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## Cultural Psychology (General) (h1)

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### Main Sections

Definition

Historical Background

Key Issues

Case Studies of Cultural Psychology

- Racial psychology

- Neoliberalism

- Mental disturbance

- Sense of time

Methodology and Cultural Psychology

- Objectivity

- Qualitative methodology

Cross-Cultural Psychology From The Perspective Of Cultural Psychology

- Comparing cross-cultural psychological research to cultural psychological research

Micro Cultural Psychology

- The contrast between cultural psychology and micro cultural psychology

Elucidating culture in psychological research on Chinese psychology

Agency

Politics and Cultural Psychology: Psychological and Social Change

DEFINITION

Cultural psychology emerged on the contemporary academic scene in the 1980s as a transdisciplinary field that studies the relation between culture and psychology. It arose as a corrective to mainstream psychology -- which minimizes the cultural organization of human psychology -- and also to cross-cultural psychology -- which employs positivistic methodology to reduce culture and psychology to abstract, fragmented variables.

Cultural psychology itself contains several strands that derive from different intellectual traditions (Ratner, 1999, 2011, a, b, c). In the space here it is impossible to survey all of them. Instead, I shall articulate certain select principles that have proven useful for understanding culture, psychology, and their relation.

These may be summarized as follows: Culture and psychology are internally integrated and continuous. They are on the same plane; two sides of the same coin; they are interdependent. Psychology is part of culture, it is a cultural element. It is necessary and functional for constructing/maintaining culture; and it takes on the characteristics of the culture that it constructs. Psychology is the subjective side of culture, while cultural factors are the operating mechanisms of psychology. Psychology is not simply in culture in the sense that it is surrounded by a cultural context. Rather psychology is the subjectivity of culture; it is cultural psychology, or cultural subjectivity that incarnates and promulgates the features of cultural factors as its content and operating mechanism.

Since psychology embodies features of culture, where culture is stratified into unequal classes, and dominated by a wealthy, powerful upper class, psychology takes on these characteristics. The politics that drive culture are similarly embedded in psychological phenomena. Vygotsky stated this clearly in the case of psychology in class society:

Since we know that each person's individual experience is conditioned by the role he plays in his environment, and that it is the class membership which also defines this role, it is clear that class membership defines man's psychology and man's behavior.

Social stimuli that have been established in the course of historical development...are permeated through and through with the class structure of society that generated them and serve as the class organization of production. They are responsible for all of human behavior, and in this sense we are justified in speaking of man's class behavior (Vygotsky, 1997a, pp. 211-212).

This is what the discipline of cultural psychology studies. It requires a serious, systematic understanding of social conditions, social factors, social structure, and politics. It looks for these in the genesis and content of psychological phenomena (Ratner, 2011a, b, c).

Cultural psychology adopts a structural-functionalist standpoint. It regards culture that forms psychology as a concrete system of interdependent, interpenetrating factors -- specifically social institutions, cultural artifacts, and cultural concepts. Each factor affects the others and expresses them through itself. The concrete character of these systemic cultural factors is imparted to psychological phenomena. Cultural psychology utilizes a methodology of cultural hermeneutics to elucidate the full cultural system that is implicated in a particular cultural element.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Cultural psychology springs from four main sources.

1) 18th & 19th century human sciences (e.g., Herder's work; the study of language and society). These scholars emphasized the distinctiveness of human culture. They said that social life, language and its symbolic and cognitive properties make humans qualitatively different from (superior to) animals. Herder wrote: "The difference lies not in quantity nor in the enhancement of powers but in a completely different orientation and evolution of all powers." This historical tradition has been carried on by historians who focus on psychological issues such as self, gender, emotions, senses. The history of "mentalities" by the French Annales historical school in the 1920s was a major force in pioneering this line of historical-psychological research (Burguiere, 2009). This tradition has also been carried on by sociologists who study emotions, childhood, and other psychological topics. The first cultural psychologist was Al-Biruni (973-1048), who has also been called the first anthropologist. He was a Persian scholar (natural scientist and social scientist) who wrote a thorough ethnography of Indian mentality (published in English as Albiruni's India, 1993) using phenomenological methodology. (I am indebted to Mohamed Elhammoumi for this reference, and many others.)

