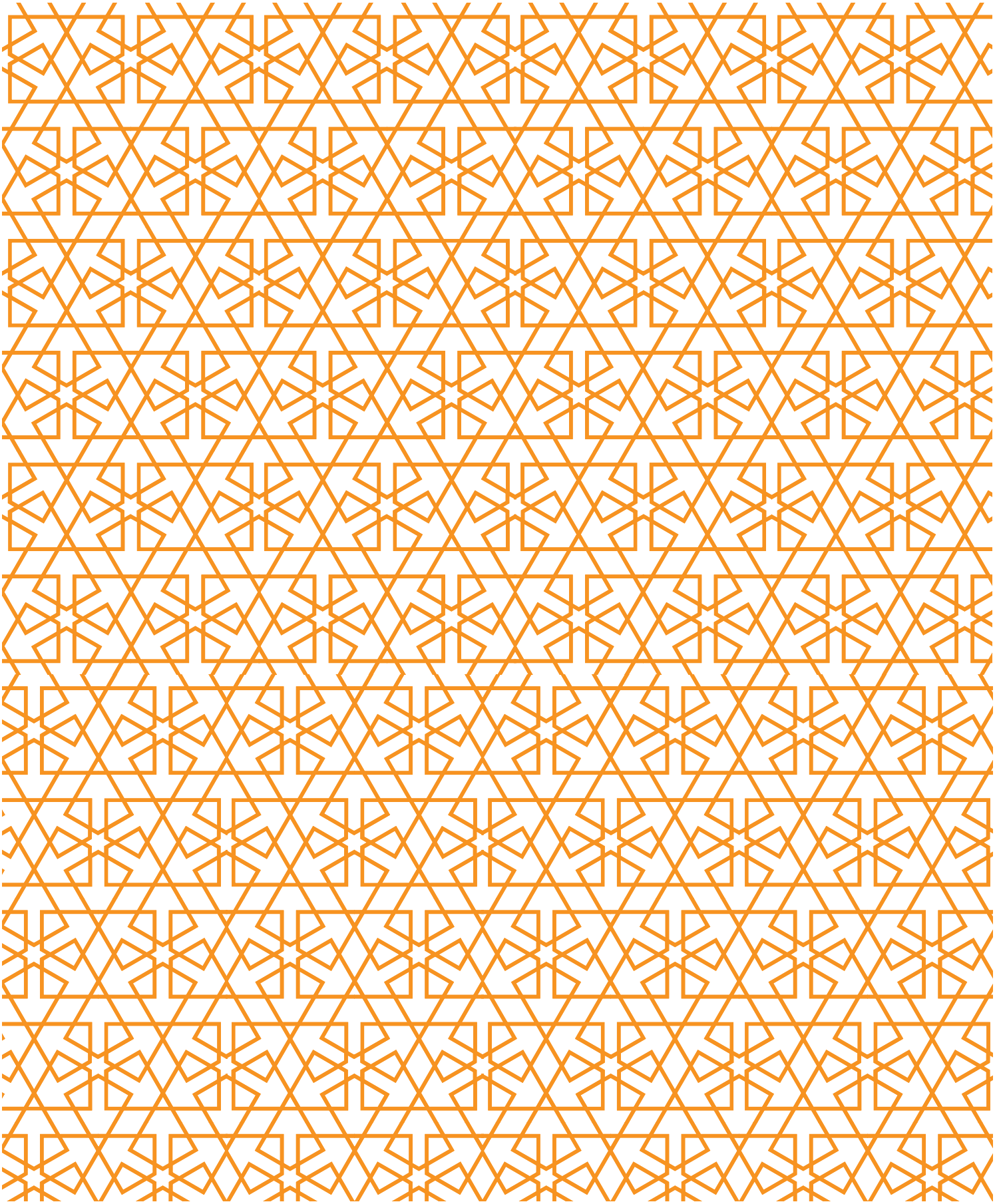
FOURTH EDITION

CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY



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CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

STEVEN J. HEINE

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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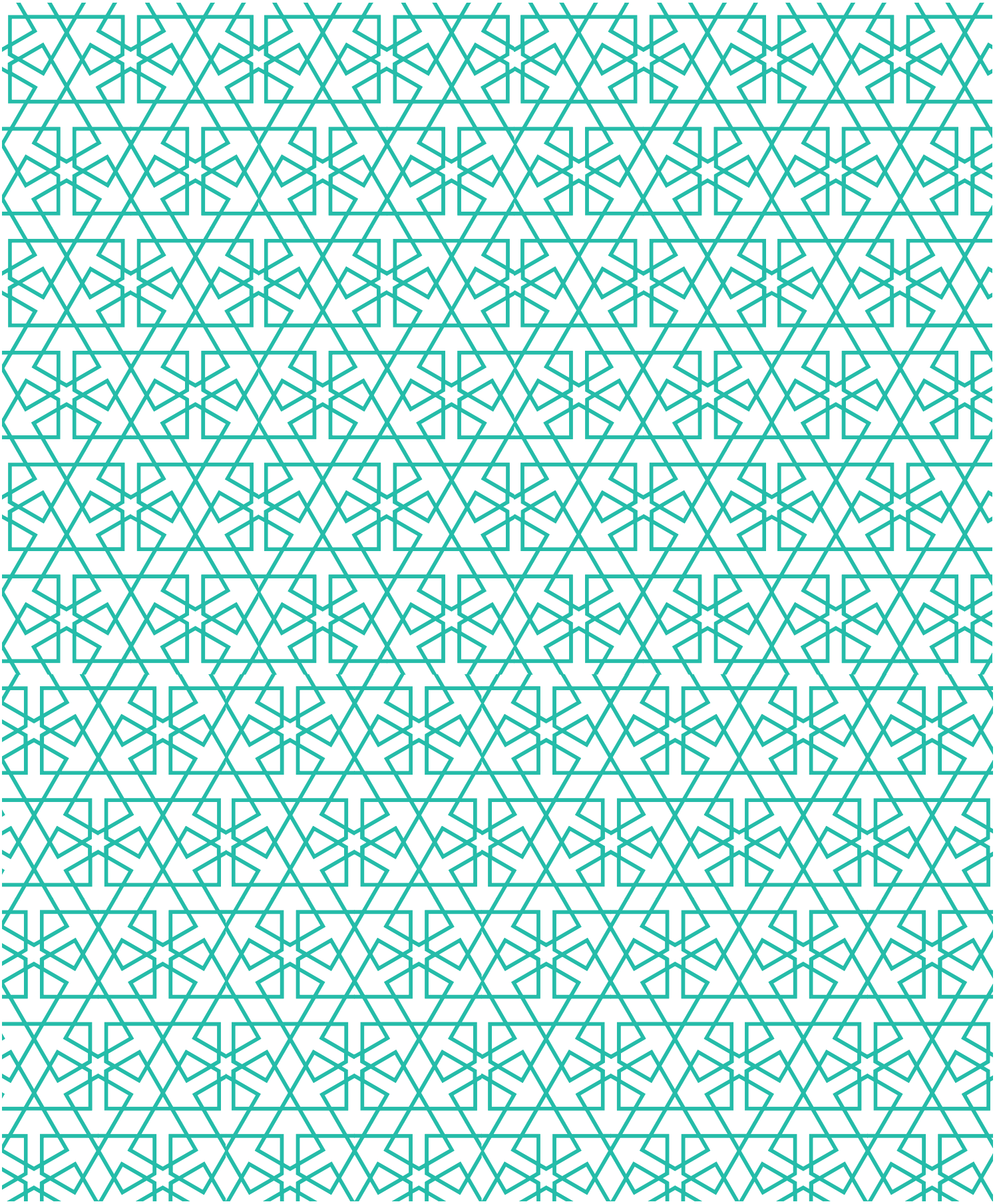
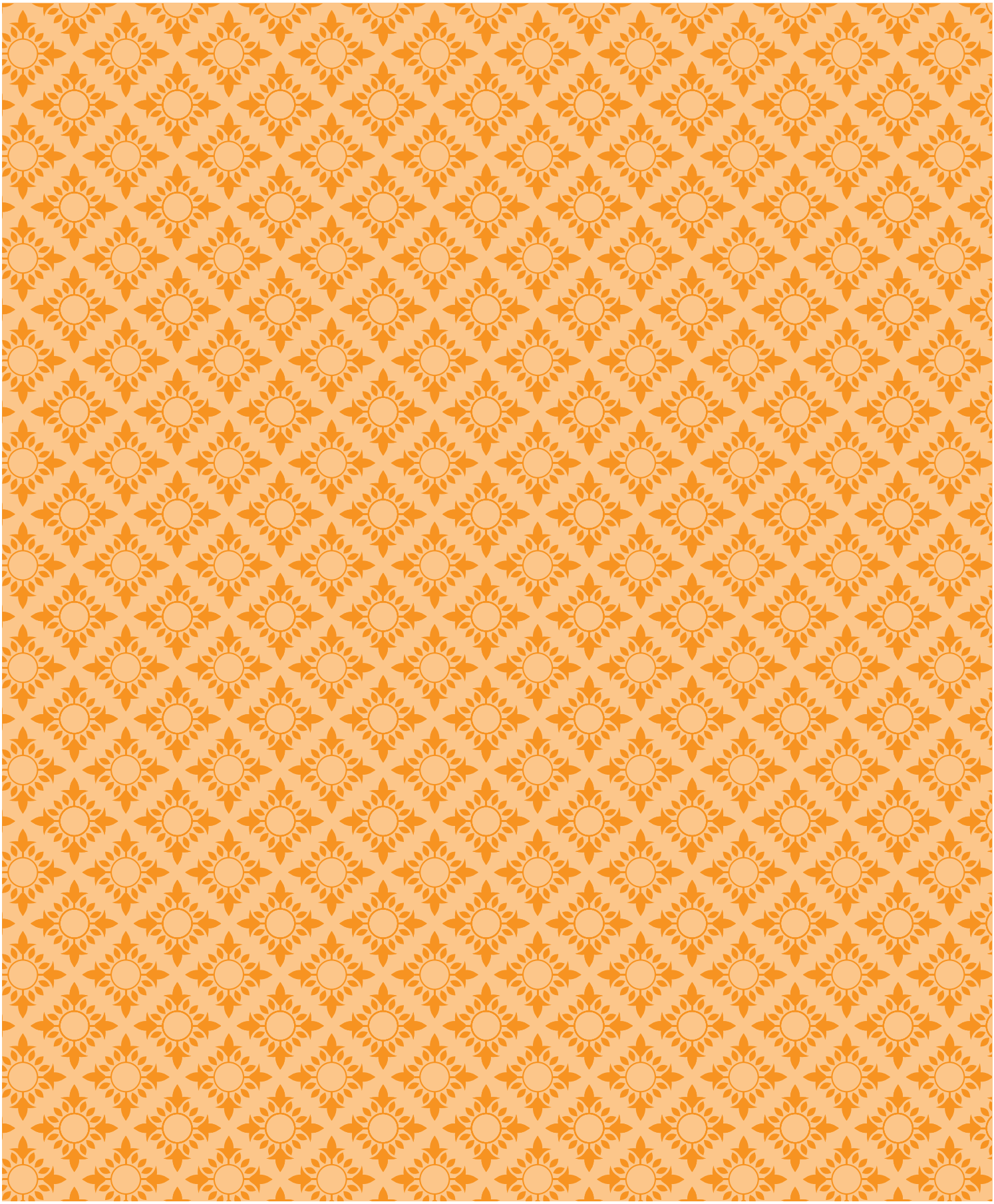
DEDICATION

FOR MY KIDS: SEIJI, KOKORO, AND ELIZABETH



About the Author

Steven J. Heine is Professor of Social and Cultural Psychology and Distinguished University Scholar at the University of British Columbia. His research focuses on meaning, genetic essentialism, and cultural influences on motivations. The author of over 100 publications, appearing in such periodicals as *Science*, *Nature*, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, and *Psychological Review*, he wrote the popular science book *DNA Is Not Destiny* (W. W. Norton, 2017). His research has been recognized by numerous awards, and he is a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He lives with his family in Vancouver.



