Abstract This commentary identifies respects in which the theories of culture adopted in the culture and self and sociocultural traditions of cultural psychology are each constrained, in part, by their psychologically grounded research agendas. While tapping non-rational and thematic aspects of culture, research on culture and the self provides only limited insight into its dynamic and heterogeneous nature and into processes of enculturation. In turn, while capturing the fluid and complex nature of cultural systems, sociocultural work neglects its non-rational and thematic aspects. In both traditions, relatively little attention is given to power. The discourse analysis of family interaction undertaken by Pontecorvo and Fasulo (1999) is shown to overcome many of these limitations. Treating culture as an integrated, complex system which is integral to human interaction, their approach captures processes of cultural creation and change as well as power relations. In conclusion, it is argued that there is a need for greater cross-fertilization of ideas across the diverse traditions of research in culture and psychology, while respecting their distinctive insights and agendas.
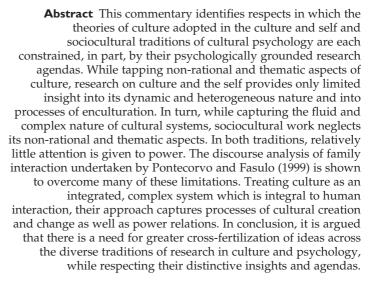
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Joan G. Miller and Nicole Berry
University of Michigan, USA

Culture in Conversation: A Commentary on Pontecorvo and Fasulo's 'Planning a Typical Italian Meal'

A dynamic theory of culture has always been regarded as central to the development of cultural psychology. As early as 1980, Jahoda, for example, predicted that the emergence of a more culturally grounded psychology would depend on advances in culture theory, while Shweder and LeVine used the phrase 'culture theory' in the title of their 1984 volume on cultural psychology to signal a similar insight. Despite a keen theoretical sensitivity to the importance of a sophisticated view of culture, however, the approaches to culture in recent work continue to be hampered by certain weaknesses.

In this essay, we briefly examine stances toward culture adopted in two of the major contemporary viewpoints in cultural psychology: work on culture and self (e.g. Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder & LeVine, 1984); and cognitive work in the sociocultural tradition (e.g. Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 1990). We note respects in which the theories of culture adopted in each tradition are constrained by the goals entailed in pursuing their respective psychologically grounded research agendas. Offering a critical commentary on Pontecorvo and Fasulo's article 'Planning a Typical Italian Meal: A Family Reflection on Culture' (1999), we then focus on ways in which the discourse analysis undertaken by these authors succeeds in capturing some of the dynamic aspects of culture neglected within these contemporary cultural psychology viewpoints. We conclude by underscoring the need to work toward bridging the diverse traditions of research in culture and psychology, while respecting their distinctive insights, perspectives and agendas.

Select Approaches to Culture in Cultural Psychology

Both the culture and self and the sociocultural tradition have close ties with mainstream psychological theory and research. Not only does each of these traditions depend on psychology for its target audience, but mainstream psychology functions both as an important source of inspiration and as an object of criticism. A central agenda of the culture and self tradition has been to challenge the mainstream psychological stance of treating psychological processes as fundamentally culture-free and universal. To achieve this aim, investigators have focused on demonstrating that various existing psychological theories are culturally bound, rather than, as assumed, applying to all of humanity in a timeless way. In turn, within the sociocultural tradition, a central agenda has been to challenge the peripheral role given to context within mainstream psychological theories of cognitive development. To realize this goal, investigators have highlighted both the fundamental dependence of thought on cultural products and processes, and the inadequacy of the present focus on the self-contained individual as the primary unit of psychological analysis. As will be seen, embedding themselves in the psychological context has simultaneously given work in these traditions a central focus and, in certain respects, constrained their insights.[1]