2) Sociocultural psychology of Vygotsky, Luria, Leontiev, which became popular in the 1980s after publication of Vygotsky's Mind in Society in 1978.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological psychology drew on and contributed to this source.

3) Psychological anthropology of Shweder, Geertz, D'Andrade, Levine, Super & Harkness, Catherine Lutz, M. Rosaldo, and Kleinman that emerged during the 1980s (Kleinman & Good, 1985; Shweder & LeVine, 1984).

4) The sociology of Durkheim, Marx, and Bourdieu. Durkheim and Levy-Bruhl argued that socially formed "collective representations" of things act as filters which structure our thinking, perceptions and sensations. Collective representations define the nature of things; they comprise the categories into which we place things; they form our expectations of how things will act; they guide our behavior. They are generated in social practice, vary with it, and are man-made. Yet they are emergent collective products which transcend individual beliefs and acts.

Marx & Engels developed a social philosophy of the individual. They argued that humans are essentially social. They are not primarily (primordially) individuals first and then aggregate into groups, as Adam Smith maintained (Sayers, 2007).

Cultural psychology flourished briefly for a decade, with an impressive outpouring of theoretical and empirical research. However, it was undercut in the 1990s by an alternative perspective. Ratner (1993, 1999, 2008, & 2011) designates this alternative perspective as micro cultural psychology. Micro cultural psychology reframed the definition of culture, the manner in which culture influences psychology, the nature of agency, and the use of qualitative methodologies to study cultural psychology.

It did so under the name of cultural psychology. However, micro cultural psychology diverted and diminished the realization of the fruitful cultural psychology that showed promise in the 1980s.

After explaining cultural psychology, I shall introduce its differences with micro cultural psychology and cross-cultural psychology.

## KEY ISSUES in Cultural Psychology

### Psychological Theory

Cultural psychology is a psychological theory. It is also a cultural theory. It explains what culture is, what its predominant factors are, how it is structured,

who controls culture, why it came into existence (i.e., its function for humans), why humans need to maintain culture in their behavior and psychological activity, how psychology is generated and organized by culture, and how psychology is vital for culture.

Cultural psychological theory goes beyond mere empiricism of correlating social factors and psychological phenomena. Such empiricism – as practiced by cross-cultural psychologists -- has no theory of culture or of psychology. This is true even of interesting and important empiricist research that establishes the association of culture and IQ. As valuable as this finding is for refuting nativistic explanations of IQ, it does not explicate the cultural basis, character, and function of human IQ.

An indication of cultural psychological theory is Shweder's (1990, p. 1) statement, "Cultural psychology is the study of the way cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, transform, and permute the human psyche."

### A Darwinian Argument for Cultural Psychology: Cultural Psychology is Darwinian Psychology

To explain why culture is central to our psychology, cultural psychological theory employs Darwinian principles. Simply put, culture is our environment, our adaptive organ, our survival mechanism. Culture is collective, coordinated behavior and thinking. According to Darwin, an organism's features are selected by its environment. Features that help the organism survive in the particular environment are supported, while those that are incompatible with environmental requirements are unsustainable. Applying Darwinism to psychology, it follows that psychology must have features that are congruent with the cultural environment. This means that psychology must be collectively formed and coordinated. It cannot be rooted in individual, natural mechanisms that are independent of culture.

Attributing psychology to non-cultural processes and having non-cultural features violates Darwinian environmental selection/determination. Ironically, Darwinian psychology is cultural psychology – because culture is the human environment – it is not evolutionary psychology. Evolutionary psychology contradicts the fundamental premise of Darwin's argument, that organisms develop attributes which are congruent with their environment (Penn, et al., 2008).

if our behavioral mechanisms were not cultural and did not generate distinctly cultural behavior, culture would collapse and we would forego its benefits.