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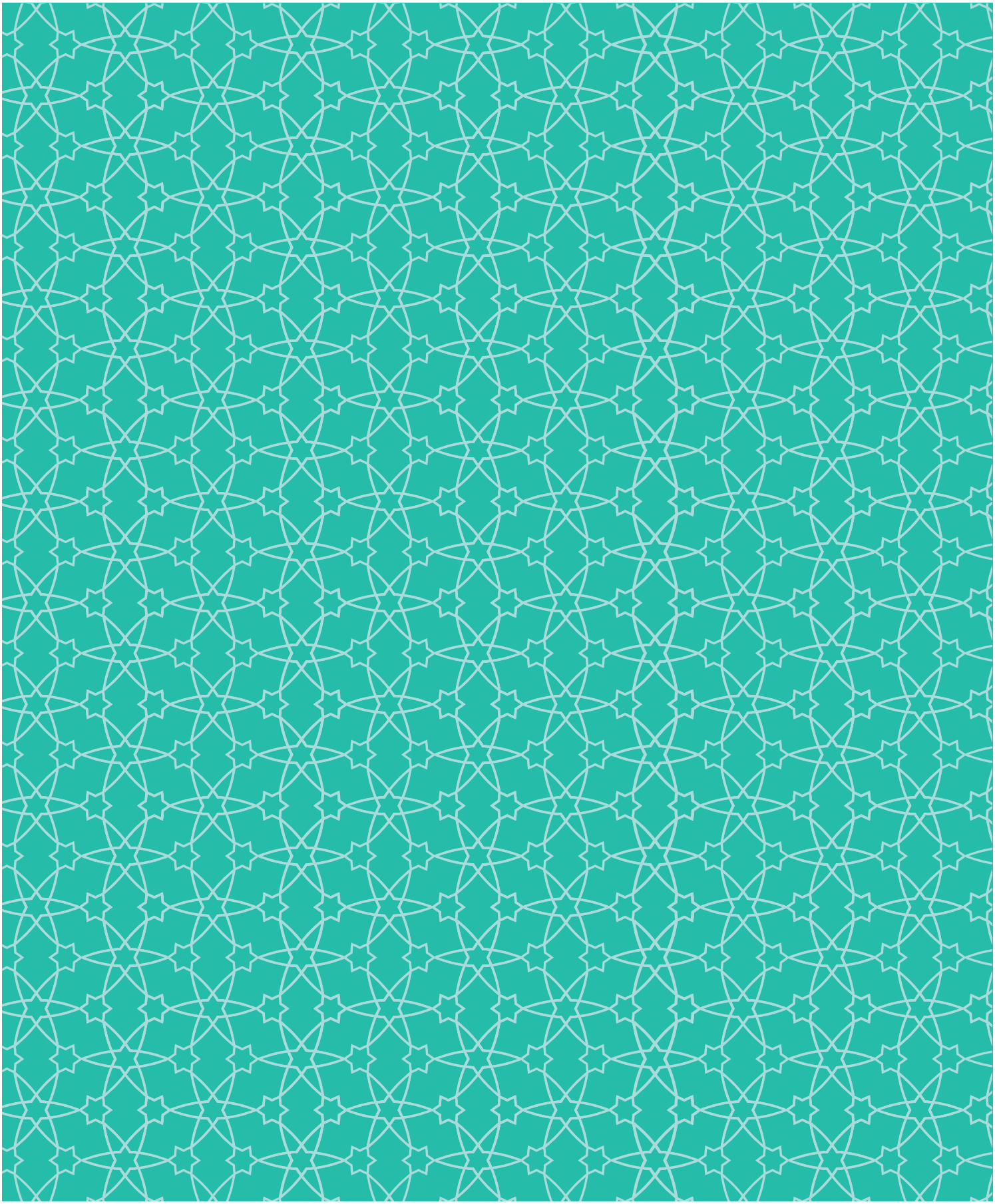

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PREFACE

My own quest to become a cultural psychologist began after college graduation. There I was with my BA degree in psychology, not knowing what to do with it. I moved to Japan in order to teach English in the small town of Obama (yes, it really was the town's name), and to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. I thought I had been an attentive student in my psychology classes, and I had learned much about how people think. Imagine, then, my surprise upon moving to rural Japan and discovering that much of what I thought I understood about human nature didn't seem to explain how my new friends and colleagues thought and behaved. I went through a series of cross-cultural misunderstandings and gaffes before I came to realize that my ideas about human nature were just plain wrong. Although they may have explained the nature of North Americans, they weren't very useful outside of that cultural context. This was interesting to me because from what I had learned in my psychology classes, people *should* think in the same ways everywhere. But in many ways, they don't. That insight and those embarrassing cross-cultural misunderstandings led me down the path to becoming a cultural psychologist and eventually to writing this textbook.

Cultural psychology, as a field, is still a relatively new discipline, and it continues to produce striking evidence that challenges psychologists' understanding of human nature. In contrast to much conventional wisdom, this field has been revealing that culture shapes how people's minds operate—sometimes in profound ways. The past couple of decades have been an exciting time, as an abundance of research continues to demonstrate that culture is not just a thin veneer covering the universal human mind.

Rather, this research has shown just how deeply cultural influences penetrate our psychology and shape the ways we think. The research underscores how human thoughts occur within cultural contexts, and shows that different cultural contexts can lead to fundamentally different ways of thinking.

When I first started teaching cultural psychology, I greatly enjoyed teaching students about the exciting discoveries coming out of this new field. However, there wasn't really an undergraduate textbook that adopted a cultural psychological perspective. Without a textbook, teaching a course in cultural psychology usually meant having students read the original journal articles describing these new ideas. This made for stimulating classroom discussions, but it also meant that my courses were typically limited to small seminars for senior students. I discussed this problem with cultural psychologists at other universities, and many said they were in the same situation. The field had become a tremendously interesting and important discipline, and had rapidly developed a rich theoretical and empirical foundation unique compared to other approaches that considered the influences of culture. But at that point, because there was no undergraduate textbook that could be used in large lecture classes, very few students were actually learning about the influence of culture on the way people think. I reluctantly came to the realization that the quickest way I could start teaching larger cultural psychology classes was to write a textbook myself. But it wasn't as easy as I thought it would be, as at first, I failed to appreciate just how much new and significant research was being conducted. In fact, the first edition took me four years to complete. And even now, as we send the fourth edition to press, there is much new and fascinating work I wasn't able to include in time for the deadline.

My goal was to write a book focused on what I have found most interesting about the field of cultural psychology. Toward this end, I have written the chapters around some provocative key questions with which cultural psychologists are still struggling. For example, one theme that arises repeatedly throughout the book is this question: How similar are the psychologies of people from different cultures? Human brains are basically the same everywhere, yet people's experiences are vastly divergent, making this a difficult and important question to contemplate. Some other fundamental questions I address are: Where does culture come from? How are humans similar to and different from other animals? What are the many different ways to be human?

I have integrated as much cultural diversity into the topics discussed as possible. The text considers research findings from every populated continent, including many investigations of subsistence cultures around the world, as well as explorations of the variations among ethnic groups within countries. I also wrote the chapters to provide a strong emphasis on experimental research throughout, while also paying particular attention to observational studies and ethnographies. I believe it's important to gain a sense of the various ways we can go about studying culture. I also wanted to highlight how culture underlies all aspects of human psychology, so I have attempted to explore the role of culture across many disciplines both within psychology (e.g., clinical, cognitive, developmental, social, and personality psychology), and outside psychology

(e.g., anthropology, evolutionary biology, linguistics, philosophy, and sociology). Finally, students will find many detailed examples throughout the book that show how cultural psychologists' theories and research are relevant to their lives. Hopefully, the combination of these ingredients will yield an interesting and educational experience for readers.

For Instructors

The instructor resources are described below.

Art PowerPoints

To aid instructors in quickly and easily creating their own visual aids linked directly to the student textbook, the figures and tables from the book are available as JPEGs and in Art PowerPoints.

Lecture PowerPoints

The newly revised Lecture PowerPoint slides feature expanded instructor-facing notes, providing detailed suggestions for in-class activities, demonstrations, short video clips, and discussion topics to engage students in a rich variety of ways. In addition, the Lecture PowerPoints include tables and figures from the book, as well as definitions of key terms. The illustrations can be used as is or customized for individual classrooms.

Test Bank

The Test Bank features over 650 questions, approximately 45 multiple-choice and 5 short-answer questions for each chapter. All questions have been updated according to Norton's assessment guidelines to make it easy for instructors to construct quizzes and exams that are meaningful and diagnostic. All questions are classified according to educational objective, student text section, difficulty, and question type. The Test Bank is available in PDF and ExamView formats.