Culture and Self
The tradition of work on culture and self is considered here as includ-

ing research in developmental and social psychology as well as in psychological anthropology and sociolinguistics. It has been concerned with uncovering the implicit cultural grounding of psychological theories of self, emotion and motivation, and with identifying new culturally based models of psychological processes. A prototypical stance adopted within this work is to document cultural variation in certain basic psychological phenomena. To note a few of many examples, research has identified respects in which (a) concerns with spiritual dimensions have not been adequately considered in psychoanalytic theory and in theories of moral judgment, and need to be given greater weight to account for processes of personality development and moral judgment within Indian and Japanese communities (Roland, 1988; Shweder, Much, & Mahapatra, 1997); (b) psychological theories of self-esteem reflect processes of self-enhancement specific to North American populations and are not well suited to capture self processes among Japanese populations, where greater cultural emphasis is placed on self-effacement and self-criticism (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, in press); (c) psychological theories of interpersonal morality and motivation embody an emphasis on voluntarism, individual choice and self-determination that does not account for the qualitatively distinct monistic approaches emphasized within certain Asian cultural populations (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Miller, 1997b).

Within the culture and self tradition, culture tends to be viewed in symbolic terms. It is recognized that cultural phenomena may be non-rational in nature, reflecting more than merely functional constraints. Focus is on documenting respects in which existing psychological theories reflect European–American cultural views and practices and on identifying modes of psychological functioning that reflect contrasting cultural views and practices. To achieve this goal, a frequent strategy is to obtain psychological data from non-western cultural populations that is in a form which can be directly compared with psychological data from European–American samples. This leads to a heavy, though not exclusive, reliance on quantitative research methods and to the adoption of relatively global characterizations of cultural systems that map onto the cultural variation in psychological functioning identified.

Whereas the views of culture adopted in the culture and self tradition have been valuable in working toward the goal of constructing less parochial and more culturally inclusive psychological theory, they also embody certain limitations. Little attention is given to processes of culture change or to the heterogeneous and frequently

conflicting nature of cultural meanings and practices. Rather, there is a tendency to treat cultures as relatively ahistorical and homogeneous. Particularly in work that employs quantitative methods, there is virtually no consideration given to everyday social practices and routines. This results in such quantitative research being unable to account for the processes of enculturation through which culture is communicated and transformed. Finally, the effects of power on access to and control over cultural processes are almost never examined.

Sociocultural Research

Sociocultural research on cognition has emerged over time in multiple intellectual traditions and is associated with theorists such as Cole, Elkonin, Engeström, Lave, Luria, Rogoff, Scribner, Wertsch and Vygotsky and many others. Central to this perspective is the view of higher-order psychological processes as culturally mediated and as emerging in the context of socially organized practical activity (e.g. Cole, 1996, 1998; Rogoff, 1990). Within this viewpoint, psychological functioning is understood to be dependent on individuals' participation in cultural activities and their involvement with cultural tools. As Cole and Engeström (1995) assert, from a sociocultural perspective, 'mind' is regarded not as internal properties of the person but as an 'emergent quality in the continuous interactions between subjects, artifacts, and the world of objects' (p. 21). Cultural processes, in turn, are understood to be historically situated and dependent on the activities of individual agents.

A central contribution of work in the sociocultural tradition is to highlight the new understandings of psychological processes that emerge when the unit of analysis is shifted from a focus on individual psychological dimensions, as is the case in mainstream psychology, to a focus on the person in the context of socially organized and culturally mediated activities. Sociocultural research offers theoretical insight into processes such as apprenticeship, guided participation and situated learning. It details cultural supports that make it possible for individuals to display psychological competencies in interaction with others or in the use of cultural artifacts, without their being able to display these competencies in the absence of such cultural input (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993). Challenging dominant psychological theories of transfer and internalization, work in this tradition highlights the need to view cognition as invariably contextually dependent, with cultural tools that are found across settings accounting for the generality in thought observed.