It is consistent with Darwinian adaptationism-functionalism that human beings have different kinds of mental and behavioral processes from animals, and that the mechanism which generates these features is also different from those in animals -- because our environment is different from theirs. It is anti-Darwinian for evolutionary psychologists to insist that animal mechanisms of genetic mutation by which animals adapt to the natural environment are the only mechanism by which all organisms survive in all environments. Such a view ignores the specific character and influence of the organisms' environment, which is the essence of Darwinism. Evolutionary psychologists are pretenders to the throne of Darwinism; they are illegitimate heirs of Darwinism; they are imposters (poseurs) of Darwinism (Ratner, 2006, pp. 201-209).

Culture is not simply one variable that psychologists can add to their arsenal of other variables. Culture is the human way of life. Consequently, our behavior and its mechanisms must be fundamentally and thoroughly cultural. They cannot be marginally, partially, and superficially cultural, for that would render them insufficient to meet the vast, profound needs of cultural life. They would be insufficiently adaptable to the cultural environment, which, in Darwinian terms, would be fatal.

The discipline of cultural psychology investigates the ways in which psychology, subjectivity, mentality, consciousness is cultural, depends on culture, is required by culture, is generated by culture, constructs and maintains culture, and embodies the characteristics of culture. Cultural psychology is a reconceptualization of human psychology in light of our distinctive cultural existence. We construe human psychology as an emergent phenomenon, a new creation, that is designed to construct and utilize distinctively cultural things (artifacts, rules, symbols, structures). Gordon explained this with regard to emotions earlier.

Human psychology is not analogous to animal behavior. It is not an extension of animal behavior applied to new situations. Human psychology is a distinctively new kind of behavioral mechanism that is required by cultural life.

Even human biology is cultural in accordance with Darwinian environmentalism. Our biology must adapt to our unique cultural environment. In fact, the social brain hypothesis argues that the unique structure and functioning of the human cortex evolved to master social tasks demanded by the cultural environment. [Humana biology is non-determining with respect to behavior/psychology, and also with respect to disease. Contrary to popular and medical opinion, genes do not determine or predispose to physical disease. For the vast majority of diseases, one's genome has very little affect on whether one will contract a disease:

<http://www.bioscienceresource.org/commentaries/article.php?id=46> ]

### Cultural Factors and Psychology

A major principle of cultural psychology is that the cultural form of environment requires, stimulates, supports, and organizes uniquely human capacities and mechanisms that generate cultural behavior and cultural products. These unique behavioral capacities and mechanisms are psychological phenomena. Psychology is the new operating mechanism for a new kind of organism in a new kind of environment. The new environment is culture and the new kind of organism is a social organism; psychology must be a social behavioral mechanism that generates social behavior in a social environment. Since psychology is selected – generated – by culture, it is important to understand the specific nature of culture in order to understand psychology.

The cultural environment is essentially one that consists of shared, coordinated, supportive behavior which combines the strengths of individuals into a supra-individual structure (institution) which is far more powerful than a sequence of separate individuals primarily acting on their own. A group of people working to lift a heavy load is capable of lifting far more than separate individuals working on their own, on their own behalf. A group of hunters that shares information about the behavior and location of some prey can catch far more prey than single individuals can.

Coordinating behavior in accordance with a common objective requires shared knowledge, common concepts, symbols, language, and behavioral norms.

Coordinating behavior and speaking a common language require shared intentions and also the ability to comprehend intentions. I must grasp that you are trying to catch that animal in order to work with you on catching it. I must know that you are trying to lift that load in order to work with you.

Culture is not reified social entities, it is active, coordinated, intentional, symbolic behavior.

Cultural behavior is structured in enduring forms such as institutions, artifacts, and cultural concepts. This makes it objective, regular, predictable, and enduring. These attributes are necessary for coordinated, cooperative behavior. It cannot be free-floating, amorphous, transient, personal/idiosyncratic, or spontaneous. These attributes would subvert the cohesion necessary for coordination, and cooperation.

