



Greenfield, P. M. & Keller, H. (2004). Cultural Psychology. In C. Spielberger (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 545-553). Oxford: Elsevier, Inc.

# Cultural Psychology

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make observations in a particular cultural context. Ethnography is generally carried out by researchers who do not belong to the ethnic community under study but who spend a considerable amount of time within the ethnic community and usually speak the local language. Ethnography covers observational methods, interviews with cultural informants, and focus group discussions.

**ethnotheory** A folk or lay theory of some part of the everyday world.

**expert** An expert has acquired advanced cultural knowledge in a particular domain.

**independence** The self-construal prevailing in large-scale, urban industrialized cultural communities, such as the United States or Western Europe. It denotes a cultural deep structure of a self-contained and bounded self that is separate from and competes with social others. The deep structure becomes instantiated in locally appropriate phenotypical expressions.

**indigenous psychology** The study of local conceptions of humans, their development, and their psychology. Indigenous approaches express dissatisfaction with the ethnocentric Euro-American view of psychology, with its claims of universality. There are two conceptual approaches, one aimed at describing variability within a universal framework (the unity of mankind) and the other aimed at establishing diverse psychologies.

**interdependence** The self-construal prevailing in small-scale, rural, subsistence cultural communities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It denotes a cultural deep structure of an interrelated self that maintains harmonious and hierarchically structured relationships with social others. The deep structure becomes instantiated in locally appropriate phenotypical expressions. Historical transitions and multicultural societies may support expressions of both

## GLOSSARY

**apprenticeship** The interactive process by which cultural experts help novices acquire knowledge in a particular domain.

**coconstruction** Creation of shared meanings or shared activities through an interactive communication process.

**community of practice** A group that regularly comes together to participate in shared activities.

**cross-cultural psychology** The study of similarities and differences across cultures in human behavior, cognition, and emotion, with culture usually being an independent variable. It differentiates etic and emic approaches. Etic approaches imply the transfer of concepts and methodologies from one culture to other cultures; emic approaches imply the development of culturally sensitive concepts and methodologies that are derived from within each culture to be studied. Cross-cultural psychology was first linked to cognitive psychology and cognitive development and later to social psychology and social development.

**ethnography** An anthropological method of field research through participant observation. The researcher utilizes a participatory role as a position from which he or she can

independence and interdependence in the definition of the self.

**macrodevelopment** Directed change over a relatively long timescale, such as years.

**microdevelopment** Directed change over a relatively short timescale, such as hours or days.

**novice** A novice is at the beginning stages of acquiring cultural knowledge in a particular domain.

**parental ethnotheories** The social cognitions that humans hold with respect to the concept of a child, the concept of a parent, and the developmental process. They are organized as belief systems that pertain to different domains. Parental ethnotheories are shared among members of cultural communities. They have intuitive, nonconscious components and serve as frameworks for parental behaviors and actions.

Social interaction among beings biologically primed for culture creates culture for the group and for the individuals in it. Culture is viewed as a socially interactive process with two main component processes: the creation of shared activity (cultural practices) and the creation of shared meaning (cultural interpretation). Shared cultural knowledge and modes of cognition are the result of processes of coconstruction. The creation, acquisition, transmission, and use of culture are psychological and interactional processes. It is the study of these processes that is the paradigmatic subject of cultural psychology.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Shared activities are adapted to survival in a particular environment; they are the material side of culture. A key aspect of shared activity is that it involves goal-directed action; this point is particularly emphasized in the German tradition of cultural psychology. Shared meaning is the symbolic side of culture. A key aspect of shared meaning is interpretation, the notion that culture provides a lens through which we see and interpret (evaluate) the world. Empirical study in cultural psychology focuses on these two components of cultural process—shared meaning and shared activity.