Acknowledgments

I was very fortunate to receive an enormous amount of support in writing this book. It would not exist without the sage guidance, clear-eyed vision, and unflagging encouragement on the part of my first editor, Jon Durbin, who worked closely with me in the conception and writing of the first edition. I am also indebted to Sheri

Snavely for her inspiration and keen judgment that led to the second edition. And I am especially grateful to the clever insights, persistent efforts, and creativity of my editor for both the third and this fourth editions, Ken Barton. I'm also very grateful to the rest of the terrific staff at W. W. Norton & Company: Jane Searle, Melissa Atkin, Katie Pak, Kaitlin Coats, Victoria Reuter, Allison Nicole Smith, Ashley Sherwood, Ted Szczepanski, Jillian Burr, and Elizabeth Trammell, who have endeavored behind the scenes and have made many important contributions to this book. Betsy Dilernia was an especially attentive development and copy editor, and has made this book much easier to read and understand. In addition, Joni Sasaki and Kristy Dean have done a wonderful job with the Test Bank and the Lecture PowerPoints. I am also greatly appreciative of the extremely thoughtful and helpful comments I received from many reviewers, listed below.

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This book benefited from several discussions over the years with my formal mentors, Darrin Lehman and Shinobu Kitayama, from whom I learned how to become a cultural psychologist, as well as from informal mentors who have educated me from afar, including Dov Cohen, Hazel Markus, Dick Nisbett, Shige Oishi, and Paul Rozin. Also, I am especially grateful for my amazing colleagues at the University of British Columbia, such as Karl Aquino, Jeremy Biesanz, Frances Chen, Mark Collard, Liz Dunn, Todd Handy, Kristin Laurin, Mark Schaller, Toni Schmader, Azim Shariff, Ted Slingerland, and Jess Tracy, with whom I've been able to discuss many of the ideas in this book. In particular, the text has benefitted from countless conversations over lunches or beers with Joe Henrich and Ara Norenzayan. I would also like to thank Andrew Ryder for his guidance in writing the mental health chapter. A number of my lab coordinators, including Matt Loewen, Louise Chim, Aiyana Willard, Eric Wong, Jenna Becker, and Hee Jin Kim, played a key role in helping me conduct background research for the material in the book. Several chapters also benefited from the feedback of many readers, including Emma Buchtel, Edith Chen, Ben Cheung, Ilan Dar-Nimrod, Takeshi Hamamura, Greg Miller, Janet Werker, and Katie Yoshida, as well as from the many undergraduates who sat as willing and patient guinea pigs as I tried out various drafts in class. These readers all offered excellent advice, helping to make a stronger text overall. Finally, I especially want to thank Christine Ou for the wonderful support and inspiration she always provides.

STEVEN J. HEINE
Vancouver, British Columbia
May 2019

FOURTH EDITION

CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

Unlike this Kalahari San man who grew up in southern Africa, people raised in an environment with carpentered corners, like most readers of this book, are susceptible to the visual Müller-Lyer illusion.

1

A PSYCHOLOGY FOR A CULTURAL SPECIES

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Humans are an interesting bunch. If a team of alien biologists arrived at our planet and tried to catalog all the different species here, they would no doubt notice how peculiar we humans are. In many ways, we would seem to be poorly adapted for survival. We're not particularly strong, we're not very fast, we don't have sharp teeth or claws, and we don't even have a furry coat to keep us warm. Furthermore, we don't ensure the survival of our species through rampant reproduction, as rabbits do. The alien biologists would surely wonder what kind of strange beasts we are. The odds would certainly seem stacked against us. Yet despite the apparent disadvantages humans have compared to other species, we've populated more parts of the world, in more diverse environments, using a broader range of subsistence systems and social arrangements, than any other species. And our numbers keep growing. How is it that humans have come to be so successful?

If these alien biologists were very sharp, though, they might notice we humans do have one adaptation that compensates for everything we lack. Humans have culture. We rely on culture more than any other species, and it is this reliance that has enabled us to succeed in such diverse environments. Our reliance on culture has important and profound implications for our thoughts and behaviors. Cultural psychology is the field that studies those implications.

You don't need a course in cultural psychology to recognize that humans are a cultural species. This fact is evident when you travel to a foreign country or meet people from cultural backgrounds other than yours. In many ways, people from different cultures live their lives differently; they speak other languages, have certain customs, eat different foods, have other religious beliefs and child-rearing practices, and so on. You can predict much about a person's lifestyle just by knowing his or her culture.

Cultural psychology is not original in highlighting the many obvious ways that people's experiences differ around the world. The unique contribution of cultural psychology, and the main theme of this book, is that people from different cultures also differ in the ways they think and behave. One idea we'll return to throughout is the notion that *psychological processes are shaped by experiences.* Because people in various cultures have many different experiences, we should expect to find variations in the ways they think. As you read through this book, I encourage you to examine the kinds of experiences you've had and the ways that you think, and contrast them to the descriptions provided by people from other cultures.

Although experiences shape psychological processes, they clearly do not determine them. Psychological processes are made possible and limited by the brain structures that underlie them. And because the brains people are born with are virtually identical in regions around the world, people from all cultures share the same abilities and limitations of the universal human brain. Herein lies

a challenge for making sense of virtually all cross-cultural studies in psychology: To what extent should ways of thinking look similar around the world because people share a universal brain, and to what extent should they look different because people have divergent experiences? Providing an answer to this question is not always straightforward, because some ways of thinking do appear to be highly similar around the world, whereas others appear strikingly different. This tension between *universal and culturally variable psychologies* is another theme of this book. As you read through the various descriptions of psychological phenomena, I encourage you to ask yourself whether the evidence suggests that the phenomena are universal or culturally variable.

This chapter provides an overview of how psychologists consider culture. We explore questions such as how culture shapes the way we think, how we can understand ways of thinking as being culturally universal or variable, and why it can be important to understand cultural differences.

What Is Culture?

Before investigating the relationship between culture and ways of thinking, we need to clearly define culture. The question of what culture is has been debated among anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists for decades, and there is no general agreement that applies to all fields. Some people focus on the symbolic aspects of culture, others pay attention to the physical artifacts of culture, and some emphasize the habits that a culture contains.

In this book, I use the term "culture" to mean two different things. First, I use it to indicate a particular kind of information: *Culture is any kind of information that is acquired from other members of one's species through social learning that can influence an individual's behaviors* (see Richerson & Boyd, 2005). In other words, culture is any kind of idea, belief, technology, habit, or practice that is acquired through learning from others. Humans are therefore a cultural species, as people have a great deal of "culture" that fits this definition.

Second, I use the term "culture" to indicate a particular group of individuals: *A culture is a group of people who are existing within some kind of shared context*. People within a given culture are exposed to many of the same cultural ideas. They might attend the same cultural institutions, engage in similar cultural practices, see the same advertisements, follow the same norms, and have daily conversations with one another. At the most global level, sometimes I use the term "culture" to refer to broad expanses of population around the world, which may even include people from a large number of different countries. For example, I often use the phrase "Western culture" to refer to people participating in cultures that stem from countries clustered in northwestern Europe (e.g., the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, and

Germany) and societies that largely descend from these countries, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia.

There are a few challenges with thinking about a group of people as constituting a culture. First, as you can see from the above definition, the boundaries are not always clear-cut. For example, individuals might be exposed to cultural ideas that emerge from distant locations, such as those from their immigrant parents, experiences they have while traveling, advertisements they see from multinational firms, or ideas they learn from watching a foreign movie. Cultural boundaries are thus not distinct. Although we can never be sure we have identified a clear cultural boundary that separates two or more groups, a shorthand practice used in many research studies is to look at nationality as a rough indicator of culture. For example, Italians may be compared with Germans, even though we know that not every member of the Italian group was exposed to exclusively Italian cultural messages.

Adding to this complexity, there are other kinds of groups aside from countries that we might say have cultures. For example, people speak of Jewish culture, urban culture, LGBT culture, high socioeconomic status culture, vegetarian culture, Millennial culture, Harvard culture, Mac-user culture, or Trekkie culture. What makes these groups arguably qualify as "cultures" is that their members exist within a shared context, communicate with each other, have some norms that distinguish them from other groups, and have some common practices and ideas. The more that people who belong to a group share similar norms and communication, the more the group deserves to be identified as a culture. But, as you can imagine, there aren't always going to be clear, distinguishing boundaries. The fluid nature of cultural boundaries weakens the ability of researchers to differentiate between cultural groups, but when differences are found, they provide powerful evidence that cultures do vary in their psychological tendencies.

A second challenge is that cultures change over time. Some shared cultural information disappears as new habits replace the old, although much cultural information persists across time as well (see Chapter 3). Cultures are thus not static entities; they are dynamic and ever changing.

Perhaps the most important challenge in considering cultures as groups of people is the variability among individuals who belong to the same culture:

- Each person inherits a distinct temperament (a predisposition toward certain personality traits, abilities, and attitudes).
- Each person belongs to a unique collection of various social groups, each with its own distinctive culture (e.g., Jason grew up on Oak Street, attended King George Elementary School, often met with his extended family, played on the Maple Grove junior soccer team, was in the band at Carnegie High School, and was a founding member of the *Perspectives* school newspaper).
- Each person has a unique history of individual experiences that has shaped his or her views.

Individual differences lead some people to reflexively embrace certain cultural messages, staunchly react against some, and largely ignore others. People are nothing if not variable, and the research findings from the studies reported in this book do not apply equally to all members of a culture. Instead, they reflect average tendencies within cultural groups. Sometimes those groups are extremely broad. An example is contrasting Western cultures and East Asian cultures (the latter encompassing groups that have been exposed to Chinese Confucian cultural traditions, such as China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam). Therefore, to say that Westerners are more emotionally expressive than East Asians would mean that, on average, people from Western cultures score higher on some measure of emotional expressiveness than people from East Asian cultures—and yet there is an enormous degree of individual variation that includes some extremely expressive East Asians and some quite unexpressive Westerners. Cultural membership does not determine individual responses.

In this latter sense, then, the term "culture" refers to *a dynamic group of people who share a similar context, are exposed to many similar cultural messages, and contain a broad range of different individuals who are affected by those cultural messages in various ways*.

Psychological Processes Can Vary Across Cultures

In various cultures around the world, psychological processes emerge in quite different ways. Some kinds of cultural variation in psychology may already be familiar to you, and you can observe the differences directly yourself. For example, one striking way that people's psychology differs between cultures is sense of humor. What is funny in some cultures might not be seen as that funny in others. The late American comedian Jerry Lewis was very popular in the 1950s in the United States, but his style of slapstick humor ultimately lost much of its appeal for American audiences. Despite the fact that Lewis had not starred in a successful comedy movie in the U.S. since his famous role in *The Nutty Professor* in 1963, his zany humor continued to be appreciated by the French for decades. He was regularly praised by French cinema critics, and in 2006 Lewis received the Légion d'honneur from the French minister of culture for being "French people's favorite clown." Likewise, although the American sitcom *Seinfeld* has enjoyed enormous success in the United States, being named by *TV Guide* in 2002 as the greatest television show of all time, it flopped miserably in Germany because most Germans did not find it funny. Yet Germans continued to watch, and love, the 1960s-era American sitcom *Hogan's Heroes*. Cultures differ so much in their humor preferences that some Hollywood studios are steering away from making comedy movies, because even if a comedy ends up being a big hit domestically, it usually won't be appreciated, in, say, China (unless, curiously, the film stars Adam Sandler) and typically won't bring in as much revenue from the international box office (Obst, 2011).