Cultural behavior is structured without being reified. It is structured through common subjectivity, or socius, or habitus which are objectified in institutions, artifacts, and concepts but are not reified. Subjectivity/psychology designs and maintains cultural factors and always has the potential to revise cultural them.

This integral system of capacities, activities, and objectified cultural factors makes us social beings. To be social is to be linked to other individuals in an integral fashion that constitutes a new type of being. Sociality is not simply individuals interacting; it is a new kind of individual in new forms of relationships with others. To be social is to be linked with other individuals in and through a social system/institution/process; it is not an interaction of one independent individual with another. Sociality is a complex, “higher,” emergent social process that supersedes the individual and configures him within a social process that is greater than himself. Sociality is not reducible to individual processes. Tribal councils, unions, governments, corporate structures are ways that people are linked together through superordinate administrative bodies and social policies which set the parameters of social interaction. (Sociality is mediated through objective social structures: e.g., the quality of your neighborhood school depends upon educational budgets which depend upon income taxes which depend upon employment trends which depend upon investment decisions by corporate executives. Consequently, the decision by a CEO to cut jobs in Southern California affects the quality of your school in Northern California through this complex social structure.) Interpersonal, one-on-one interaction is not the model of sociality – the CEO, for example does not directly interact with the administrator of the local school to affect its quality. Interpersonal interaction does not rise to the level of complexity that sociality has. (In fact, as I have argued in Ratner, 2011a, b, c, interpersonal interactions derive from complex macro processes.) Nor would interpersonal interaction provide the benefits, requirements, and stimulation that complex, institutionalized sociality provides. The more complex the social relations that link individuals, the stronger and more supportive they are for participants, and the greater are the demands for complex subjective/psychological functions to perceive, understand, remember, and feel the social relations that comprise the cultural environment.

This new social creature in new modes of interaction is called a socius by James Baldwin, an American psychologist/philosopher, in 1895. The *socius* connotes a social self, a self of personal values, sanctions, and duties, in which all individuals by their very nature participate. Being social is a new order of life that goes beyond the individual to create a new kind of body, a social body. Our social body adds a new quality to our existence. It transforms us from a physical being to a conscious, thinking, symbolizing, creative, willful being (Ratner, 1991, chaps. 1, 4). As Vygotsky said: "A human being as a specific biotype is transformed into a human being as a sociotype; an animal organism becomes a human personality." "The biological, by means of social factors, melds into the social; the biological and organic into the personal; the `natural,' `absolute,' and



unconditioned into the conditioned. This is the true material of psychology" (Vygotsky, 1993, pp. 160, 155).

All the richness and advance of human civilization depends upon people having a social body that reconstitutes them as social organisms. Indeed, the socius is the foundation of individuality. Individual capacities derive from our social existence. This social psychology was developed by Baldwin later by scholars such as Vygotsky and Janet (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000 ). Janet said that higher mental processes such as memory are first carried out externally and only subsequently become available as internal, private mental functions: "all social psychological laws have two aspects: an exterior part concerning other people, an interior part concerning ourselves. Almost always... the second form is posterior to the first one." Vygotsky similarly said, "The social moment in consciousness is primary in time as well as in fact. The individual aspect is constructed as a derived and secondary aspect on the basis of the social aspect and exactly according to its model" (Vygotsky, 1997b, p. 77). "Essential is not that the social role can be deduced from the character, but that the social role creates a number of characterological connections" (ibid., p. 106).

Culturally-derived psychology/subjectivity is cultural not only in being stimulated by culture, but in being a cultural phenomenon. In other words, culture does not simply stimulate some innate psychological tendency that pre-exists culture as an individual phenomenon. Culture constitutes psychology as a cultural phenomenon in form and content. Baldwin (1913, p. 140) emphasized this in stating that "the character, ends, and objects of thought and life are collective."