Within the sociocultural tradition, culture is approached in terms of

its social and material embodiments, such as language, media, computational instruments, and so on, as well as everyday social practices and sociocultural routines, such as letter writing, story telling, tailoring, shopping, and so on. Culture is understood to be grounded in larger sociopolitical contexts, and to change across historical cohorts. In contrast to work on culture and self, sociocultural research challenges the quantitative approach of mainstream psychology in favor of qualitative perspectives and has not been concerned with producing data that are directly comparable to those of mainstream psychology. However, it has tended to retain the focus, characteristic of mainstream psychology, of emphasizing the rational and adaptive nature of cognitive development. This has contributed to its tendency to view culture exclusively in terms of functional demands, affordances and constraints.

Utilizing qualitative methods, the empirical approaches adopted within the sociocultural tradition embody a process-oriented view of culture that has been highly successful in moving psychology toward a more dynamic view of socialization and enculturation. However, sociocultural approaches also may be criticized for a certain incompleteness or narrowness of vision. Apart from considering variation that arises from prior experience or expertise, little consideration is given to individual or group-related variation in the nature of participation in cultural practices. There has also been a tendency to focus primarily on developing cultural competence and to give little attention to the multi-directional aspects of cultural learning. Whereas work in the sociocultural tradition avoids the stereotyping of cultural meaning systems found in the thematic stance of certain quantitative work on culture and self, it does so by maintaining a stance that gives almost no attention to non-rational aspects of cultural meanings and practices and to ways that these contrast in different cultural communities. Finally, as in work on culture and self, relatively little consideration is given to questions of power, control and domination that may impact the nature of cultural processes and individuals' involvement with them.

Summary

In summary, the traditions of cultural psychology under consideration have been highly successful in realizing their goals of providing new ways of understanding the cultural constitution of psychological processes. However, as has been noted, reflecting in part their links with mainstream psychology, these traditions each embody certain limitations in their views of culture that diminish their explanatory

force. Whereas work on culture and self takes into account non-rational and thematic aspects of cultural systems, it fails in many instances to appreciate the dynamic and heterogeneous nature of cultures or to provide insight into enculturation. In turn, whereas work in the socio-cultural tradition recognizes the fluid and complex nature of cultural systems, it overlooks the non-rational and thematic aspects of cultural meanings, and has had only limited success in capturing the multi-directional feedback processes underlying enculturation and socialization. Finally, in both traditions, little or no attention has been given to ways in which power impacts on the structure of cultural practices and individuals' involvement in them.

Understanding Culture through Discourse Analysis

In this section, we critically examine the approaches to culture embod-ied in Pontecorvo and Fasulo's (1999) discourse analysis of a family meal. Our interest is in identifying respects in which their analysis succeeds in overcoming many of the limitations in the treatment of culture adopted within the contemporary viewpoints in cultural psychology discussed. As will be seen, the authors' work illustrates the power of discourse analysis to provide a view of culture that captures many of its dynamic, multifaceted and political dimensions, which tend to be overlooked or downplayed in this other contemporary work.

In their analysis of an ongoing family conversation, Pontecorvo and Fasulo treat culture as an integrated, complex system, which arises naturally as part of human interaction. The authors shift the focus of cultural analysis from attempting to understand the effects of culture (an implicit emphasis of work on culture and self) to simultaneously examining how culture is constituted and reconstituted. From their perspective, understanding enculturation (how culture is produced within the individual) represents the flip-side of understanding the effects of culture.

Individual variation in participation in cultural practices as well as cultural change is evidenced, for example, in the portion of the discourse in which the family members discuss 'what is typically Italian'. In this instance, the daughter, Sofia, inquires about the typical-ity of a hamburger. The mother and father assure her that it is in no way Italian. Yet, as the authors note, the family happens to be eating hamburgers that night. Assuming that traditional Italian foods hold this status because they are prototypical of foods eaten in Italy, the event of the hamburger on the table constitutes an example of individ-

ual deviation from a cultural norm. The entire family, including the young daughter, understands that a dinner regarded as appropriately Italian may differ from what is commonly served at the table: Italians may eat hamburgers and Russian salad, but what they consider as typically Italian is far different. Notably, the discourse reveals the family to be agentic, as they actively reflect on, if not try to resolve, this discrepancy. This portion of the conversation also highlights the need to understand cultural change in terms of shifts in the practice of its members. The discourse analysis points to such variation both as a mechanism through which cultural change occurs and as a marker of its occurrence. It may be inferred that insight can be gained into which practices have changed and given rise to more general shifts in cultural trends through monitoring the everyday practices of individuals in studies conducted over time.