The observation that people's sense of humor varies is something you may have noticed yourself if you've watched foreign comedies or have friends from other countries. I think these kinds of readily observable cultural differences in preferences are common ways to think about cultural variation: People from other cultures are different because they like other kinds of jokes, prefer unusual kinds of food, wear other types of clothes, worship different gods, vote for political candidates with other concerns, and so on. Such differences in preferences are familiar to us because we see similar kinds of variations among people in our own culture.

As you'll learn, however, cultural variation in psychological processes can extend much more deeply than personal preferences. Many basic psychological phenomena—such as the ways people perceive the world, their sense of right and wrong, and the things that motivate them—can emerge in starkly different ways around the world. And this fact raises a difficult question: How can we understand the workings of the human mind when it apparently works in different ways in different contexts? Arguments for cultural variability in psychological processes are controversial, and this controversy reveals the diverse underlying assumptions that many researchers embrace.

Is the Mind Independent from, or Intertwined with, Culture?

The American cultural anthropologist Richard Shweder is considered by many to be the father of modern cultural psychology. He argues that much of the field of psychology—what he calls **general psychology**—assumes that the mind operates according to a set of natural and universal laws that are independent from context or content (Shweder, 1990). According to Shweder, the guiding assumption of general psychology is one captured in the lyrics of a song by Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder: "People are the same wherever you go." This is true in many ways, and some researchers have attempted to document how people's thinking can be said to be the same across all cultures. For example, in all cultures people speak a language using between 10 and 70 sound units (phonemes), they all smile when they're happy, they all have a word for the color black, they are all disgusted at the idea of incest between parents and children, and they all understand the number 2. All the human universals that have been documented are listed in the fascinating book *Human Universals* (Brown, 1991). Studying universals is a highly interesting, yet enormously challenging, enterprise that tells us a great deal about human nature. We can learn much about how the mind works by identifying the unchanging ways it operates.

However, in many important ways people are *not* the same wherever you go. For example, in some languages pronouns can be dropped while in others they cannot, people in some cultures bite their tongue when they are embarrassed whereas people

in other cultures do not, some languages don't have a word for blue, people in some cultures are disgusted at the idea of incest between cousins whereas others are not, and in some cultures people do not understand the number 5. The study of human variability is also a very interesting and challenging enterprise that greatly informs our understanding of human nature and the ways the mind operates.

Think back to the questions that were investigated in your introductory psychology course. Was the focus primarily on what all humans share in common, or on the ways that some people think differently from others? Shweder argues that general psychologists, perhaps as captured in your introductory course, tend to be more captivated by arguments about human universality than about cultural variability. This interest in universality, Shweder proposes, arises because general psychologists tend to conceive of the mind as a highly abstract central processing unit (CPU) that operates independently of the context within which it is thinking or of the content it is thinking about. The underlying goal of general psychology, as Shweder sees it, is to provide glimpses of the CPU operating in the raw so we can understand the set of universal and natural laws that govern human thought. Context and content are viewed as unwanted noise that clouds our ability to perceive the functioning of the CPU. Therefore, elaborate experiments are conducted in the highly controlled environment of the laboratory to provide the purest view of the CPU. The computer metaphor here is deliberate, because the CPUs in computers do largely function independently of context and content. The wiring between the semiconductors is not affected by either the context they are in or the content they are processing. The mind as computer is a metaphor that has been embraced so strongly within general psychology that many of the theories could be applied equally to computers as to the human mind.

According to this perspective, important cultural variations in ways of thinking cannot exist because cultures merely provide variations in context and content that lie *outside* the operations of the underlying CPU. If cultural differences do appear in psychological studies, this universalist perspective would suggest that they must reflect the contamination of various sources of noise, such as translation errors, or the differences in familiarity people have with being in psychological experiments. They could not reflect differences in the CPU because it is universally the same across all contexts. General psychology would argue, then, that virtually all of human psychology is universally experienced in similar ways.

In contrast, an assumption that tends to be embraced by cultural psychologists is that in many ways the mind does *not* operate independently of what it is thinking about. According to this view, thinking is not merely the operation of the universal CPU; thinking also involves participation in the context within which one is doing the thinking and interacting with the content one is thinking about. Cultural psychologists would argue that to fully understand the mind it is important to consider, say, whether one is thinking about food, weapons, sexual partners, or sacred rituals. It

is critical to consider whether one's behaviors increase one's status within the community, violate a law, demonstrate affection to one's child, or are consistent with religious doctrine. Furthermore, the ways that people think about these kinds of behaviors are influenced by the very specific and particular ways that cultural knowledge shapes their understanding of those behaviors. Because humans are cultural beings, their actions, thoughts, and feelings are immersed in cultural information, and this information renders these actions, thoughts, and feelings to be *meaningful* (see Bruner, 1990, for an in-depth discussion). In other words, these actions, thoughts, and feelings come to relate to other things beyond them.

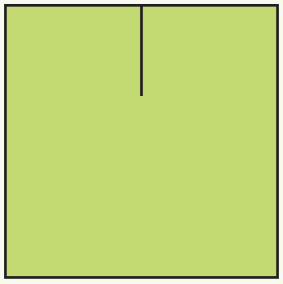
Here's an example. The simple act of an American college student going out to have a cappuccino might have several meanings: a chance to quench her thirst, a lapse in observing her diet, an effort to wake up so she can study, or a chance to pursue a romantic partner. The identical action can come to take on different meanings, and the potential meanings are influenced by the cultural context within which they occur. By contrast with the American student, however, in certain cultural contexts women going to a coffee shop on their own is not considered appropriate, people don't strive for an ideal body weight different from their natural size, using artificial stimulants to obtain energy can be seen as sinful, and romantic relationships are typically arranged by family members rather than sought out by individuals themselves. In other words, the same array of meanings that may be derived from the experience of an American college student going to a coffee shop are not available in all cultures; instead, other arrays of meaning are available there. Humans seek meaning in their actions, and the shared ideas that make up cultures provide the kinds of meanings people can get from their experiences. Cultural meanings are thus entangled with the ways the mind operates, and we cannot consider the mind separate from its culture.

Cultural psychology's challenge to general psychology may surprise you. Is there any empirical evidence that the mind is enmeshed with cultural influences? Much of the rest of this book will provide such evidence, but for now, here's a brief example. Take a look at **Figure 1.1**, which depicts what's known as the figure-line task (Kitayama, Duffy, Kawamura, & Larsen, 2003). Participants are shown a box that has a line drawn inside of it; this is the stimulus box. Next they look at two smaller boxes. They are asked to draw a line in the small first box that is identical in length to the line in the top stimulus box; this is called an *absolute task*. In the second small box, they're asked to draw a line identical in proportion to its box as the original line is in proportion to the stimulus box (about one-third); this is called the *relative task*.

In one study, university students who were either of European-American cultural background or had recently moved to the United States from East Asia had brain scans done using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) while making judgments with the figure-line task (Hedden, Ketay, Aron, Markus, & Gabrieli, 2008).

Look at the stimulus box. Do not measure the length of the line in it.

Stimulus



In the "absolute task" box, draw a line that is as close as possible to the absolute length of the line in the stimulus box. Then, in the "relative task" square, draw a line that is as close as possible to the relative length of the line in the stimulus box—that is, the line should be one-third the height of the "relative task" box. Measure each of your lines with a ruler.

Absolute Task

Relative Task

Result:
The "absolute" line should be 12 mm long. The "relative" line should be 6 mm long.

Explanation:
As we'll explore more in Chapter 9, people from Western cultures tend to perform better at the absolute task. People from non-Western cultures tend to perform better on the relative task. Which task were you more accurate in? Is this result consistent with what researchers would expect, given your cultural background?

FIGURE 1.1

The interconnection of mind and culture.

Try this figure-line task yourself.

Source: Adapted from Kitayama et al., 2003.

The results are shown in **Figure 1.2**. When European Americans completed the relative task, they showed more activation in the left inferior parietal lobe and the right precentral gyrus than they did when they completed the absolute task. These two regions of the brain are both associated with attentional control, indicating that the relative length judgment was more difficult for the European Americans and required more concentration than the absolute length judgment. In contrast, when the East Asians made the same judgments, they showed more evidence of attentional

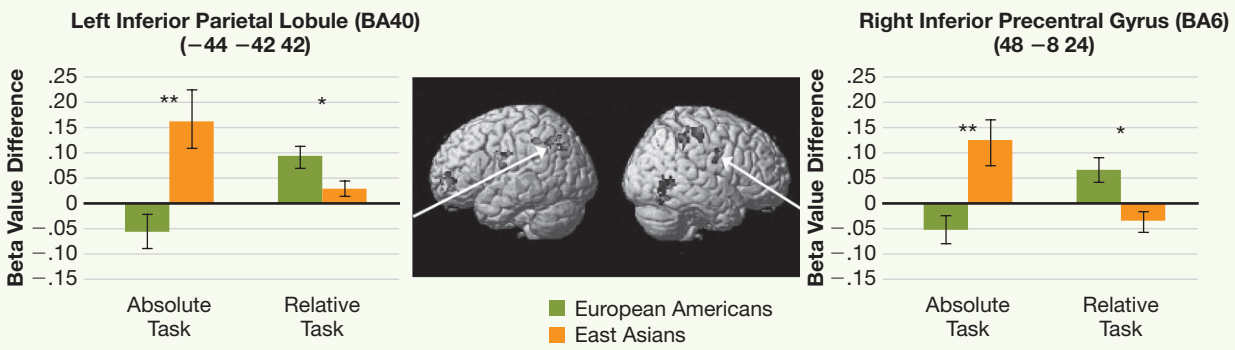


FIGURE 1.2 *Cultural differences in brain activation for the same task.* European Americans show more activation of these brain regions (which are associated with attentional control) when engaged in the relative task. East Asians show more activation of these same regions when performing the absolute task.
Source: Hedden et al., 2008.

control when they completed the absolute task compared with the relative one. In other words, the East Asians found the absolute length judgment to be especially difficult, which is a finding that repeats much past research (e.g., Kitayama et al., 2003), and indicates cultural differences in analytic versus holistic reasoning (as we'll explore in more detail in Chapter 9). The same task, then, elicits different patterns of brain activation across cultures. The experiences East Asians and European Americans have had in their lives come to differentially shape how their brains respond to simple tasks involving estimating the lengths of lines. This is an example of how mind and culture cannot be disentangled; the mind is shaped by its experiences, and cultures differ in the kinds of experiences that they provide.