Consistent with Darwin's thinking, human cultural environment requires a compatible cultural organism equipped with a compatible behavioral mechanism. The mechanism of human (cultural) behavior must be a cultural phenomenon. It cannot be a natural mechanism that simply responds to a cultural environment. Human behavioral mechanisms match their environment just as animal mechanisms match their natural environment. If would not work, and would be anti-Darwinian, if humans in their cultural environment utilized natural behavioral mechanisms which animals use to function in their natural environments.

With coordinated, cooperative cultural activity being the basis of human psychology, it is imperative to maintain cohesive, organized, integral, structured cultural factors in order to enhance the development of our subjectivity and psychology. It is not just the common content of culture that draws people together in mutual support, it is also the act of forming and participating in common, coordinated, cooperative, structured, enduring, complex activity that

makes people work together as sociuses with joint subjectivities. This kind of social activity is what stimulates and elicits advanced psychological functions such as thinking, remembering, perceiving, emoting.

Gordon, (1981, pp. 563, 562) explains that "Social life produces emergent dimensions of emotion that resist reduction to properties inherent in the human organism...Socially emergent dimensions of emotion transcend psychological and physiological levels of analysis in terms of (1) origin, (2) temporal framework, (3) structure, and (4) change." "Although each person's experience of emotion has idiosyncratic features, culture shapes the occasion, meaning, and expression of affective experience. Love, pity, indignation, and other sentiments are socially shared patterns of feeling, gesture, and meaning."

Culture must be maintained in order to enhance society and psychology. (I am speaking here of culture in general, not any particular historical culture. Many particular cultures degrade society and psychology.) Fragmentation, divisiveness, egoism, ethnocentrism, and similar anti-group practices degrade culture and deprive individuals of its social and psychological benefits.

A good example of a specific common culture is French public education from 1881 which defined the school as the place where national unity would be forged, where the children of peasants (who spoke a variety of regional dialects and usually followed religious dictates) would become citizens/patriots. The school was to be the agent of acculturating children into a shared culture in which they could all participate. The goal of its pedagogy was to instill a common republican political identity in children from a diversity of backgrounds. The school was to effect a transition from private to public, from the world of the locality and the family to that of the nation. Teachers were the "missionaries" charged with converting their pupils to the wonders of science and reason and the reasonableness of republican principles. A shared language, culture, ideological formation, and nation was to be the outcome of the educational process. Uniforms were often used as a way of facilitating common culture and overcoming class differences in clothing.

This kind of cultural solidarity is crucial for obtaining the benefits of cultural sharing, stimulation, support. Outsiders who lacked the common language, identity, purpose could not coordinate with those that did, and would not receive the stimulation and support that culture brings. Of course, common culture can be refined to incorporate new elements; however, the refinements would constitute a new solidarity that was shared by the members. New elements would not be compartmentalized into their own, separate spheres because this would isolate those members and fragment the culture, thus weakening it.

The foregoing description indicates that culture includes subjectivity, intentionality, individual activity, and psychology. This integration is emphasized by sociologists who study social institutions: “An institution links together different orders and realms of social life, notably the agentic with the structural, the symbolic with the material, and the micro with the meso and the macro structures of social organization” (Mohr & White, 2008, p. 486).

The socius is our subjectivity, it is not simply our external environment. Our psychology does not simply exist within culture; psychology is informed by culture, it is cultural psychology; culture exists within psychology. Similarly, we are not simply animals who live in a cultural environment; we are cultural animals in the sense that our animal being has been acculturated and transformed.

Pred (1984) provides a more specific model of culture and psychology from the standpoint of geography. He begins with a thorough description of culture as emergent sociality that configures individual psychology:

Social structure is comprised of those generative rules and power relations - including the control over material, symbolic or authoritative resources - that are already built into a specific historical and human geographical situation, or into an historically and geographically specific social system. The rules and power relations of social structure do not only constrain and enable human agency and practice. They also emerge out of human agency and practice. A social structure's component rules may be formal or informal. Whatever their nature, these learned and humanly produced rules form the underlying grammar of activity and behavior in particular contexts. The power relations of a social structure may exist among different individuals, among different groups or classes, among different institutions, and among individuals or groups on the one hand, and institutions on the other. Insofar as power relations may differ in their geographical extent, structuration processes may simultaneously occur at multiple spatial levels, interpenetrating with one another through the practices associated with mediating institutions or individuals (Pred, 1984, p. 281).

