Intercultural Communication: Success Comes From Within

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Before we begin…
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Outline

- What is Culture?
- Cross-Society Understanding
- Cross-Community Understanding
- Cross-Person Understanding
- Intercultural Communication?
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What is Culture?

“The choice of a point of view is the initial act of any culture.”

— José Ortega Gasset
What is Culture?

1) The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively.

2) The cultivation of bacteria, tissue cells, etc., in an artificial nutrient medium.

*Oxford English Dictionary (1995)*
What is Culture?

…Patterns of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, ideas and especially their attached values…

…Culture systems may be considered as products of action, and as conditional elements of future action…

Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952)
What is Culture?

• Culture, mind, and brain “make each other up.”

• Culture is both “in the head” and “in the world.”

• Unit of analysis: The person-in-context.

Bruner, 1990; Dressler, 2018; Kitayama & Uskul, 2011; Ryder et al., 2011; Shweder, 1990
What is Culture?

Culture is the taken-for-granted.
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Cross-Society Understanding

**Individualistic**
- Multiple ingroups
- Lower commitment
- Less cohesive
- Voluntaristic
- Ingroups and outgroups are less distinctive

**Collectivistic**
- Few ingroups
- Greater commitment
- More cohesive
- Inescapable connection
- Ingroups and outgroups are very distinctive
Cross-Society Understanding
Cross-Society Understanding

Did you move from another city or area within this country in the past five years? Percentage answering yes
Cross-Society Understanding
Cross-Society Understanding

Loose cultures

- Ukraine
- Estonia
- Hungary
- Israel
- Netherlands
- Brazil
- Venezuela
- New Zealand
- Greece
- Australia
- U.S.A.
- Spain
- Belgium
- Poland
- Hong Kong
- France
- Iceland
- Germany
- Italy
- Austria
- Great Britain
- Mexico
- Germany East
- Portugal
- China
- Japan
- Turkey
- Norway
- Korea South
- Singapore
- India
- Malaysia
- Pakistan

Tight cultures

How "Tight" is Your State?

Researchers ranked states on how they enforced social norms and punished deviants. Higher numbers signify "tighter," more restrictive states.

- Under 40
- 40-49.9
- 50-59.9
- 60-69.9
- 70 & Above

Source: University of Maryland, College Park, 2014.
Cross-Society Understanding

- Cross-society differences shaped by historical disease prevalence:
  - More collectivism
  - More tightness
  - Less mobility

- Emerging evidence during the current pandemic:
  - Tightness predicts higher conformity to local rules
  - Mobility predicts more rapid viral spread
  - Advantages of tight-loose ambidexterity
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Cross-Community Understanding

- Societies are divided into many overlapping cultural communities.
- These communities can be understood as social-cognitive networks.
- A given network can have very different norms.
  - E.g., Who is a legitimate source of authority?
- A given network can have very different practices.
  - E.g., We must celebrate this holiday on this day in this way.
Cross-Community Understanding

- People in different communities have different experiences.
- Communities differ in their social standing and access to power.
- Anxiety increases likelihood of seeing ‘others’ as a problem.
Cross-Community Understanding

- Community differences impact pandemic outcomes.
  - E.g., Public health authorities vs. religious authorities
  - E.g., Practices that contribute to or protect against disease spread.

- But longstanding inequities also contribute to different outcomes.

- And anxieties increase discrimination:
  - Against devalued communities
  - Against communities linked in some way to the disease
  - Even to groups that are also celebrated (e.g., healthcare workers)
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Cross-Person Understanding

Independent view of the self

Interdependent view of the self
Cross-Person Understanding

Independent view of the self

- Linear view of optimism.
- Good luck keeps getting better.
- Bad luck keeps getting worse.

Interdependent view of the self

- Cyclical view of optimism.
- Good luck will turn bad.
- Bad luck will turn good.
Cross-Person Understanding

- During SARS:
  - Canadians more optimistic than Chinese at the start of pandemic.
  - Chinese more optimistic than Canadians at the end of pandemic.

- Defensive pessimism associated with more:
  - Endorsement of traditional Chinese values
  - Distress about SARS
  - Willingness to follow health measures, such as hand-washing

*Ji et al. (2004)*
Cross-Person Understanding

- Pessimistic tendencies part of a cluster of traits, negative affectivity:
  - Neuroticism
  - Anxiety sensitivity
  - Intolerance of uncertainty

- Negative affectivity associated with somatosensory amplification.

- Physical sensations become more salient and even more severe.
  - Symptom generation

Chentsova-Dutton & Ryder (2019)
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Intercultural Communication?

- Again, the unit of analysis is the person-in-context.

- It is potentially dangerous to reduce the person to ‘their group’.

- It is not enough to “just get to know the person”.

- How then do we proceed?
Intercultural Communication?

- Research findings, careful descriptions, even stories can be useful.
- But these are best understood as *possibilities*.
- Only probabilities in certain circumstances, and never certainties.
- We learn to consider more possibilities when encountering others.
Intercultural Communication?

- The **WEIRD**est people in the world?
  - Western
  - Educated
  - Industrialized
  - Rich
  - Democratic
Intercultural Communication?

• What culture should I make it a priority to learn?
  • A locally important minority?
  • A country I frequently visit?
  • The society where my clients live?
  • …?

• Most important to learn about your own culture, as a culture.

• And then seek intercultural experience, with curiosity and humility.
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Q&A

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