Bridging Cultural and Developmental Approaches to Psychology

New Syntheses in Theory, Research, and Policy

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Introduction

Changing Our Scholarship for a Changing World

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Today the world's population is close to 7 billion. At about 300 million, the population of the United States is less than 5% of the total. Looking at developmental science, however, one might think that a very large proportion of the world's population was American. It is not only that a large proportion of developmental research includes American participants and is published by American scholars (e.g., Arnett, 2008). It is also that the research questions often are posed in light of the American context with little attention to what it is like to live in other cultures. There is a need to seriously broaden this theoretical and research approach to address the life-courses of diverse peoples. And this need will only continue to grow. By 2050, the prediction is that the global population will be 9 billion, with nearly all of the growth occurring in developing countries.

Not only is the global population growing but there is also an unprecedented flow across cultures of people, ideas, and goods. With increasing migrations, worldwide media, and international trade, diverse peoples interact with one another more than ever. With these interactions come changes to cultures and the psychological development of their members (Jensen, in press; Jensen, Arnett, & McKenzie, in press).

A few snapshots are illustrative. In Chile, urban teenagers congregate en masse at parties, where they flout the traditional sexual mores of what once was one of the most conservative countries in Latin America. At the parties, promoted through Fotologs and MSN Messenger, adolescents meet up with

fleeting partners to dance and make out with abandon (Barrionuevo, 2008). In China, "factory girls" in their late teens to mid-twenties stream from rural villages to cities to work. In the process, their lives are changed in myriad ways as some attend English classes, some become escorts to wealthy business men, and many increasingly emphasize self-reliance while also sending hard-earned money back home (Chang, 2008). In Holland, ethnic Dutch college students have started camel farms to sell camel's milk to Moroccan and Somali immigrants, a career path greeted with puzzlement by their college professors and prohibitions by the Dutch agricultural authorities and the European Union (Heingartner, 2009).

In a world of changing demographics and increasingly interconnected cultures, scholarship and policy approaches also need to change. The aim of this book is to take up this challenge and opportunity by bridging cultural and developmental approaches to human psychology. The book brings together a group of experts from diverse disciplines and diverse parts of the world, who have taken on the task of integrating findings on human development with cultural findings. The experts present new theoretical and research syntheses for their areas of scholarship, and they discuss implications for public policy.

Bridging Cultural and Developmental Approaches to Psychology

During the last couple of decades, a number of scholars have created a distinct area of "cultural psychology" (e.g., Cole, 1996; Miller, 1999; Rogoff, 2003; Shore, 1996; Shweder, 2003; Valsiner, 2000). This includes scholars from fields such as anthropology, communication, education, linguistics, psychology, social work, and neuroscience. Many of their efforts have gone into defining a discipline' and distinguishing it from others, such as cross-cultural psychology, which at least according to some cultural psychologists for a considerable time had focused primarily on how people's thoughts and behaviors are fundamentally the same across cultures (Stigler, Shweder, & Herdt, 1990). By now a sufficiently broad and deep corpus of cultural psychology research exists that a cultural psychology handbook has been published (Kitayama & Cohen, 2007).

Looking at developmental science, there is clear interest in cultural issues. For example, the latest Handbook of Child Psychology (Damon & Lerner, 2006) includes a chapter on cultural psychology, and a number of the other chapters address cultural issues or state that future research must address cultural diversity. This interest in culture is also evident in developmental conferences, developmental job postings, and new and upcoming developmental textbooks. Although culture will not become the single-most important construct of research in developmental science (as it is in cultural psychology), addressing how culture intersects with development is the next frontier (Jensen & Larson, 2005).

Three Questions

To bridge developmental and cultural approaches and arrive at new syntheses, the present authors address three specific sets of questions for their areas of expertise:

1. On the one hand, developmental approaches to psychology typically provide one-size-fits-all theories. One-size-fits-all does not really work well for simple things, like bathrobes. Nor does it seem to work any better for something as complex as human development. On the other hand, cultural psychology provides detailed conceptions of diverse cultural groups. This potentially suggests a need for a-theory-for-every-culture, raising the specter of theoretical pandemonium. Bridging the two approaches, what are new syntheses that offer a more appealing alternative to one-size-fits-all and one-for-every-culture?

2. One attempt to reconcile developmental and cultural approaches to psychology has been the suggestion that the former addresses the "structure" of human thought and behavior, whereas the latter addresses "content." Structure pertains to things that purportedly are psychologically deep, such as fear of punishment or attachment between children and caregivers. Content constitutes much more specific aspects of thought and behavior, the kinds of things on which structure operates, such as whether or not one is fearful of deceased ancestors and whether or not children attach to one or more caregivers. To what extent does the distinction between structure and content adequately capture the insights from both developmental and cultural approaches to psychology? To what extent do findings suggest that developmental structures, such as how to segment the life-course, how to conceptualize identity, and how to represent the self and the world vary across cultures? If the structure–content distinction is inadequate, what are plausible alternatives?