But how could the mind be shaped by cultural experiences? Here is where the usefulness of the mind as computer metaphor really starts to break down. Unlike a computer, the human brain continues to change, grow, and rewire itself in response to experience. Our brain is highly plastic throughout our life, especially when we are young. Our hardware changes in response to what we do. One famous example is a study of taxi drivers in London. Cabbies in London face daily challenges of navigating one of the busiest and most complex street grids in the world. As they gain experience over the years, they create detailed mental maps that help them figure out the best way to get from point A to point B. And importantly, their experience in navigating through these mental maps actually changes the structure of their brain. The posterior region of the hippocampus facilitates spatial memory in navigation. In fact, small mammals and birds that depend on spatial memory for food storage have unusually large hippocampus volumes compared to other related species

(Lee, Miyasato, & Clayton, 1998). Similarly, London cab drivers develop larger hippocampus volumes relative to other humans. It's not the case that people with exceptional navigational skills (and large posterior hippocampi) become taxi drivers; rather, driving a cab leads to better navigational skills and larger posterior hippocampi. The study found that the longer a London taxi driver has been driving a cab, the larger both of his posterior hippocampi had become (Maguire et al., 2000).

This study is not unique, and several other studies have found evidence that physical aspects of the brain change in response to experience, such as increasing amounts of gray matter when people engage in mindfulness practice (Hölzel et al., 2011) or learn how to juggle (Draganski et al., 2004; **Figure 1.3**). Regularly encountered experiences can thus ultimately come to change the structure of the brain. The nature of the brain is not fixed from birth, but rather changes in the response to certain experiences. And because cultures provide people with particular sets of experiences on a daily basis, we can see how cultural influences could change their brains. Although people around the world are all born with relatively the same brains, with time, they come to have different brains by way of their different cultural experiences.

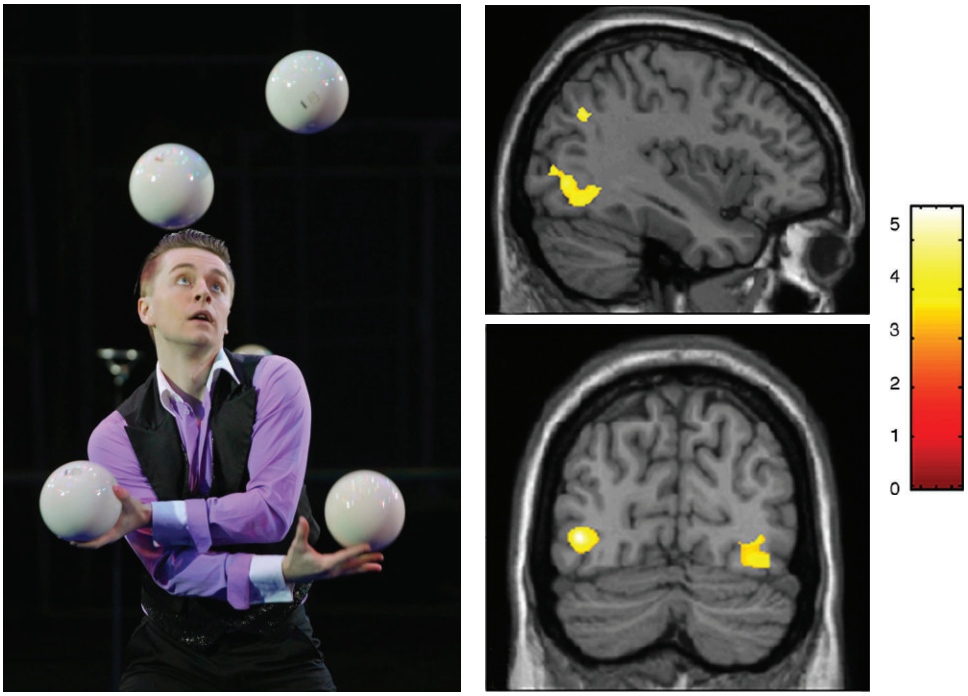


FIGURE 1.3 *Experiences can alter the brain.* When people learn how to juggle, they show an increase in volume of gray matter in the regions highlighted in the brain scans shown here.
Source, brain scans: Draganski et al., 2004.

Cultural psychologists tend to explain cultural differences in psychological processes as follows: When people in one culture are considering a particular cultural idea (e.g., the belief that it is good for children to become independent from their parents at a young age), they will focus on it a great deal, creating a rich network of thoughts, behaviors, and feelings. This network of information will be activated whenever people encounter a reminder of the cultural idea, such as an overheard conversation, a memory of something in the past, the current situation, or their impression that others around them are concerned with this idea. If people consider their networks of information often enough, the networks should become activated regularly and automatically, such that they come to mind and become prioritized ahead of other ones. Because cultures differ in the ideas their members frequently encounter, they will also differ in the networks of thoughts, actions, and feelings that are most accessible to the members. It's logical to see, then, how culture comes to shape the way people think.

Many cultural psychologists would therefore view general psychology's goal of understanding the mind after it has been stripped clear of the noise of context and content to be misguided. Because human thought is sustained by the meanings people pursue, any effort to bleach out those meanings to more clearly reveal the underlying CPU would only distort and misrepresent what the mind actually is. Humans are so embedded in their cultural worlds that they are always behaving as cultural actors, and their mental habits are continuously supported by the interpretations they get from their culture. In other words, people are forever bound up in their own system of cultural meanings, and they never start to think instead like a universal human. (For an elaboration of this idea, see Geertz, 1973.)

Many cultural psychologists would argue that culture cannot be separated from the mind because *culture and mind make each other up*. Cultures emerge from the interaction of the various minds of the people that live within them, and cultures, in turn, shape how those minds operate. And because cultures often do differ dramatically in terms of their practices, institutions, symbols, artifacts, beliefs, and values, the ways people from different cultures think, act, and feel should also vary substantially. Cultural psychologists thus expect to find significant differences in the psychological processes among people in various cultures. The rest of the chapters in this book will expand on those differences.

Case Study: The Sambia

Discussions of cultural differences in psychological processes are often quite controversial. The controversy seems to rest on the contrasting views of the mind in the two perspectives of general psychology (i.e., the mind operates independently of context and content) and cultural psychology (i.e., the mind is shaped by context and content). I have had countless discussions and debates with other psychologists about various

cultural differences in ways of thinking. Frequently we disagree about whether the observed cultural difference reflects a deep difference in the way people from various cultures think (which is usually my position), or whether it represents a superficial difference of no significance, being the product of some kind of bias in the experimental design (often my opponent's position). Many times, we can have a good debate because the evidence leaves room for interpretation. People who have had psychological training are generally rather resistant to accepting the idea of real cultural differences in ways of thinking, and some readers might have the same reluctance. As an initial effort to demonstrate that psychological differences between cultures can run deep, I describe here a case study of the Sambia. (For a more detailed exploration, see the ethnography by Herdt, 2006.) It represents a very dramatic example of a cultural difference.

The Sambia live in an expansive valley perched high on a mountain range, over a mile above sea level, in the eastern highlands of Papua New Guinea. Their environment is one of the least accessible places on the planet. Until a few decades ago, they had been a ferocious warring people, engaged in constant battles with neighboring tribes in the valley. Today, they are largely peaceful, and they exist by hunting and by cultivating taro gardens and pandanus nut groves. However, one cultural practice has persisted since their warring days: their initiation ritual to transform young boys into men (**Figure 1.4**).

FIGURE 1.4 *Sambian initiation rituals: boys becoming men.* A Sambian boy is tested by sucking a flute in preparation for his transformation into manhood.

The Sambia believe that femaleness is an innate natural essence, whereas maleness is a tenuous essence that must be explicitly cultivated. Boys are viewed as existing in the female world, hanging out with their mother, and doing what are thought of as female tasks, such as babysitting and weeding. The Sambia believe boys are contaminated from their mother's womb; they are considered too dependent on their mothers for protection and warmth, and their feminized position is highlighted as they wear the same type of grass apron as females. The men are often quite openly hostile to the boys, taunting them by saying, "Go back to your mother where you belong!" As a former warrior tribe, the Sambia have a process for boys to become masculinized, including initiation rituals to rid boys of their feminine habits and transform them into brave and fighting men. Much of that initiation practice involves pain, such as piercing the septum of the nose and thrashing the boys with sticks.

The Sambia are not unique in having such rituals, and throughout history many warrior societies have had similar initiations to recruit and train male warriors (Sosis, Kress, & Boster, 2007). The goal is to give boys a sense of power, or *jerungdu*, the word for physical strength, which is considered the supreme essence of maleness. Boys are believed to be born without any *jerungdu;* they get it through semen. Semen is viewed as the physical basis of *jerungdu*; without semen, a boy has no *jerungdu,* and he has no masculinity. But they believe the male body is not capable of manufacturing semen—it must be acquired. And it is acquired by boys through years of ritualized homosexual behavior. From about age 7, boys regularly ingest semen by performing daily oral sex on adolescent boys and men. In their late teens they stop ingesting semen from others, switch roles, and start providing semen to younger boys, who perform fellatio on them. They usually get married at about age 17, and after a few years of marriage, men typically become fathers. At that point their sexual practices become exclusively heterosexual (at least officially; apparently impromptu and private homosexual encounters may, for some, continue throughout their lives). Each time a man ejaculates he loses semen and *jerungdu,* but once he is a man he is capable of replacing it by ingesting some white tree sap.

For the Sambia, then, the publicly recognized male sex life tracks an arc of exclusively homosexual behaviors from the age of 7 until marriage, a period of bisexual behaviors (sex with their wives, and oral sex with younger boys) from marriage until fatherhood, and then exclusively heterosexual behaviors after that. In contrast, Sambian females do not have any similar practices of ritualized homosexuality; they are expected to be exclusively heterosexual.

These kinds of male initiation practices have been found in many societies in Melanesia. The nearby Etoro and Kaluli, for example, also believe it's important for boys to acquire semen to get power; Etoro boys perform ritualistic oral sex like the Sambia, whereas Kaluli boys receive their regular doses of semen through the anus. The Etoro find the Kaluli initiation practices to be disgusting, and the feelings appear to be mutual (Kelly, 1980).

