SL IB Psychology

Cultural Origins of Behaviour & Cognition

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Overview: What is Culture?

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What is culture?

- **Culture** refers to the products of **socialisation** within any organised group, society or nation and involves a set of **rules, norms and customs** that are agreed by the members of that group
- Culture is **active** rather than passive; each individual contributes to the culture in which they were born – and to the cultures they encounter throughout their life
- Culture is created by people and in turn influences the development of people i.e. it is a **bi-directional process/phenomenon**
- Culture is not **static**: it is subject to changes wrought by time, by advancing technologies, by social change, by geographical change
- Deep culture refers to the **attitudes, beliefs and values** that underpin daily life and habits within that culture; it may not be immediately obvious as it is **inherent** in cultural norms and behaviours which are familiar to those within the culture
- Examples of deep culture include belief in life after death; that cows are sacred; that everyone has the right to free speech
- **Surface culture** is the manifestation of deep culture i.e. **observable** and **tangible** behaviours, customs and rituals
  - *Examples of surface culture include eating food with chopsticks; performing specific dances at festivals; living in houses on stilts*

Culture and psychological research

- In the early days of psychology, research was carried out in Western, **individualistic** countries e.g the USA, the UK, Western Europe
- It was assumed that this research revealed **universal truths** that could be equally applied to all people: this is known as an ***etic*** approach to investigating behaviour
- An **etic** approach is aligned with **ethnocentrism**: attempting to explain all behaviour using samples which only represent one specific culture (usually individualistic)
- An **imposed etic** occurs when for example a Western researcher from an individualistic culture studies a different cultural group and draws conclusions about their behaviour using their **own cultural standards** as a **measure**
- One way of avoiding an etic approach is to conduct research from within a specific culture in terms that are meaningful to that culture: this is known as an **emic** approach to investigating behaviour
- An emic approach is aligned with **cultural relativism**, the idea that only those within a culture can properly explain its behaviour

Conformity: How Does Culture Influence Behaviour?

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What is conformity?

- **Conformity** refers to the behaviour of an individual when faced with (usually) a **majority** (**minority influence** can also produce conformity but it is much less usual than **majority influence**)
- Conformity is a form of **social influence** which is different to **obedience** in that it involves a kind of **group consensus** as to how to behave whereas obedience is a behaviour which stems from following the orders of a **legitimate authority** e.g. teacher, boss, doctor, military commander, police etc.
- **Normative social influence** occurs when people conform to **group social norms** when they want to be included in the group, to feel that they belong (even if at times they secretly do not agree with the group's behaviour)
- **Information social influence** occurs when people conform to **group social norms** because they believe that the group is better informed than they are i.e. they don't know what to do so they just follow what the majority of other people are doing
- It could be argued that conformity is a **positive** force as it helps people to agree; to work together and to form **cohesive** attitudes, beliefs and behaviours e.g. in running a workforce, in making decisions in a meeting, in queuing up for a train or in a shop, in knowing when to stay quiet and when to speak out
- It could be argued that conformity is a **negative** force as it prevents people from acting according to their innermost beliefs; it can result in a loss of identity as the group is surrendered to; it can result in tragedy e.g. if everyone is ignoring a fire alarm when in fact there is a fire in the building

What is the relevance of culture to conformity?

- Conformity is the act of putting aside true beliefs, attitudes and values for the sake of group harmony, so it appears to be more aligned to **collectivist** cultural values as **individualistic** cultures value the individual over the group
- A collectivist culture is one in which the group takes precedence over the individual: family, community and social groups are at the forefront of the attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and values of collectivist cultures
- An individualistic culture is one in which the individual takes precedence over the group: self-reliance, ambition and independence are considered to be positive and desirable **traits** in individualistic cultures
- Researchers have focused on conformity as a **variable** by which to measure **cultural differences** because – as outlined above – the nature of each type of culture may be easily seen in attitudes towards conformity i.e. forming a **hypothesis** based on conformity as a marker of cultural difference appears to be a **valid** place to start

Which research studies investigate culture and conformity?