Both components are cumulative in nature because culture is created by processes that occur between, as well as within, generations. Meanings and activities not only accumulate but also transform over time. This cumulative and temporal characteristic of culture creates the necessity for historical methods of studying culture as psychological process. It also creates the

necessity for developmental methods for studying the transmission and transformation of culture from the older to the younger generation. Equally important (albeit understudied) are developmental transitions from being a novice socialized by experts to being an expert socializing novices. Cultural psychology does not conceptualize the adult as a static entity with set cultural characteristics but rather attempts to study the diachronic processes of socialization and development that constitute cultural learning and apprenticeship.

As a species, humans are biologically primed to create, acquire, and transmit culture; culture is the primary mode of human adaptation. Because of the centrality of adaptation as a concept, cultural psychology aims to study meanings and activities in context rather than in the more decontextualized setting of the laboratory experiment. Cultural psychology is an interdisciplinary specialty that integrates psychology and anthropology.

## 2. THE CONCEPTION OF CULTURE IN CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Cultural psychology can be understood by contrast with two other approaches to the relationship between psychology and culture—cross-cultural psychology and indigenous psychology. Although all three are fuzzy concepts with partially overlapping exemplars, the paradigmatic instances of the three approaches are quite distinctive; these paradigms are central to the descriptions that follow.

### 2.1. Cultural Psychology Compared with Cross-Cultural Psychology

The goal of cross-cultural psychology is to separate the universal from the culture specific in human behavior. Cross-cultural psychology has a universalistic bias: Culture can be decomposed, its different layers can be peeled off, until the existential and universal human nature remains. In cross-cultural psychology, culture is generally operationalized as an antecedent or independent variable to behavior. Often, the independent variable is the label of a particular national group (e.g., a comparison of Chinese and U.S. participants). Occasionally, as in Harry Triandis's 1980 definition, culture is also conceived as a dependent variable, with

behavior or experience as the independent variables. Whether an independent or a dependent variable, culture is implicitly viewed as being outside of and apart from the individual.

In cultural psychology (original terminology from Price-Williams), culture is, in contrast, seen as inside the individual. Culture is "a way of knowing, of construing the world and others" (Bruner, 1993, p. 516). Through processes of interaction and communication, these construals acquire a certain degree of intersubjectivity or shared meaning. Shared knowledge and shared meanings generate a set of everyday practices that also define culture in terms of shared activities. Thus, as Jahoda points out, culture and behavior, culture and mind are viewed as indistinguishable.

Accordingly, cultural psychology derives its problems and procedures from an analysis of the nature of culture, with an important focus on everyday life. Whereas the methodological ideal of the cross-cultural psychologist is to carry a procedure established in one culture, with known psychometric properties, to one or more other cultures, to make a cross-cultural comparison, the methodological ideal of the cultural psychologist is for problems and procedures to flow from the nature of culture, both in general and in specific. For example, in their 1981 book, Scribner and Cole focused on literacy as an important cultural element, a way of interpreting and representing the world (the nature of culture in general). They proceeded to find out what each of three different literacies meant to the Vai people of Liberia (the nature of culture in specific) and to study the cognitive consequences of these literacy practices.

The cultural psychology of Scribner and Cole traces its intellectual roots to the work of Russian psychologists Vygotsky and Luria. In the early 1930s, soon after the Russian revolution, Vygotsky and Luria studied the logical processes of collectivized and noncollectivized central Asian peasants. Their stimuli were two kinds of syllogism: "The contents of some were taken from the concrete, practical experience of the villagers; the contents of others bore no relation to familiar, practical life" (Cole & Scribner, 1974, p. 161). The point of their study was the cognitive difference in the way the two groups of peasants handled the two kinds of syllogism. Again, syllogisms are an aspect of human logic (culture in general), whereas the everyday life of the peasants (culture in specific) was a key source of problems to solve. These examples from Scribner and Cole and Vygotsky and Luria not only illustrate the methods of cultural

psychology but also illustrate the importance of cognition in the origins of cultural psychology.