Sambian views of sexuality and sexual identity stand in sharp contrast to those of Western society. Sexual orientation tends to be viewed as a lifestyle among Westerners—a lifestyle that affects how people view themselves, shapes their activities, and determines the other people with whom they associate. Whereas Westerners might identify themselves as homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual, every Sambian male proceeds through all of these stages in sequence. Homosexuality and bisexuality are minority types of sexuality among Westerners, yet among Sambian men, homosexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality are universal and natural stages in life. They serve as behaviors rather than as a basis of Sambian identity. And among Sambian men, it is heterosexuality that is considered a disgrace because contact with women is viewed as especially contaminating and draining of a man's *jerungdu*.

I include this rather dramatic contrast between Sambian and Western culture to make two points. First, the distinctiveness of the Sambian initiation rituals underscores how humans live in cultural worlds. Our actions are fraught with meaning, and this meaning is derived from particular cultural experiences. A Sambian father *desires* to rid his 7-year-old son of the contaminating feminine influence of his mother, and he *wants* his son to perform oral sex on a married man as a means to toughen him up. However startling and bizarre these practices may be to us, they carry deep meaning for the Sambians. The Sambians have a rich set of thoughts and emotions associated with their cultural rituals that people who are not socialized in a Sambian context do not. We cannot fully understand the psychological experiences of Sambians without considering the cultural contexts in which their actions occur.

Second, the Sambian sexual practices raise an important question: What aspects of sexuality are human universals? Sexual orientation serves as a key basis of identity in the West, and the rights of gay people remain politically controversial (although much progress has been made in recent decades). The Sambia do not have the social concept of sexual orientation. This suggests that as biologically grounded as our sexual motives are, they become shaped by specific cultural beliefs and practices.

Psychological Universals and Levels of Analysis

The American poet Mark Van Doren made this observation about human nature: "There are two statements about human beings that are true: that all human beings are alike, and that all are different. On those two facts all human wisdom is founded." With this profound statement Van Doren has identified the issue that underlies the enterprise of cultural psychology.

When we consider culture and psychology, we have two contrasting views. One view is that psychological processes are essentially the same everywhere, and the other is that psychological processes emerge differently according to the cultural context. Demonstrating which view is better supported by the evidence should be straightforward, because all you'd have to do is measure some psychological variables

across a number of different cultures. If the results tend to look the same everywhere, the general psychologists would win. But if the results look substantially different, the cultural psychologists would claim victory. However, the controversy continues because of the difficulty of agreeing on the kinds of evidence that would be best suited to test universality.

For example, consider the question of marriage. Is it culturally universal? The answer depends on what we mean by marriage. On one hand, if we mean the kind of marriage that is common in Western cultures in which a man and a woman fall in love and agree to share their lives exclusively with each other until either one of them dies or they get divorced, then marriage is *not* universal, as there are many cultures in which people do not form such relationships (Ford & Beach, 1951). On the other hand, we could consider marriage in a more abstract sense, as some kind of formal arrangement in which men and women stay together in an enduring relationship (with, perhaps, multiple women per man or multiple men per woman, and whether or not there were feelings of love prior to the marriage), along with public recognition of exclusive sexual access among those who are married, and centered on the rearing of children. A definition of marriage gets even more abstract when we include same-sex marriage, which recently has been recognized in more than two dozen countries around the world. With this abstract definition, we could say marriage is a cultural universal because there are relationships in almost all cultures that fit the broader description (Goodenough, 1970; for an example of a culture that doesn't fit within the abstract definition, see the work on the Na of China, by Hua, 2001).

One eternal source of controversy in discussing human universals, then, is whether we present the phenomenon we're investigating in specific, concrete terms or in more general, abstract terms. (Also see Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis, & Sam, 2011; Lonner, 1985.) The level of abstraction we use influences the success we'll have in identifying evidence for universality. At more abstract levels, there is often more evidence for universals; however, at more abstract levels the phenomena, or processes, under question are often too abstract to be of much use. This tension between universal and culturally specific psychologies will be evident in many of the topics we discuss in this book.

There's another reason why it's not easy to settle controversies about whether certain psychological processes are universal. There are a number of different levels by which we can consider evidence for universality, and a hierarchical framework has been proposed (Norenzayan & Heine, 2005). **Figure 1.5** shows a decision tree for determining the level of universality that best fits a given psychological process. Notice that the appropriate level of universality can often be debated because some evidence might point more to one level, whereas other evidence might suggest a different level. The existence of this hierarchy underscores the complexity of discussions of whether a psychological process can be said to be universal.

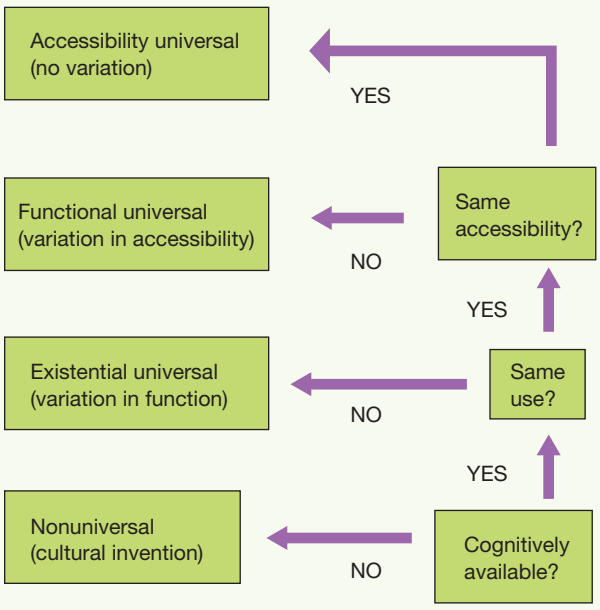


FIGURE 1.5

A decision tree for determining the level of universality in a psychological process.

Source: Norenzayan & Heine, 2005.

Let's go through the decision tree to see how we can identify the level of universality that is most appropriate for a given psychological process. There are four levels, from lowest to highest: nonuniversal, existential universal, functional universal, and accessibility universal.

NONUNIVERSAL. If we find that a particular psychological process can be said to *not* exist in all cultures, this reflects an absence of universality and is called, appropriately enough, a **nonuniversal**. Nonuniversals are cultural inventions. An example is abacus reasoning. An abacus is a calculation tool that is used in some parts of the Middle East and in Asia (**Figure 1.6**). People from cultures where training in using an abacus is common think about numbers differently than people from cultures that do not use an abacus. Abacus users tend to favor the odd-even distinction, they think in base units of fives, and they make a specific pattern of errors not seen in non-users (Miller & Paredes, 1996). The psychological processes associated with abacus reasoning can be said to be nonexistent in people who have not been trained. Much of numerical reasoning appears to be a nonuniversal (Carey, 2004; Gordon, 2004), in that some of the psychological processes involved seem to be present only among those who have been raised in cultures that use them. (We'll discuss cultural

FIGURE 1.6 *Abacus reasoning: a nonuniversal.* People trained to use an abacus perform calculations differently from those who have not been trained. This is an example of a nonuniversal psychological process.

variation in numerical reasoning more in Chapter 9.) Only a few nonuniversals have been identified in the cross-cultural literature.

EXISTENTIAL UNIVERSAL. If we can conclude that a particular psychological process is available in all cultures, then we move up the decision tree to the next level. Now we must decide whether the process occurs in the same way across cultures. If the answer is no, it qualifies as an **existential universal**. Here, a psychological process is said to *exist in all cultures, although the process is not necessarily used to solve the same problems, nor is it equally accessible across cultures*. In other words, the psychological process is latently present, although it might be used to achieve different ends across cultures. For example, Westerners tend to find experiences with success to be motivating and experiences with failure to be demotivating (e.g., Feather, 1966). In contrast, East Asians tend to show the opposite pattern, and they work harder after failures than after successes (Heine et al., 2001; Oishi & Diener, 2003). Internal motivations to do one's best are present in both cultural groups; however, experiences with successes and failures are not equally likely to lead to such motivations across cultures. (We'll discuss this topic more in Chapter 8.) Increased persistence in the face of success can be said to be a characteristic of an existential universal.

FUNCTIONAL UNIVERSAL. If we conclude that a psychological process is used to solve the same problems across cultures, then we move up to the next level in the decision tree. Here we must decide whether the process is equally accessible to people in all cultures. If the answer is no, we can call it a **functional universal**. Functional universals are psychological processes that *exist in all cultures, are used to solve the same problems across cultures, yet are more accessible to people from some cultures than others*. In the case of functional universals, the psychological process serves the same function everywhere, although it may not be used that much in some cultures. For example, one large-scale investigation explored whether people from a variety of subsistence societies around the world tended to punish those who acted unfairly, even if that punishment was costly for the person who delivered it (Henrich et al., 2006). (We will explore this topic more in Chapter 12.)

Such costly punishment was evident in all 15 societies that were investigated. Apparently, costly punishment is meted out in response to unfair behavior universally; such punishment thus serves a similar function. But there was also considerable variation in the amount of punishment. For example, among the Tsimane of Bolivia, participants spent up to 28% of their earnings to punish others who were unfair. In contrast, among the Gusii of Kenya, participants spent more than 90% of their earnings. The costly punishment of others is thus not accessible to the same degree across cultures.

Other examples of functional universals will be discussed in later chapters. They include certain kinds of categorization rules (e.g., Norenzayan, Smith, Kim, & Nisbett, 2002), an attraction to similarity (e.g., Schug, Yuki, Horikawa, & Takemura, 2009), and the role of negative affect in depression (e.g., Kleinman, 1982). Many of the cross-cultural studies summarized in this book are testing whether or not a psychological process meets the standards of functional universals.

ACCESSIBILITY UNIVERSAL. If we conclude that a psychological process is equally accessible in all cultures, it is an **accessibility universal**, the top level of the decision tree. The strongest case for universality, it indicates that a given psychological process *exists in all cultures, is used to solve the same problems across cultures, and is accessible to the same degree across cultures*. (By accessibility, we mean the likelihood of a person using the particular psychological process.)