Pred's description of culture is more thorough and specific than the typical notion of culture as shared customs that are historically transmitted. Pred

identifies power relations in organized social structures. Moreover, the power relations that define a society permeate individuals and groups at all different levels of society, e.g., macro institutional, micro interpersonal levels, in various social spaces. Pred emphasizes that features of cultural factors form the grammar of individuals' activity in particular situations. "Power relations cannot be separated from the realm of action and everyday practice [manifested in]...the indirect control of who does what, when, and where;" and "what people know (and are able to say), and how they perceive and think" (pp. 290, 289). Even "independent" activities bear the imprint and limitations of cultural factors: "There are always culturally arbitrary dispositions or elements of practical knowledge associated with the creation and definition of 'independent' projects that can be acquired only via socialization, or path intersections with institutional projects (ibid., p. 286)." Pred perceptively observes that, power relations always contain an "underside" of subjectivity that accords with positions of power.

Pred (p. 285) makes the important point that structured, political cultural factors structure action, not only by encouraging it, but also negatively by limiting alternatives to given forms. This takes the form of limiting knowledge and competencies that can envision alternatives. (I have called this the psychology of oppression; Ratner, 2011b). Pred identifies five types of culturally shaped "unknowing" that serve this political function.

- (1) The unknown, and not possible to know, in terms of being totally unknown to all or some local inhabitants.
- (2) The not understood in terms of not being within the frame of meaning of all or certain local inhabitants.
- (3) The hidden in terms of being hidden from certain local inhabitants.
- (4) The undiscussed, in terms of being taken for granted as true or natural by all or some local groups.
- (5) The distorted, in terms of being known only in a distorted fashion by all or certain members of the local population.

Of course, the status quo is not monolithic or immune to critique and challenge. "These daily-path experiences, interactions, and encounters occasionally result in the discovery of other long-term institutional role possibilities that, depending on the basis of a person's biographical history and competition from other individuals, one may or may not have a realistic chance of entering into. Moreover, these daily-path encounters help one to define and redefine oneself, to renew and initiate strengths and weaknesses, and to form intentions" (p. 287). However, discovering viable alternatives to the status quo is difficult given the positive and negative mechanisms the status quo has at its

disposal to enforce conformity. (The absence of viable proposals to solve current economic, ecological, and psychological crises – and the ease with which people fall victim to false, superficial solutions -- testifies to this point.)

Pred makes the important point that social structure determines human's interaction with nature. Consequently, living in a balanced relationship with nature requires transforming the social structure, it cannot be accomplished through technical means alone – such as green energy and organic food production: “Because the transformation of nature is inseparable from the local expression of structuration, from the historically contingent becoming of place, it cannot be understood unless the prevailing power relations at the core of local social structure are identified” (p. 289).<sup>1</sup>

### Case Studies of Cultural Psychology

The general principles of cultural psychology we have been discussing are meant to elucidate the specific cultural origins, characteristics, and function of particular psychological phenomena. These observations explain, describe, and predict particular psychological phenomena. These cultural observations also lead to effective strategies for enhancing psychological phenomena and solving psychological problems. We shall demonstrate these uses of cultural psychology in three “in vivo” case studies.

#### Racial psychology

An excellent case study comes from historian Jennifer Ritterhouse's account of how White psychology was generated by the slave system (its laws, values, institutionalized power and wealth and control over property) in the United States. After blacks had been legally freed and made citizens, Southern whites sought to maintain their rule over blacks through informal cultural rules known as racial etiquette (Ritterhouse, 2006). Racial etiquette included demeanor on side-walks (blacks were to defer to whites), sexual behavior, play, names (“Sir” vs. “boy”) and eating behavior. Violations of racial etiquette were met by beatings and lynchings. Indeed, “as many as a quarter of the 4,715 lynchings known to have taken place in the South between 1882 and 1946 resulted from breaches of racial etiquette that were seldom crimes” (Ritterhouse, 2006, p. 36). A particular psychology was generated by racial etiquette, and it exemplifies how cultural factors are the origins, operating system, characteristics, and function of psychological phenomena.