Thus, cultural psychologists study cultural processes directly—for example, literacy or syllogisms as cultural forms and products. In comparison with cross-cultural psychologists, their research designs rely much less on what the anthropologist Beatrice Whiting called "packaged" variables. A packaged variable is an index of culture as an antecedent or independent variable. An example of a packaged variable is the labels "Japanese" or "German." In principle, each of these labels "packages" a whole suite of shared cultural characteristics and processes. When cultural psychologists make comparisons, they do not use packaged variables. Instead, they use much narrower groupings, such as collectivized vs uncollectivized peasants in Luria and Vygotsky's work.

Some research falls on the border between cultural and cross-cultural psychology. In the 1960s, for example, Greenfield brought Piagetian cognitive tasks to the Wolof of Senegal, an approach belonging to cross-cultural psychology. However, she did not compare Senegalese to North Americans, which would have been a cross-cultural approach. Instead, she looked at developmental trajectories within each culture, as well as compared children from different ecologies within the Wolof world: urban vs rural and schooled vs unschooled. She also examined the Whorfian hypothesis by doing a semantic analysis of various domains in Wolof and French. This was another way in which research procedures flowed from the nature of the culture—in this case, the linguistic aspects of culture.

The cultural psychological perspective implies that research is conceptualized as a communication process. Communication with the people of the study community in their own language is a prerequisite for cultural analyses of shared activities and shared meanings. The anthropological notion of ethnography as a methodological concept is a necessary first step in order to bring the importance of lived experience in a cultural place from ground to figure. In order to study cultural processes from the participants' own points of view, cultural psychology has, as Greenfield pointed out in 1997, developed its own tool kit of methods. Some, like ethnography and discourse analysis, have been adapted from anthropology. With other methods, such as the use of video, cultural psychology has followed the leadership of developmental psychology as a discipline. (Later, exemplars of different research programs are introduced, noting different cultural methodologies for different research problems.)

## 2.2. Cultural Psychology Compared with Indigenous Psychology

Although indigenous psychology and cultural psychology clearly have independent origins, they share the notion that the prime subject of study is the subject's creation of meaning systems, particularly systems that are shared or normative within a defined cultural group. In different ways, both traditions have recognized that psychological theories are important aspects of shared cultural meaning. Millers, writing from the vantage point of a cultural psychologist, has, on a theoretical level, asserted the cultural grounding of all psychological theory. This cultural grounding of theory has been a strong motive, if not an explicit metatheoretical statement, for indigenous psychology.

The unique contribution of indigenous psychology is the notion that psychological concepts and psychological theory, not just data-collection techniques, should be developed within each culture. Unlike indigenous psychology, the empirical research tradition of cultural psychology has not been based on formal psychological theories with culture-specific origins. Nevertheless, cultural psychology has increasingly in recent years made ethnotheories (i.e., folk theories) of psychological functioning and development a subject for empirical investigation—for example, in the collaborations of Shweder and Bourne and Harkness and Super.

Indigenous psychology, however, aims to go one step further: The goal of indigenous psychology is to take informal folk theories of psychological functioning and formalize them into psychological theories. Cultural psychology arrived at the empirical study of folk theories, including folk theories of psychological development. Indigenous psychology has, in turn, moved ethnopsychology from an object of empirical study to a source of formal psychological models. In other words, indigenous psychologists have taken steps to translate ethnotheories of psychology into formal theories of psychology and, from these theories, to conduct empirical psychological studies. This goal is incredibly important for psychology as a whole, on both a metatheoretical and a metamethodological level.

However, cultural and indigenous psychology also differ in some respects. Unlike indigenous psychology, which, as Sinha points out, was born as an attempt to decolonize the mind—in fact, many of its pioneers and proponents inhabit former British colonies—cultural psychology still constitutes a “crossing over” into someone else's culture by the investigator. Also, unlike indigenous psychology, its connection to

cross-cultural psychology has tended to be erratic and ambivalent.

On the other hand, because of its own origins with an emerging scientific elite in developing nations, indigenous psychology, especially in East Asia, tends, on the whole, to privilege elite populations (university students) as subjects of study and culture change as a research topic. Cultural psychology, in contrast, tends to give a great deal of attention to relatively stable subsistence village cultures; for example, well-known studies have been done on subsistence groups in Liberia, Morocco, Guatemala, India, and Mexico.