The present analysis also provides a superb example of how to address power in analysis of culture, an issue neglected within both of the traditions of cultural psychology discussed. Culture is shown to be inseparably intertwined with power relations. Individuals do not contribute equally, do not command equal authority over a domain, and their expressions are not equally esteemed. In the family conversation, turns are dictated by role, with the daughter's cultural preferences configured by who gets to talk, what s/he says, and when. The daughter is shown to be trying out ways to behave to please her parents, not the babysitter nor her brother. The parents are the authorities in the conversation. The esteem that accompanies their position is demonstrated by the fact that they are the only participants who dispense approval, with the daughter's cultural preferences heavily informed by theirs.

The discourse analysis also provides insight into the nature of enculturation and socialization, issues that are not well understood within much contemporary work in cultural psychology. The analysis shows individual cultural preferences to be formed in the course of a normal conversation through feedback mechanisms. Within the discussion, the daughter tests her ideas of what is Italian by submitting them for review to her parents. The interaction (re)affirms for her that pasta and fried olives are popularly considered to be Italian, whereas hamburgers and Russian salad are not. More implicitly, the interaction reaffirms her parents' (cultured) ideals of how a girl her age should behave. When she attempts to 'turn the menu page' from the first to the second course, both her parents ignore her. The message here is that Sofia's role is not to set the agenda for the conversation. On the other hand, her parents encourage Sofia when she contributes in ways that they

465

have deemed appropriate. They respond to her comment about what is not Italian, thereby acknowledging it as suitable, and she is praised when she suggests an appropriate second course after her parents have introduced the subject. Highlighting the multi-directional nature of socialization, the discourse analysis reveals that who is being social-ized and how s/he is being socialized may change in the course of the conversation. Thus, it is not only Sofia whose behavior is influenced by her parents, but her parents whose behavior is affected by that of Sofia. Notably, these same types of feedback mechanisms and patterns of mutual influence occur among all the participants in the conversation. The discourse analysis underscores the need to recognize that social-ization and enculturation represent simultaneous processes, with the two processes so enmeshed that they must be approached as inter-twined rather than treated in isolation.

The claim that discourse analysis, like that presented here, allows for a dynamic view of culture which escapes many limitations, however, does not imply that it necessarily results in an infallibly textured or potent portrayal of culture. For example, although 'Planning a Typical Italian Meal' succeeds in portraying enculturation as a dynamic process, it does not adequately address the question of what is Italian. Certain descriptive, concrete details happen to be included in the content of the presented discourse. But the analysis itself does not assess ways that the interaction, the conversational style or even the content of the conversation reflects features that are specifically Italian. This becomes problematic because in the end the authors rely on the reader to interpret the relevant cues him/herself. In this particular analysis, we are given the information that the father is a businessman and that the wife stays home with the children. It is also suggested that the daughter is being socialized to occupy a subordinate position to males and authority. It is very easy to use these examples to substanti-ate stereotypes of Latin cultures as patriarchal, and then to rely on generic concepts of male and female to guide us in our analysis of the conversation. But using a stereotype as a default concept to under-stand the interaction does not result in a sound analysis of what is Italian. Furthermore, the method does not suggest any ways to delin-eate what pertains to this culture. Obviously, everything in the conversation is Italian, but not all parts of culture are equal. As the hamburger/pasta example revealed, hamburgers may be consumed in practice, but they are not esteemed as truly Italian food in the way that pasta is. Not all cultural representations are valued equally, nor are they distributed equally. We can neither understand how Italian culture works nor accurately describe it by treating all aspects manifest

as contributing equally to the culture. In sum, without explicitly addressing questions of the particularity of a practice and its importance, it is difficult to gain insight into the nature and force of cultural meaning systems.