One example of the cultural psychology of Southern whites was their acceptance of lynching blacks as just punishment for violating the cultural codes. Whites eagerly attended lynchings and derived pleasure from watching black men hanged from a tree. In Fort Lauderdale, Fla. in 1935 a white woman, Marian Jones, claimed that Reuben Stacey had attacked her. A mob of 30 armed men took Stacey to be lynched. Word of this spread and brought thousands of curious spectators, including women and children, to watch him be shot and hanged. Excitement was rife among the crowd and photographs showed smug, satisfied looks on the faces of some observers. Ritterhouse (2006, p. 74-75) describes the perceptions, emotions, and cognition displayed at these events.

Some white southerners not only failed to regard lynchings negatively as horrors from which innocent children ought to be sheltered, but instead regarded them positively as exciting events that neither they nor their children should miss. The mob execution of a black man, woman, or family was not only a public spectacle but also public theater, often a festive affair, a participatory ritual of torture and death that many whites preferred to witness rather than read about. Special excursion trains transported spectators to the scene, employers sometimes released their workers to attend, parents sent notes to school asking teachers to excuse their children for the event, and entire families attended, the children hoisted on their parents' shoulders to miss none of the action and accompanying festivities. Children's responses to what they saw included an eleven-year-old North Carolina boy who injured a white playmate during a make-believe lynching, and that of a nine-year-old who returned from a lynching unsatisfied, telling his mother, "I have seen a man hanged, now I wish I could see one burned."

This is a culturally based, culturally formed, culturally specific, culturally functional, culturally shared psychology that was generated by the cultural practices and values of racial etiquette. People without these practices and values would not have the same perceptions, emotions, motivations, desires, and reasoning processes.

A white Southern woman recounted a childhood incident that further expresses the cultural basis, character, and function of perceptions, reasoning, and emotions. When she was eight years old, around the turn

of the century, she and a playmate were walking on a sidewalk and an 8-year old Negro girl did not get out of their way. “We did not give ground – we were whites!” When the black girl’s arm brushed against her, she turned on her furiously saying, “Move over there, you dirty black Nigger” (p. 129).

The white girl’s perceptions and emotions were informed by the racial etiquette that included investing the sidewalk (a cultural artifact) with cultural (i.e., racial and social) significance -- sidewalks were symbolic of white people’s authority and superiority, and blacks were supposed to yield even if it meant they had to walk in the gutter. These cultural facts generated a) the white girl’s perception that the black girl’s behavior was wrong, immoral, and disrespectful, b) her reasoning that she had a right to correct this problem, and c) her emotion of outrage and aggression. Without the symbolic significance attached to the sidewalk and the sense of white privilege, the psychological reasoning, perception, and emotion would not have been elicited.

Another white boy of 10 reacted on the same basis of white privilege. A larger, older black girl did not give way to him on a sidewalk and he hit her hard in the stomach. He declared in his memoir “I wasn’t ashamed.” (p. 131). He wasn’t ashamed because his racial status entitled him to hit blacks and encouraged him to do so in order to preserve the racial status. His lack of shame was culturally based and formed.

These examples testify to central tenets of cultural psychology: the fact that cultural practices and values determine the situations in which emotions are elicited, the kinds of emotions that are elicited, and the concrete quality of those emotions.