## 2.3. Comparing Indigenous, Cross-Cultural Psychology, and Cultural Psychology

Although indigenous psychology shares the spirit of cultural psychology, its methods (in practice, although not in principle) tend to resemble those of cross-cultural psychology. That is, indigenous psychology most often utilizes standard psychological methodology such as questionnaire formats and tends to study variables rather than processes. For example, Yang and Bond used rating scales and adjective lists in their 1990 study of indigenous Chinese personality constructs.

There are some notable exceptions. For example, Enriquez, the founder of indigenous psychology in the Philippines, has utilized an indigenous (and group-oriented) method of social interaction as a means for data collection. However, by and large, indigenous psychology, unlike cultural psychology, has not experienced the influence of method and theory from anthropology and developmental psychology.

Why has cultural psychology developed in the way that it has? To answer this question, we turn to a study of its sociopolitical roots.

## 3. SOCIOPOLITICAL ROOTS OF CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Cultural psychology has a long tradition and a rather young history in psychology. In the context of defining the place of psychology in the systematics of sciences, in 1920 Erich Stern presented a view that could not be more modern. For him, psychology is inevitably a cultural science since any attempt to understand any psychological phenomena needs to take into account the social cultural environment, ontogenetic history,

and ancestral heritage. Culture represents the legacy of preceding generations as expressed in the dispositions, the consciousness, and the psychology of each living individual whose plasticity allows change in order to adapt to changing surroundings. His thoughtful and comprehensive treatise also disqualified experiments as a tool to understand psychological processes.

The modern conception of cultural psychology developed without connection to such ancestors. It grew out of liberal policy in a world increasingly dominated by the Cold War after World War II. The notion was to help the Third World develop in order to make sure that, on the political level, Third World countries did not fall to Communism. Thus, John Gay and Michael Cole, funded by the Ford Foundation, began their cultural psychological research in Liberia as part of the African Education Program of Educational Services, Inc. of Watertown, Massachusetts. Daniel Wagner originally went to Morocco with the U.S. Peace Corps. Patricia Greenfield's dissertation research in Senegal in 1963 was funded by a grant (awarded to Jerome Bruner at Harvard University) from the U.S.-based Ford Foundation to develop the Institute of Pedagogical Studies at the University of Dakar in Senegal.

Initially independent from this U.S. branch of cultural psychology, a German school of cultural psychology emerged in Saarbruecken. It was founded by Ernest Boesch and further developed by Lutz Eckensberger. These scholars also went to so-called Third World cultures on the basis of politically motivated developmental aid programs. Ernest Boesch went to Thailand using grants from the UNESCO in order to set up an institute; Lutz Eckensberger went to Afghanistan using grants from the former German Ministry of Developmental Aid in order to train teachers in vocational schools. The initial contact with other and very different cultures thus became a major factor in conceptualizing cultural psychologies.

On the institutional level, the Department of Social Relations at Harvard, with its integration of psychological, sociological, and anthropological methods and theories, provided the educational foundation of modern cultural psychology and was particularly crucial in the merger of psychology and anthropology. The actual term cultural psychology seems to date from 1969, when two anthropologists, DeVos and Hippler, wrote an article titled “Cultural Psychology: Comparative Studies of Human Behavior” for the second edition of Lindzey and Aronson's *Handbook of Social Psychology*. A second use of the term cultural psychology emerged in 1980 when Douglass Price-Williams, a psychologist

serving as a member of an anthropology department, wrote an article titled “Toward the Idea of Cultural Psychology: A Superordinate Theme for Study.” Hence, cultural psychology has from the beginning represented the meeting of psychology and anthropology.

