite the popularity of static approach, there is a growing dissatisfaction with its limitations, such as circular and insufficient explanations of many important cultural phenomena and inability to deal with cultural heterogeneity. Psychologists increasingly tend to see culture as a dynamic process rather than an "index" or an "entity."

Another important dimension on which various approaches to culture differ is whether culture is conceived as residing inside the person, e.g., linked to psychological processes, or outside the person (Triandis, 2000). Perhaps one of the most exemplary definitions of culture focusing on the individual is proposed by Earley and Randel (1997), who "advocate that culture is best thought of as psychological experience of individuals and not a collective phenomenon, group characteristic, or the like" (p.64). While this view contributes some unique insights for understanding culture elements, it is not as widely endorsed as the view of culture as a collective or contextual phenomena.

Both theory and research support an idea that the group level culture influences individual level dynamics. Empirical evidence suggests that the process of cultural learning of culture does not stop after childhood. For example, studies on acculturation demonstrate that over time, exposure to a different culture may lead to changes in beliefs, values, behaviors (see Berry & Sam, 1997, for review), and even in personality (McCrae, Yik, Trapnel, Bond & Paulhus, 1998). Specifically, Study 3 of McCrae et al. (1998) suggested that exposure to Canadian culture over time might have influenced personality profiles of individuals of Chinese origin. Moreover, people of Chinese origin who lived in Canada longer had personality profiles more similar to those of white, Canada-born Canadians than people who lived there for a shorter periods of time.

These empirical results are consistent with the model of slow, or connectionist (Lord & Harvey, 2002) learning and suggest that intra-individual psychological characteristics slowly adjust to changes in cultural environment.