There are likely to be many accessibility universals, although few have been documented thus far in psychological research. The best candidates would be those psychological processes that emerge very early in infancy or are shared across species. For example, social facilitation—the tendency for individuals to do better at well-learned tasks and worse at poorly learned ones when in the presence of others—has been shown to occur in both insects and humans (e.g., Zajonc, Heingartner, & Herman, 1969). It would be surprising if this tendency varied significantly across cultures, and indeed, there is thus far no evidence for any cultural variability. Likewise, a folk understanding of the laws of physics (e.g., an understanding that objects cannot just disappear) is evident among infants at a very early age, and thus also likely reflects accessibility universals (e.g., Baillargeon & DeVos, 1991). Much research is needed to confidently demonstrate that a phenomenon is an accessibility universal, and thus far we can only claim that it seems reasonable to anticipate that some processes will turn out to be accessibility universals.

The Psychological Database Is Largely WEIRD

At this point, we know very little about the extent to which many psychological processes are universal. This is largely due to the inescapable fact that in many cases we don't yet have the data that would enable us to test the question of whether or not

a process is universal. The vast majority of psychological studies have thus far been limited to explorations of the minds of people living in so-called **WEIRD societies**, WEIRD being an acronym for Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010b). For example, an analysis of the top journals in six subdisciplines of psychology found that 68% of the participants were American and 96% came from Western industrialized countries (Arnett, 2008; for a more recent analysis with similar findings, see Nielsen, Haun, Kartner, & Legare, 2017). Even more problematic, these participants are not representative of Westerners more generally, because the sampling method that has become standard in cognitive, social, and personality psychology, as well as some research in clinical psychology, is to recruit participants from undergraduate psychology classes (Sears, 1986). Approximately 70% of all psychology study participants are undergraduate students (Arnett, 2008). This means that a randomly selected American undergraduate is more than 4,000 times more likely to be a research participant in a psychology study than is a randomly selected participant outside of the West.

This fact alone reflects an interesting, and still unexplained, cultural psychological finding: Why are Westerners, especially North Americans, so much more interested in psychology than other people are? At many North American institutions the most popular major is psychology, whereas in many universities worldwide, psychology is not even offered as a topic of study. For some reason, North Americans appear to be more fascinated with psychological questions than people in most of the rest of the world. Why do you think it is that you are taking a psychology course? Can you identify any cultural reasons that have resulted in your reading this book?

Thus, perhaps the strongest evidence for Shweder's contention that general psychology does not concern itself with context or content is the fact that psychology has adopted a sampling methodology that largely ignores questions about the generalizability of its findings. The extremely narrow samples most psychologists use make good sense if the mind really does operate exclusively according to universal laws. If this is true, any person's mind is as good as anyone else's for revealing its universal nature. If minds are universally similar, you might as well study the most conveniently accessible ones. There is no need to be off trekking through the highlands of New Guinea to recruit study participants if their minds are functioning identically to those of Western college students, who can be enticed to participate with some extra course credit or a few dollars.

The cost of this sampling method for psychology, though, has become increasingly evident when researchers conduct cross-cultural studies. It's not just that the typical psychological database represents a very narrow slice of the world's population; it also represents a very *unusual* slice. For many of the ways of thinking discussed in this book, the findings that come from WEIRD samples appear to be different from those obtained in other samples.

Here's a good example. You are probably familiar with the **Müller-Lyer illusion**, shown in **Figure 1.7**. The line on the left looks longer than the line on the right, even though both lines are the exact same length. The fact that people reliably see the left line as longer than the right line led some to argue that this illusion represents something about the innate structure of the brain (e.g., Fodor, 1983). However, when a team of cross-cultural psychologists explored how people from a number of subsistence societies around the world perceived this illusion, together with samples of European-descent South Africans and American undergraduates (Segall, Campbell, & Herskovits, 1963), they found striking cultural differences, shown in **Figure 1.8**. The *y*-axis shows the point of subjective equality (PSE), which measures the percentage the right line must be longer than the left line before the two lines are judged to be equal in length; the *x*-axis shows the different cultures that were studied.

FIGURE 1.7 *The Müller-Lyer illusion.* Because of this visual illusion, the line on the left looks longer than the line on the right, even though both vertical lines are the same length. In addition, the angles at the corners suggest the left line is farther away than the line on the right. People who are raised in cultures where they are not exposed to carpentered corners are not susceptible to the illusion.

We can see two important points from these findings. First, not only is the Müller-Lyer illusion an illusion in certain cultures but not others (the two lines are not perceived as different in length by the Kalahari San or by South African miners), but the cultural variability points to a psychological mechanism that underlies the illusion. People are susceptible to the Müller-Lyer illusion because the angles of the lines are similar to the angles they see when they look at carpentered corners, which provide information about relative distance (see Figure 1.7). If people are not exposed to carpentered corners, especially in childhood (McCauley & Henrich, 2006), they don't learn that the corners provide depth cues, and therefore they are not susceptible to the illusion. Learning about the cultural variation in this case has helped psychologists understand why some people see this illusion: It's not an innate feature of the human brain, but something that is learned through having experiences with corners.

Second, the American sample is the outlier in this case; it represents the extreme end of the distribution. If you wanted to learn about the prevalence and the magnitude of the Müller-Lyer illusion throughout the world, you would get an exaggerated estimate if you focused on American samples. And this tendency for American student samples to show an extreme pattern of responses is not an exception. For many of the key findings in psychology (ranging from perceptions of fairness to moral

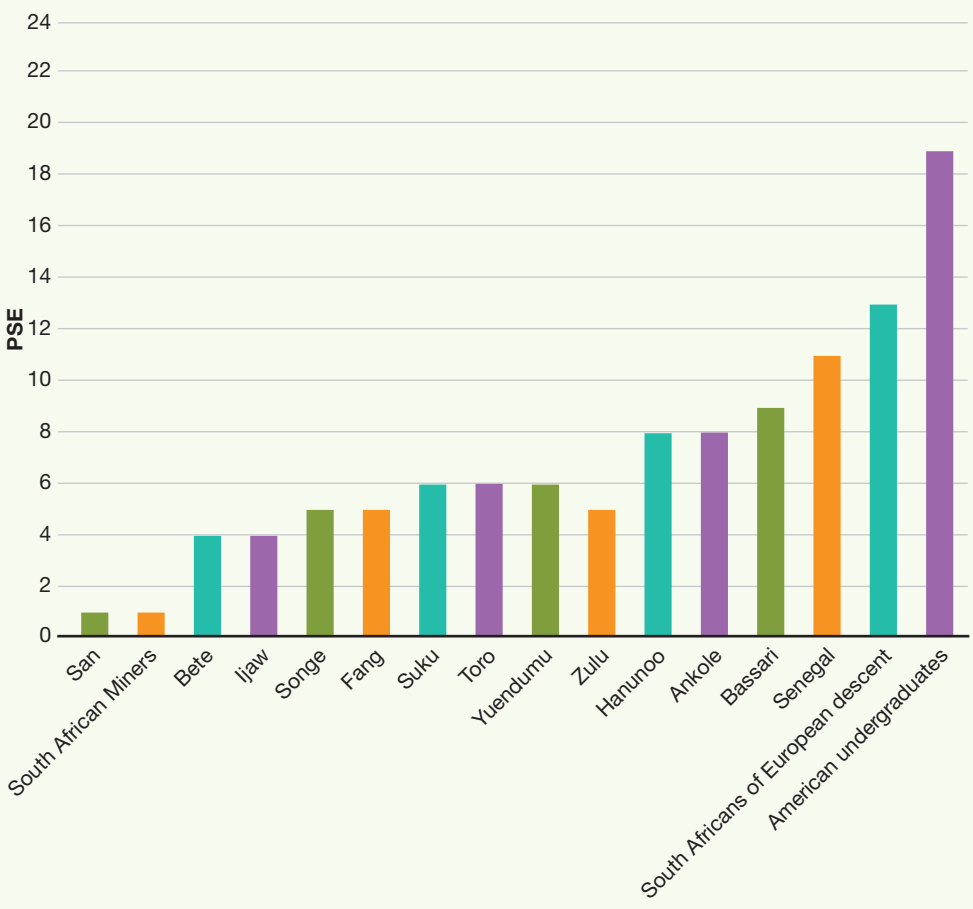


FIGURE 1.8 *Cultural differences in perceiving the Müller-Lyer illusion.* The larger the point of subjective equality (PSE), the more pronounced is the Müller-Lyer illusion. American undergraduates are more susceptible to this illusion than those from the other cultural groups that have been studied.
Source: Henrich et al., 2010b.

reasoning, self-concepts, reasoning styles, desires for choice, and many others), the available cross-cultural data reveal the following:

1. People from industrialized societies respond differently than those from small-scale societies.
2. People from Western industrialized societies demonstrate more pronounced responses than those from non-Western societies.

3. Americans show yet more extreme responses than other Westerners.
4. The responses of contemporary American college students are even more different than those of non-college-educated American adults (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010b).

Research participants from WEIRD societies are clearly quite weird in their ways of thinking, and building theories about the human mind exclusively from these samples is problematic. A recent analysis of people's responses to a long set of cultural values from 99 countries demonstrates how differently people around the world think in contrast to Americans (Muthukrishna et al., in press). As you can see in **Figure 1.9**, the countries in darker blue have a larger variety of values in contrast with the United States, and thus on average are the most psychologically different from Americans.

Psychology has largely relied on narrow and unrepresentative samples, which weakens its ability to address questions about how well findings from any particular study generalize to other human samples. One key goal of cultural psychology is to

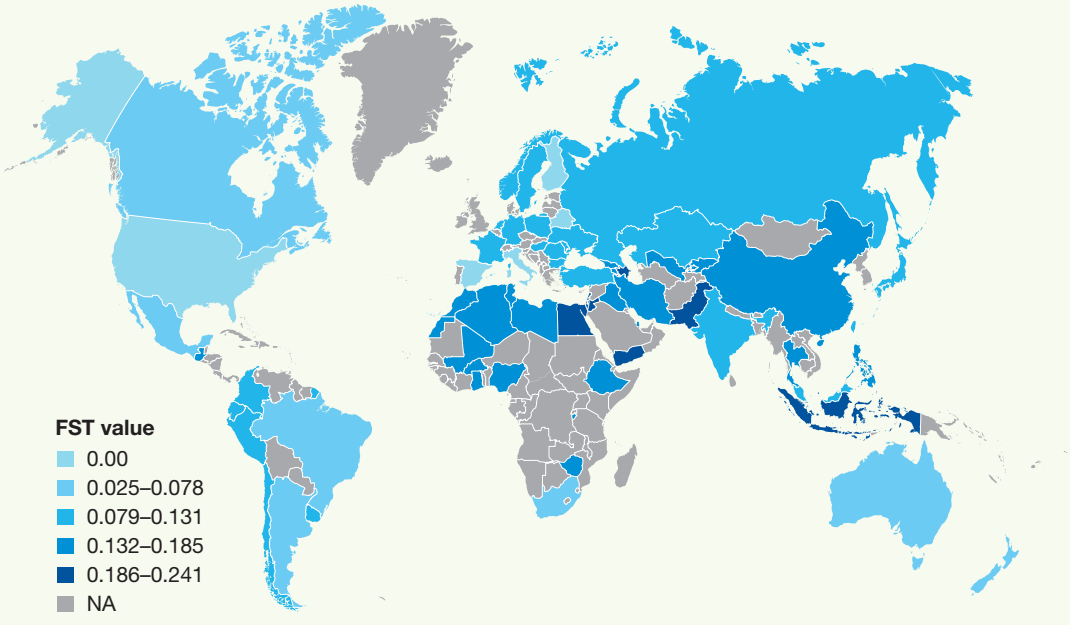


FIGURE 1.9 *Differences in cultural values between various countries of the world and the United States.* FST is the fixation index, which indicates how different people's answers to a large set of cultural values are compared to the norms in the U.S.