On the intellectual level, cultural psychology has grown out of dissatisfaction with the universalism and decontextualized methodology of psychology in general and cross-cultural psychology in particular. On the other hand, it has also grown out of anthropology's wish to deal with the person, not merely the culture as a supra-individual envelope. These motivations, from Cole, Shweder, and Bourne in the United States, contrast with that of German cultural psychology. The latter has, in reaction to the Nazi Terror, been driven by a strong desire for a humanistic psychology or even a more human world. These qualities seemed lacking in behavioristic approaches that became mainstream during that time.

## 4. EXEMPLARS OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

### 4.1. Parental Ethnotheories: An Example of Shared Meaning

The analysis of parental ethnotheories about development has become a vital area of research. Parental ethnotheories are shared beliefs about the goals of child development and the socialization practices that will achieve these goals. According to Harkness and Super, they specify how to become a competent adult in a particular environment. Parents throughout the world hold specific beliefs about proper care and handling of small children. These parental ethnotheories express conceptions of the nature of children, parenting, and development. In this way, ideas about child care practices are related to developmental goals, as defined by the cultural environment. Parental ethnotheories thus link socialization practices to cultural values. They also link the socialization agendas of one generation to the next. Parental ethnotheories generate child-rearing practices that, in turn, create the cultural adult. This cultural adult, in turn, participates in the socialization processes of the next generation.

Although interindividual differences are prevalent with respect to parenting goals and practices in every culture, members of cultural communities can be viewed as groups of individuals who coconstruct a shared reality in different domains of life. According

to Markus and Kitayama, two basic contrasting realities are the value systems that define independent and interdependent construals of the self. These, in turn, as Greenfield and Cocking have shown, generate corresponding developmental goals. These goals are actualized through different socialization practices and parenting styles during different stages of development. Parental ethnotheories can thus be conceived of as the mediating links between these cultural metamodels and behavioral contexts and practices.

Keller and collaborators analyzed parental ethnotheories in cultural communities found to differ in their orientations toward independent and interdependent construals of the selves: West African Nso farmers (interdependent orientation) and middle-class northern Germans (independent orientation). Parental ethnotheories were assessed as reactions to videotaped prototypical interactional situations from these different cultural communities. (This procedure has also proved revealing of cultural patterns in research on teacher and classroom evaluation.) Particularly because these reactions were assessed in a group setting, in which consensus was generally negotiated, it can be assumed that the respondents use their shared cultural framework with all the cultural standard operating procedures and unstated cultural assumptions. Because of the use of actual interactions as stimuli, this procedure further allows one to address the issue of the belief-behavior dissonance. Comments concerning deviations from normative practices reveal the valued practices and beliefs.

These analyses revealed results that are in line with the expectations of different cultural orientations with respect to independence and interdependence. The Nso women comment on parental behaviors that can be related to interdependent developmental goals such as primary care and body contact and subscribe to a physical stimulation model of infancy, in which their special technique of motor stimulation is supposed to foster growth and development. The German women, through their cultural lenses, value face-to-face communication, exclusive attention toward the baby, object play, and language. They subscribe to a communication model of infancy, in which communication occurs between two bodies that are physically separate and the flow of the interactional exchange is supposed to be shared by (quasi) equal partners, thus supporting independent socialization goals.

The evaluations of the German and the Nso women are independent of the origin of the videotapes. That is, the Nso cultural lens interprets physical stimulation practices positively when participants see them on

videos from either culture. In contrast, the Nso cultural lens provides a negative evaluation when these stimulation practices are missing in the videos of either culture. Similarly, German mothers positively evaluate instances of the communication model and negatively criticize their absence on both the Nso and German tapes. However, physical stimulation behaviors are more prevalent in the Nso videos, whereas communication behaviors are more prevalent in the German videos. Thus, the cultural values manifest in the ethnotheories are reflected in socialization practices favored by each cultural group.