Questions may also be raised about methodological biases that may have impacted on the analysis. Little consideration is given, for example, to the impact which the family's knowledge of being observed had on the conversation. The family's act of turning the camera off once the younger child left the room, as the authors note, suggests that the camera may have led the family to behave in ways that they would not have acted in the course of a family meal that was not being monitored. In this regard, it appears possible, for example, that the length of discussion of the topic of planning the family meal might have been artificially prolonged by a desire to please the researchers or to keep the topic on a relatively neutral issue. The present concerns point to the need to give consideration to the potential reactivity of observational methodologies and to the importance of bringing in-depth ethnographic knowledge to bear in establishing the validity of interpretations being placed on observations.

Conclusions

The discourse analysis undertaken by Pontecorvo and Fasulo, it has been seen, constitutes a highly effective approach for capturing dynamic aspects of culture that are poorly understood in much contemporary work in cultural psychology. Examining ways that culture generates situations, it provides a much needed tool for characterizing cultures both processually and descriptively. It also provides insight into ways that unequal power structures human relations and participation in cultural practices—considerations given little attention even in ethnographic work conducted within the sociocultural tradition.

Limitations observed in the present analysis, however, point to certain challenges for future work. Whereas the authors' approach avoids the stereotypic stance of overly thematic views of culture, it does so by bypassing any attempt to identify culturally specific beliefs, values and understanding systems implicit in the observed interactions and practices. This type of omission, which is also found within the sociocultural tradition, underscores the importance of adopting stances that recognize both thematicity and heterogeneity in cultural systems. The research also highlights the need to be concerned with reducing reactivity and with establishing the validity of interpre-

tations, even in qualitative studies in which explanatory force is achieved through hermeneutical rather than quantitative means.

It may be concluded that it is critically important for the culture and self as well as sociocultural traditions to work toward developing more sophisticated understandings of culture, similar to those captured by the present discourse analysis. This does not imply, however, that research in cultural psychology should center exclusively on qualitative methods. Consideration must be given to the complexities and varieties of research questions under consideration and to the inherently partial answers provided by any one approach. For example, whereas the quantitative methodologies employed in some work in the culture and self tradition constrain the degree to which this work embodies a dynamic view of culture, they also have value in capturing a sophisticated view of certain psychological phenomena. Rather than a homogenization in methodological strategies or in research goals, the present considerations point to the need for creative use of multiple methodologies in work in culture and psychology, and for greater cross-fertilization of ideas across its varied traditions.

Note

1. It should be emphasized that this type of skewing may be observed in other research traditions as well. As has been argued elsewhere (Miller, 1994, 1997a), many anthropological traditions of work in cultural psychology betray somewhat parallel weaknesses in the sophistication of their views of psychological processes.

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Biographies

JOAN G. MILLLER is an adjunct associate professor in the Department of Psychology and an associate research scientist in the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. She received her doctorate in human development from the University of Chicago and held an appointment as Associate Professor of Developmental Psychology at Yale University. She has conducted fieldwork in Mysore, India. Her research interests are in the area of cultural psychology, with a focus on interpersonal motivation, morality and social development. ADDRESS: Joan G. Miller, Institute for Social Research–RCGD, University of Michigan, Box 1248, Ann Arbor, MI 48106–1248, USA. [email: jgmiller@umich.edu]

NICOLE BERRY is currently a third-year graduate student at the University of Michigan in cultural anthropology. She received her Bachelor's degree from the University of South Carolina. She served in the Peace Corps in Costa Rica from 1992 to 1995. Her research interests include the relationship between language and social inequality, social and economic development, cognitive anthropology, Latin America and Chile. ADDRESS: Nicole Berry, Department of Anthropology, 500 South State Street, 1020 LS&A Building, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109–1382, USA. [email: berryn@umich.edu]