Source: Muthukrishna et al., in press.

collect results from a broad enough array of cultures to be able to more confidently explore questions about human universals and human diversity. This goal is challenging because of accessibility barriers to a wide range of cultures. For instance, most psychologists don't receive training in other cultures. And some cultures might not have local psychologists working there who can serve as collaborators. In addition, it is far more costly and difficult for Western psychologists to collect data around the world than it is to collect data with convenient samples of students from their universities. Thus far, the most common non-Western research participants have been students from East Asia, since there are many psychologists there who collaborate with international teams. Non-Western samples are similar to Western samples in many respects (they are students, usually from wealthy backgrounds, living in complex societies), which makes the cross-cultural comparisons more straightforward to interpret. Yet, as you'll see in subsequent chapters, there are many pronounced psychological differences between people from East Asian and Western cultural backgrounds. However, the field still has not done nearly enough research to explore other non-Western cultural regions. Perhaps in the future you'll participate in some research on other understudied populations.

In doing the research for this book, I have consistently had two thoughts. First, there has been a flood of excellent research in cultural psychology over the past few decades. **Figure 1.10** shows the percentage of articles that have been published each year that include cultural themes. While in the 1980s less than 5% of articles had such themes, more recently this number has doubled to nearly 10% (see Kashima,

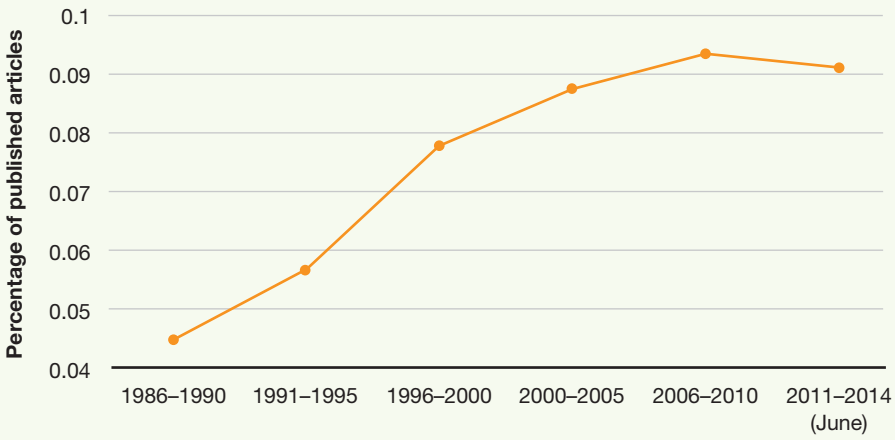


FIGURE 1.10 Percentages of culture-relevant research in psychology, 1986-2014.
Source: Adapted from Kashima, 2016.

2016). Psychology has become more international over this period of time (Webster, Nichols, & Orozco, 2009).

Second, despite this enormous amount of research, many key questions about the relationship between culture and psychology have yet to be investigated. There are large gaps in our knowledge base waiting to be filled regarding how culture influences psychology. In particular, many of the world's cultures remain unexplored frontiers in terms of psychological testing. In all likelihood, psychologists will be focusing on issues in cultural psychological research for many decades to come.

Why Study Cultural Psychology?

One good reason to learn about cultural psychology is that in order to comprehend how the mind operates, it's important to understand the role cultural experiences play in terms of how people think and feel. As noted earlier, many psychological findings that have been obtained from American students emerge somewhat differently in other samples, and our theories about human nature will be misguided if we don't consider the diverse ways people make sense of themselves and their worlds. Experiences are central to the development of psychological tendencies, and cultures provide people with certain kinds of experiences. Studying cultural psychology, and the role of culture, therefore, prevents having a distorted and incomplete understanding of the human mind.

This is the same kind of reason for learning about any field: Gaining knowledge in that field is important for developing an understanding about related topics. However, given the nature of the questions explored in cultural psychology, we might raise an entirely different kind of question about its value as a field. How does learning about cultural psychology affect the ways people think and lead their lives? This question is important to consider, because cultural psychology's focus on differences between cultures can touch upon some sensitive issues that are highly relevant to our lives.

With the increase in globalization over the past several decades, people are coming into contact with others from diverse cultural backgrounds more than ever before (see Chao, Kung, & Yao, 2015). What is the best way to deal with group differences in a multicultural community? Should those differences be ignored in favor of focusing on similarities? Or should cultural differences be acknowledged and be viewed as a source of strength? This is a sensitive and controversial issue that divides society and psychologists alike.

As noted earlier, in many respects, people are the same everywhere. Taking this perspective is called a **color-blind approach** (or "culture-blind"), and many people adopt this mindset with the best of intentions. The hope underlying this approach is that people will interact with each other without giving much attention to anyone's ethnic or cultural background. In the words of some advocates for racial equality, "the

way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race" (*Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1,* 2007, p. 2768). So perhaps the best way for people of different backgrounds to get along is to stop paying attention to cultural differences and focus instead on people's common human nature.

In support of this perspective, much research has shown that people can very easily be led to adopt an "us versus them" mindset and favor their own group over others (Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989). Research in this tradition consistently finds that as soon as you tell people there are two groups and that they belong to one of them, you quickly tend to get discrimination between the two groups, with people treating those in their own group better than those in the other group. This discrimination will occur even when those groups are based on the most trivial of distinctions, such as whether people are told they belong to a group of people who prefer art by the painter Wassily Kandinsky or a group who prefer art by the painter Paul Klee (Tajfel, 1974). Attention to differences between groups can lead to discrimination, so it follows that if people's attention is *not* drawn to the differences between cultures, they will be less likely to create boundaries between themselves and others, and they will all get along better.

In contrast to this color-blind strategy, focusing on and respecting group differences is frequently called a **multicultural approach**. The rationale is that people really *do* identify strongly with their groups, and most group identities are far more meaningful than the kind that can be artificially created in the lab. Furthermore, people are especially likely to identify with their group if their group is smaller than other ones, or is disadvantaged in some way. Somewhat ironically, being discriminated against can lead members of minority groups to become even more committed to their own, as well as more resistant to adopting the ways of dominant groups (Rumbaut, 2008). People in minority groups tend to greatly value their group identity, and they often respond quite negatively to efforts by majority group members to ignore what makes them distinctive (Verkuyten, 2005). Attempts to downplay group differences may come across as suggesting that minority members would be accepted as long as they shed their distinctive cultural identity and act like those in the majority group. And research consistently finds that minority group members tend to favor a multicultural approach more than majority members do (Offermann, Basford, Graebner, Jaffer, De Graaf, & Kaminsky, 2014; Priester, Pitner, & Lackey, in press). A multicultural approach, then, suggests that people will fare better when the distinctive characteristics of their group are observed and appreciated.

What happens when researchers compare these two conflicting approaches? The findings are generally consistent (for reviews, see Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Plaut, Thomas, Hurd, & Romano, 2018). Groups that emphasize multicultural messages fare better in many ways than groups that emphasize color-blind messages. For example, one extensive study of a few thousand employees from various companies assessed the relationship between each company's attitude toward diversity and the employees' engagement with their jobs (Plaut, Thomas,

& Goren, 2009). The more multicultural (and less color-blind) the attitudes of the white employees, the more the minority employees were engaged with their work. Similarly, minority employees have more trust in, and comfort with, a company that uses multicultural messages than one that uses color-blind messages, especially when the company has only a few minority members (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008).

European Canadian and First Nations (native Canadian) participants had more positive conversations with each other after hearing multicultural messages than after exposure to color-blind messages; and the multicultural messages increased the identity security of the First Nations participants while reducing the amount of negative emotions expressed by the European-Canadians (Vorauer, Gagnon, & Sasaki, 2009). Likewise, when white Americans heard color-blind arguments, they acted in more prejudicial ways toward minorities than when they were exposed to multicultural arguments (Holoien & Shelton, 2012). Other research finds that people who hear more color-blind arguments are less likely to see prejudice where it actually exists (Apfelbaum, Pauker, Sommers, & Ambady, 2010; Offermann et al., 2014).

White students also show more positive attitudes toward minority members when the environment presents multicultural messages than when it presents color-blind ones (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). But whites often do not view efforts to emphasize multiculturalism as positively as minority members do (Morrison, Plaut, & Ybarra, 2010), especially if they view racial discrimination as deliberate and something that results from bad intentions, as opposed to being unintentional (Apfelbaum, Grunberg, Halevy, & Kang, 2017). Sometimes majority group members feel that multicultural messages exclude them (Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011). In addition, researchers find that these messages are most effective when they highlight the benefits for both majority and minority group members (Jansen, Otten, & van der Zee, 2015), and emphasize that multiculturalism is valued at the same time as merit (Gündemir, Homan, Usova, & Galinsky, 2017). The fact that whites are not as enthusiastic about multicultural messages as minority members is perhaps not surprising; color-blind messages are more likely to be perceived as legitimizing any existing ethnic inequalities (Knowles, Lowery, Hogan, & Chow, 2009). Furthermore, even though a multicultural perspective tends to be preferred by minority group members, there is no single approach that always works (Apfelbaum, Stephens, & Reagans, 2016). Also, sometimes multicultural efforts can backfire (Brannon, Carter, Murdock-Perriera, & Higginbotham, 2018; Zou & Cheryan, 2015).

These findings suggest another good reason to study cultural psychology. An increased understanding and appreciation of cultural differences can lead people of different backgrounds to get along better, be more fully engaged in their work, and be able to detect discrimination when it exists. Researchers have found that students who take a cultural psychology course show an overall increase in cultural awareness and cultural intelligence, which improves intercultural understanding (Buchtel, 2014). These studies indicate that people fare best when they try to understand how