Ethnotheories link to socialization practices, which then link to children's behavioral development (e.g., the timing of mastering developmental tasks). Having experienced distinct and frequent body stimulation, the Nso babies develop the gross motor milestones of sitting, standing, and walking significantly earlier than the German babies. On the other hand, the experience of a rich language environment, face-to-face interactions with nonverbal and verbal contingencies, and object play instigate an earlier onset of language in German babies compared to Nso babies. The fact that the Nso community does not value the early onset of language as much as the German cultural community is expressed in a statement of a Nso woman, commenting on the language use of a German mother interacting with her baby: "For them, every child needs to be intelligent." The cultural timing of developmental milestones organizes subsequent developmental pathways in coherent and systematic ways so as to achieve the developmental goals valued in each cultural environment. The mothers who engage in these child-rearing practices were themselves the object of the corresponding socialization practices when they were children. It is believed that childhood socialization is perhaps the most conservative or persistent part of any culture. On the other hand, with changing sociocultural and especially socioeconomic environments, cultural practices also change. However, research shows that practices change long before attitudes and beliefs.

#### 4.2. Apprenticeship: The Historical Transformation of Shared Practice

As Barbara Rogoff and Jean Lave note, apprenticeship is the participatory structure by which more expert members of a culture induct less expert members into the normative activities and practices of a culture. Corresponding to the two basic types of ethnotheory,

one idealizing the independent individual and one idealizing the interdependent individual, are two basic styles of apprenticeship. The independent style of apprenticeship utilizes more trial-and-error strategies, learner initiative, and division of labor. The interdependent style utilizes more teacher guidance, observational learning, and interdependent problem solving. The former is well adapted to a traditional agrarian setting in which information and resources flow from the older to the younger generation with relatively little change. The latter is well adapted to a commercial economy in which innovation and novelty are valued and the younger generation is more independent of the older.

However, the styles of apprenticeship are not constant; they are socially constructed in response to environmental conditions. Therefore, changes in economic conditions should induce a shift in mode of cultural transmission. This notion was tested by Greenfield, Maynard, and Childs in a video study of weaving apprenticeship in a Maya community at two points in time; the two waves of data collection were separated by two decades. At the second point of data collection, the weaving learners from the first wave had grown up and become mothers whose daughters were now learning to weave.

In both cohorts, researchers microanalyzed weaving videos to understand the interaction between learner and teacher as apprenticeship progressed. The first generation of weaving teachers, mainly mothers, utilized the interdependent style of apprenticeship as their daughters learned to weave. Two decades later, after a period in which the economy moved away from subsistence and toward commerce, the mode of apprenticeship had indeed shifted. Microanalysis of the videos revealed the appearance of a new, more independent style of apprenticeship. Weaving learners were displaying more initiative in the apprenticeship process, peer teachers (compared with teachers from the older generation) had become more prevalent, and there was less cooperative weaving between learner and teacher. This shift was concentrated, moreover, in just those girls who, with their mothers, were most involved in textile commerce.

This historical transition in the apprenticeship process was reflected in changes in resulting weaving practices. What girls and women wove had also changed. The concept of community creativity, in which a few fairly uniform designs identified members of a cultural community, was joined by a concept of individual creativity. Design innovation and individuation were now apparent throughout the woven textiles. Shared practices had changed in the direction of a new cultural model.

The dimension of shift was that dimension most basic in the cultural differentiation of ethnotheories of development discussed previously. This parallel suggests a close conceptual relationship between the analysis of cultural meanings and the analysis of cultural practices.

#### 4.3. Connecting Shared Practice to Shared Meaning

Although development and the analysis of developmental processes are an integral part of cultural psychology, not all research programs address ontogenetic, intergenerational, or historic development directly. Adult cultural experience is also a focus of cultural psychology. An important theoretical issue is the extent to which shared practice results in shared cultural meaning. In the German tradition of cultural psychology, Lutz Eckensberger and colleagues used different microcommunities of practice to explore this issue with adults. The researchers interviewed different samples of people who had different views on a coal plant that was supposed to be built. The groups included people living in the area, experts on coal plants, environmental activists, and politicians. Each group could be considered to share activities and practices in relation to coal plants in general and this plant in particular.