3. Turning to policy, some have claimed that developmental approaches to psychology can lead to a kind of colonialism (*see* Chapter 11). The argument is that theories purported to be universal and their policy implications are exported to other cultures, although these theories are typically based in work with American middle-class research participants. Others have claimed that cultural psychology can lead to a kind of rosy romanticism or all-out relativism where diverse cultural practices are regarded exclusively in a positive light and potential clashes between cultures and their practices are ignored. Does bridging developmental and cultural approaches to psychology offer new and helpful alternatives to these old but persistent issues of universalism and relativism?

Topics and Organization

In this book, the three sets of questions are addressed in a total of 13 chapters. The chapters are divided into four sections. Part I addresses "Psychological Processes and Culture," with chapters on moral reasoning and development (Jensen), children's learning beliefs (Li), and memory development (Leichtman).

Part II on "Developmental Contexts and Culture" focuses on family (Goodnow), peers (Chen), civic organizations (Flanagan, Martínez, and Cumsille), and adult communities (Schlegel). In Part III on "Developmental Selves and Culture," the authors attend to identity development (Phinney and Baldelomar), acceptance of self and the world (Rothbaum and Wang), and individual purposes (Valsiner). The last section, Part IV, on "Developmental Phases and Culture," addresses how the life-course is divided or partitioned in diverse cultures with a focus on childhood and adolescence (Nsamenang), emerging adulthood (Arnett), and phases across the lifespan (Saraswathi, Mistry, and Dutta).

It is important to note that the order of sections and of chapters within sections does not imply that some topics or areas are developmentally "prior" or "deeper," as compared to others. In fact, as noted above, this book and its authors revisit the question of what is psychologically deep and *a priori*, as well as the very meaning of notions of the psychologically deep and *a priori*. For example, as Jacqueline Goodnow discusses in her chapter on family, developmental approaches often place the family at the inner contextual core of a child's development. Yet, in many respects, other contexts such as legal systems and cultural norms are no less basic or primary. Among other things, laws and norms define who are considered to be family members, the domain of family influence, and what are taken to be moral and "natural" goals of family life. Thus Goodnow puts forth a new theoretical alternative to nested models of concentric circles with family at the developmental core. Goodnow's chapter is the first of four in the section on developmental contexts. As should now be evident, however, this does not signify that family comes first or is psychologically deeper than other contexts. Rather the chapter challenges the conventional wisdom from the start. Similarly, each of the chapters in the first section of the book on "developmental processes" reconsiders common differentiations between structure and content in regards to reasoning, learning, and memory.

It is also important to point out that this book aims to revisit common developmental science conventions of how the life-course is structured and segmented. Developmental science courses, textbooks, journals, professional organizations, and so forth frequently divide "childhood" from "adolescence," which in turn seems to be followed by a lengthy lump of "adulthood." Here, reconsideration of this structure takes place on a number of levels. First, the present book brings together scholars who specialize in diverse phases of the life-course, and whose professional paths also take them to different professional meetings and outlets. Second, the section of the book on developmental phases includes three chapters that offer new ways to conceptualize the life-course on the basis of cultural findings. The authors of these three chapters also deliberate the extent to which certain life-course phases are best conceptualized in the singular, such as childhood and emerging adulthood, or the plural, that is childhoods and emerging adulthoods. Third, the segmenting of the life-course that is done by developmental science is related to the segmenting that occurs in society, and some of the present chapters address the implications of this.

For example, in her chapter on the extent of adolescents' involvement in adult communities, Alice Schlegel elaborates on unintended but nevertheless disconcerting psychological and social consequences of separating adolescents from adults. Meanwhile, Connie Flanagan and her colleagues point to developmental opportunities for peer groups of adolescents who form youth-based cultural and civic organizations. Also, Jean Phinney and Oscar Baldelomar consider the implications for adolescents' identity development and well-being in light of the extent to which they are in sync with the expectations for independence and interdependence of their culture. In short, the life-course is examined here from both a developmental and cultural perspective and with an eye to both scientific theory and social policy implications.

With its inclusion of diverse life phases, diverse topics, and experts from diverse cultures (about 60% of the authors are of cultural backgrounds that are not American), the present book aims to speak to a broad range of developmental and cultural issues. Even for topics not addressed in this volume, the syntheses between universalistic, one-size-fits-all approaches and particularistic, one-theory-for-every-culture approaches offered across chapters may be interesting and useful.

Finally, in the spirit of bridging, William Damon (a developmental scientist) and Richard Shweder (a cultural anthropologist) have authored a foreword and commentary, respectively.

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PART I

DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES AND CULTURE