- **Smith & Bond (1996)** – conformity may be higher in collectivist cultures
- **Takano & Sogon (2008)** – conformity may not be higher in Japan, which is a collectivist culture

Smith & Bond (1996) and Takano & Sogon (2008) are available as separate Key Studies – just navigate the Cultural Origins of Behaviour & Cognition section of this topic to find them (Two Key Studies of Culture & its Influence on Behaviour)

Worked example

SAQ (SHORT ANSWER QUESTION) - 9 MARKS

Outline one effect of the influence of culture on behaviour and cognition using one study to support your answer. [9]

The question does not require you to provide explanations but to give an outline of both theory and study. Here is an example of a paragraph, outlining a suitable study to use in the question:

Takano & Sogon (2008) were interested in testing the extent to which the Japanese are conformist as this has long been something of a stereotype directed at Japanese people. The participants, 297 Japanese university students from Tokyo, were split into 40 groups, each consisting of between seven and nine participants, with each group having just one naïve participant. The students then participated in Asch's classic conformity experiment involving identification of line length with the dependent variable measured as the number of conforming answers on trials when the wrong answer was given.

Two Key Studies of Culture & its Influence on Behaviour: Smith & Bond (1996) & Levine & Norenzayan (1999)

Key Study: Smith & Bond (1996)

Aim: To investigate **conformity** as a product of **culture**

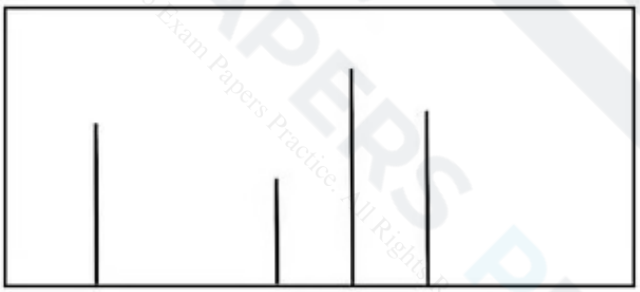
Participants: The study was a **meta-analysis** which in total comprised 133 studies, from 17 countries which **represented** both collectivist and individualistic cultures. The countries included France, Fiji, Ghana, Hong Kong, Japan, the UK, and the USA

Procedure:

- A meta-analysis is a **quantitative research** method which uses the data from previously published studies on the same topic, in this case conformity rates as measured via the **Asch paradigm (1951)**
- This meta-analysis used statistics to analyse the findings of **cross-cultural replications** of Asch's original study (which in itself had nothing to do with culture)
- Smith & Bond combined the findings of these studies to draw an overall conclusion about rates of conformity in collectivist cultures compared to individualistic cultures
- The findings are expressed as an **effect size**, in the case of this study this was linked to overall rate of conformity per country

Asch (1951) is a classic study of conformity; the procedure is as follows:

- A **naïve participant** is asked to state which of three lines to the right of a card is the same length as the line on the left of the card, for example:



- The participant is tested individually in a room with seven **confederates** and is always seated towards the end of the group
  The experimenter then asks each participant in turn to state which of the three lines on the right of the card are the same length as the target line on the left of the card
- In the **critical** trials the confederates always give the same wrong answer, so the **dependent variable** is measured as the number of **conforming** answers to the wrong answer
- Giving the wrong answer is evidence of **normative social influence** as, Asch concluded, the participants give the wrong answer to an easy task in order to be accepted and liked by the majority

Results:

- The highest rates of conformity were seen in more collectivist countries: the effect size from studies in Fiji was the highest at 2.48; Hong Kong scored 1.93 and Japan scored 1.42
- The lowest rates of conformity were found in individualist countries: the effect size from studies in France was 0.56; The Netherlands scored 0.74; the USA scored 0.90

Conclusion: Conformity may be affected by culture with collectivist cultures showing more conformity than individualistic cultures.

Evaluation of Smith & Bond (1996)

Strengths

- A meta-analysis provides a large amount of quantitative data from which researchers can extract information highlighting patterns and trends in behaviour which should be **reliable** due to the **statistical power** of large numbers
- Using replications of Asch's conformity research means that the researchers had access to the results of studies which used a **standardised procedure** which should ensure that there is in-built **reliability**

Weaknesses

- The reliability of the findings is compromised somewhat by the fact that there was no **consistency** in terms of numbers of Asch replications per country: the meta-analysis used only two studies from France and Fiji but used 79 from the USA
- A meta-analysis is a rather 'cold' method to use for investigating human behaviour as it is purely statistical and cannot provide any explanation as to why conformity might occur more in collectivist cultures