The investigators used interviews to assess the moral meanings constructed by the different groups concerning the coal plant. Their interest was in the structure (e.g., complexity) of the reasoning rather than in its content. Findings revealed that each group had a typical pattern of moral reasoning about the coal plant. Thus, there was a link between activities common to each group in relationship to the plant and level of moral reasoning. The pattern of results indicates a connection between shared activities and the construction of shared structures of moral meaning.

### 5. APPLICATION OF CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

As these examples show, cultural psychology can be applied to analyzing the everyday realities of members of different cultures and subcultures. However, there is another level of application that is also possible: applying findings to social interventions. We present one example. An implication of the modern-day multicultural reality in countries such as the United States or Germany is seen at

school. Multicultural immigration opens up the possibility of different cultural values among students, between students and teachers, and between home and school. An applied project, "Bridging Cultures," began with basic research by Greenfield, Quiroz, and Raeff documenting cross-cultural value conflict between Latino immigrant families and schools. Immigrant parents were generally much more collectivistic in their orientation to child socialization than were their children's teachers. In collaboration with a group of teachers, Greenfield, Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, and Quiroz utilized this research to help teachers and schools understand home culture and school culture in order to create educational "bridges" between them. The result of this intervention was greater home-school harmony in educational practices and classroom management. Shared practices and meanings were created between home and school.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS: AN EXAMPLE OF CULTURAL PROCESS

Both shared activities and shared meanings are intrinsic to the human mode of adaptation for survival. They are two facets of shared cultural knowledge and the primary subject matter of cultural psychology. An example will elucidate how shared activities and shared meanings are coconstructed in communities of practice; such coconstruction is the paradigmatic cultural process. The example illustrates that both material culture and symbolic culture result from processes of cultural coconstruction.

Following the Los Angeles earthquake of 1994, many of the material supports of everyday life, such as water, electricity, and roads, were destroyed. In small groups and through the media, people developed new shared knowledge concerning survival activities, such as where to get water, how to circumvent damaged roads to get from point A to point B, and methods for detecting leaking gas. Expertise was shared with novices, such as when a contractor showed his neighbors how to turn off their gas or a ham radio operator provided news of the location and magnitude of the earthquake in the absence of electricity. The nature of culture as a tool for organizing everyday life, a notion developed by anthropologist Thomas Weisner, was quite apparent.

Symbolic communication, through both language and visual media, is a critical means by which social sharing takes place; communication processes were quite intense during this period of adapting to the physical conditions created by the earthquake. As a result, new

shared activities that enhanced physical survival were created through cultural processes of social interaction.

Simultaneously, shared meanings were also created to rationalize and understand the events that had taken place. Like shared activities, shared meanings arose through communication processes. One shared meaning that developed was the custom of asking people how they fared in the earthquake; the normative reply was, "I was fortunate." The search to create shared meaning for a stunning physical event was particularly apparent when, a few days after the earthquake, a local public affairs radio show host convened clergy from many religions to ask them about the larger meaning of the earthquake. His question was, "Did God send the earthquake to punish Los Angeles?" Clearly, adaptation to the aftermath of the earthquake could not be reduced to a process of adapting to physical conditions; the interpretation of these conditions—that is, processes of creating meaning—were part and parcel for the shared culture that developed in response to the earthquake.

This example provides a model of processes that are assumed to occur whenever a new member of society is born: the creation of shared knowledge, activities, conventions, and meanings through communication and social interaction. This microdevelopmental example of culture re-creation by adults occurs in each generation in the macrodevelopmental processes of children. The example is also a model and metaphor of culture change provoked by new ecological conditions. Finally, this example illustrates the potential for cultural variability as a response to different ecological conditions. This is the stuff of cultural psychology.

### See Also the Following Articles

Child Development and Culture ■ Community Psychology ■ Conformity across Cultures ■ Cross-Cultural Psychology, Overview ■ Cultural Complexity ■ Diverse Cultures, Dealing with Children and Families from ■ Family and Culture ■ Indigenous Psychologies ■ Intergroup Relations and Culture ■ Motivation and Culture ■ Perception and Culture ■ System Safety ■ Values and Culture

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