Key terms:

- **Meta-analysis**
- **Asch paradigm**
- **Effect size**

Key Study: Takano & Sogon (2008)

Aim: To investigate the idea that the Japanese are **conformist**

Participants: 297 university students from Japan who belonged to the same college clubs (these did not include sports clubs)

Procedure:

- The participants were split into 40 groups, each consisting of between seven and nine participants: each group had one naïve participant
- The students participated in Asch's classic conformity experiment involving identification of line length (see the above description of this procedure in Smith & Bond, 1996)

Results:

- The participants gave the wrong (conforming) answer in 12 out of a total of 18 critical trials, with a conformity rate of 25.2% (less than in Asch's original research which showed a conformity rate of 32%)
- 14 participants did not conform at all in any of the critical trials, and 3 conformed in all 12 critical trials

Conclusion: The idea that the Japanese are highly conformist may be incorrect and may be based on outdated ideas about culture

Evaluation of Takano & Sogon (2008)

Strengths

- The results of this study help to puncture cultural **stereotypes** which suggest that all collectivist cultures – and particularly Japan - are conformist
- The study used Asch's original **standardised procedure** which means that future **replications** of the study could be conducted to check for **reliability**

Weaknesses

- The participants were from the same university and attended the same non-sporting clubs which makes the results difficult to generalise as the sample does not represent a wider population
- As with Asch's original procedure, there was no interaction between group members which is not a true reflection of how an individual is influenced by the majority in real life which means that the study lacks **external validity**

Key terms:

- **Naïve participant**
- **Conformist**
- **External validity**

Hofstede Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede Cultural Dimensions

What are Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions?

- Between 1971 and 1973 Geert Hofstede, a professor from Maastricht University conducted a huge, global **survey** of IBM employees focused on **cultural attitudes** and **behaviours**
- The survey was in the form of a **questionnaire** to which over 60,000 people from over 50 countries responded
- Hofstede came to the conclusion that **cultural dimensions** could be used universally to describe the **norms** for behaviour within cultures
- From the results of the survey Hofstede was able to categorise cultural dimensions, initially into four broad categories:

- It is possible to visit Hofstede's website to compare cultural dimensions between countries: just visit this link: Country comparison tool
- When you land on the site just choose four countries to compare – the list of cultural dimensions will then be shown as percentages with an explanation as to what this means per country underneath the graph
- A fifth cultural dimension was added – **Long-term orientation**, which is the extent to which a culture values behaviours which contribute to long-term achievements e.g. persistence, perseverance as opposed to **short-term gains**
- The dimensions are revised frequently i.e. in 2010, **Indulgence vs. restraint** was added to describe the extent to which a culture enjoys pleasurable experiences as opposed to denying pleasures and **delaying gratification**

Evaluation of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Strengths

- A large-scale, global survey produces a huge amount of **quantitative data** which means that the results should be **reliable** and **generalisable**
- The research is constantly reviewed and updated which means that it is unlikely to suffer from **temporal validity**

Weaknesses

- The findings could be said to be overly **reductionist** as they attempt to explain complex behaviours via rather **rigid** and **inflexible** categories
- Although the sample of IBM employees is large it does not equally **represent** all countries and cultures - e.g. more employees from the USA and developed countries

Which research studies investigate cultural dimensions?

- **Smith & Bond (1996)** – conformity may be higher in collectivist cultures
- **Levine & Norenzayan (1999)** – pace of life may be different in individualistic and collectivist cultures

Smith & Bond (1996) and Levine & Norenzayan (1999) are available as separate Key Studies – just navigate the Cultural Origins of Behaviour & Cognition section of this topic to find them (Two Key Studies of Cultural Dimensions)

Worked example

ERQ (EXTENDED RESPONSE QUESTION) - 22 marks

Evaluate research into cultural dimensions. [22]

The question requires you to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the theory and relevant research. Here is an exemplar paragraph:

The cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism as measured in Levine & Norenzayan (1999) appears to support the idea that cultures may operate a different pace of life i.e. collectivist cultures have a slower pace. However, there are several limitations in the way that these observations were obtained, and which question the validity of the findings. For example, the measurement of the time it took for the person serving in the post office to complete the transaction did not account for waiting time or for individual differences e.g. the postal worker may simply always work at a certain speed whilst their colleagues may be quicker or slower. Plus, the speed of transaction could have been the result wanting to clear a long queue rather than a general measure of the pace of life. Conditions of pavements and crowdedness at certain times of the day could also be extraneous variables that affected walking pace. As the observations were only conducted once per place then it is impossible to ascertain the extent to which the observed pace of life is generally representative of that country/culture.

Two Key Studies of Cultural Dimensions: Levine & Norenzayan (1999) & Smith & Bond (1996)

Key Study: Levine & Norenzayan (1999)

Aim: To investigate the **cultural dimension** of individualism/collectivism on **pace of life** i.e. how quickly/slowly people and organisations move, in a sample of large cities across the world. There were four **hypotheses**:

- Cities with a higher level of economic vitality and wealth will have a faster pace of life
- The hotter the city, the slower the pace of life will be
- Individualistic cultures will be faster than collectivist cultures
- The larger the city, the faster the pace of life

Participants: Cities from a sample of 31 countries across the world, both individualistic e.g. USA and collectivist e.g. Japan

Procedure: The researchers recruited students travelling abroad or returning home and other psychologists in the field of **cross-cultural research** to **observe** and collect **data** for the study. There were three specific **categories** of behaviour to be observed:

1. Walking speed of pedestrians
2. Speed of service at the post office
3. Accuracy of clocks in banks, selected at random

Results:

- The fastest pace of life was observed in Switzerland with countries in Western Europe and Japan also having high scores
- The countries with scores from the middle of the list included the USA, Eastern European countries, and more recently industrialised Asian countries
- The slowest pace of life was seen in Latin American counties, the Middle East, and non-industrialised Asian countries
- Therefore, the four hypotheses were supported by the results, for example the hotter countries were slower; economic vitality and affluence **predicted** pace of life, with the wealthier countries being faster

Conclusion: The individualistic/collectivist cultural dimension does appear to be a good predictor of pace of life in cities.

Evaluation of Levine & Norenzayan (1999)

Strengths

- A huge amount of **quantitative data** was collected which increases the **robustness** of the data, meaning that it should in turn be reliable
- There were some clear differences between individualistic and collectivist cultures in the findings which means that the study has **internal validity**

Limitations

- There are myriad **extraneous variables** that could affect the validity of the findings e.g. people may walk slowly if they are tired or have a disability; some post officer workers might simply wish to finish their shift on time and so may hurry more than at the start of their shift

- There may simply have been too many observers, spread too far across the globe e.g. one observer's estimation of 'fast' or 'slow' is unlikely to have been identical to every other observer which would mean a lack of **inter-rater reliability**

Key terms:

- **Pace of life**
- **Economic vitality**
- **Inter-rater reliability**

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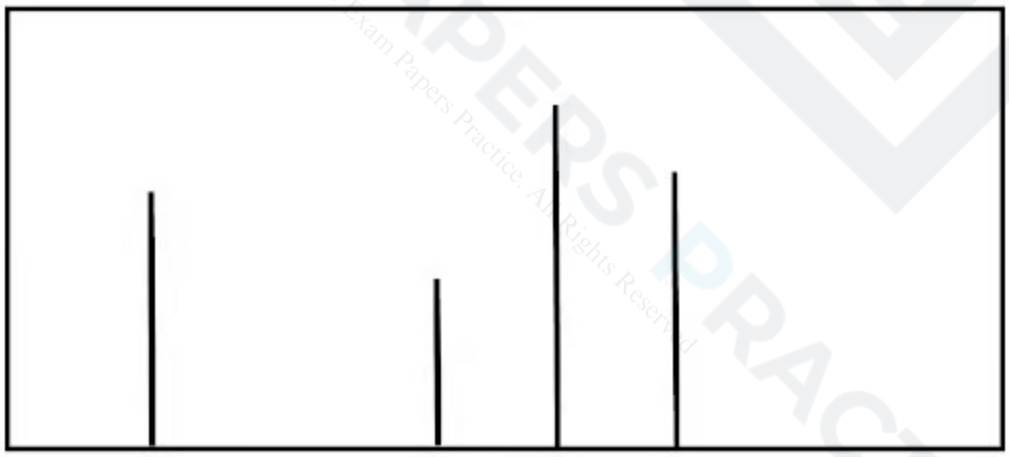

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