An interesting cultural quality of the racist anger was that it was directed at violations of the racial code (i.e., social status of whites and blacks); it was not a personal animosity directed at the black individual. Whites actually felt close to blacks in their everyday lives, allowing them to hold, feed, clothe, and play with their children, as well as cook the food for the adults. However, whites felt angry if a black momentarily brushed their arm on a sidewalk, or sat next to them on the bus for a few minutes! Clearly, this anger was not a personal animosity that felt blacks were dangerous, diseased, or reprehensible individuals who should be always shunned. The discomfort and anger at blacks violating social rules was a kind of social outrage, a structural racism that treated the offender in terms of his impact on the social order, not his immediate impact on the white person which imperiled her personal safety. Nor was this anger a feeling of animosity directed at black personhood or individuality that

would impede future close personal encounters between the black individual and the white person's family in other situations. It was a situational anger confined to the particular social situation that was challenged by the black's behavior.

Another example of the culturally specific quality of White psychology was the fact that most, if not all, of their perceptions, emotions, and cognitions about Negroes were informed by a superior, paternalistic, patronizing, snobbish attitude that they were inferior to whites in intelligence, morals, civilization, and emotional control. The anger of the 8-year year white girl who became furious at the black girl on the sidewalk, was a specific kind of anger that was tinged with white superiority and the expectation of privilege. Superiority was in the anger. Her anger was neither abstract, nor was it similar to other concrete forms of anger such as anger at a spouse for arriving home late, forgetting a birthday, or having an affair. These forms of anger are tinged with disappointment, sadness, betrayal, or a sense of being unloved, not with superiority that was manifested in the girl's anger. Conversely, the girl's anger had no elements of sadness, disappointment, betrayal, or sense of being unloved.

This psychology is nuanced by cultural values, rules, and practices. It demonstrates how psychology is organized by and permeated by cultural issues. It is fair to say that these cultural values, rules, and practices were the operating mechanisms of White psychology. They generated the perceptions and emotions in particular situations with particular culturally-nuanced qualities.

The attitude of white superiority sometimes led whites to not become angry at certain black "misbehavior" and to tolerate it as normal, typical expected, unavoidable, even charming and amusing – as long as it did not challenge the racial etiquette of white superiority. Having children out of wedlock, and even stealing things elicited no outrage or disappointment from whites because a) they didn't harm whites to any significant extent and did not challenge racial etiquette, b) they were regarded as natural for such inferior creatures. Indeed, whites enjoyed seeing blacks "misbehave" because it provided vivid testament to white superiority, and it justified whites' domination of blacks.

This patronizing tolerance of black "misbehavior" was an ingredient in whites' self-concept. It generated a sense of self-pride, benevolence, tolerance, and altruism because they did not punish blacks in these cases. This benevolent, tolerant self-concept was based on a sense, and a power relation, of superiority, not on a sense of genuine caring and helpfulness.



White sense of benevolence depended on the malevolence of enslaving blacks and patronizing them, however this escaped the attention of whites. White self-concept thus had a distinctive quality, or content. It was not an abstract, pride, benevolence, tolerance, and altruism, nor was it a genuine benevolence, tolerance, and altruism that whites practiced toward other whites of their status.

The affection that whites felt for blacks was also permeated with racial superiority. It was a paternalistic, patronizing, arrogant affection. that was generated by the behavior of blacks as dutifully deferential, minding their place. "We loved 'our Negroes' downward but expected them to love us upward." "My sense of fellowship with Negroes had an odd tie-in with my snobbery." Within these hierarchical limits, these whites felt their relationships with blacks were beautiful and that a special love and understanding existing between them and blacks. As soon as blacks became too familiar or uppity, this special love and understanding unraveled and the ruling class men and women quickly used force to restore their class dominance. This affection that embodied racial etiquette was a specific, concrete emotion quite unlike the affection that whites felt for other whites. This other kind of affection was more egalitarian and personal and did not incorporate the quality of hierarchical distancing that characterized affection for blacks.

The psychology of white-black affection was governed by the operating system of racial ideology. Their ideology structured their caring in a particular – superior – form; this same ideology blinded them from accurately perceiving the form their own caring took; their ideology blinded them from accurately perceiving the social and psychological effects their racist caring had on black recipients; and this same ideology blinded them from perceiving its own existence as the operating system that was behind all of this – i.e., behind the structuring, and behind the blinding of them to the structure and to the structuring. Instead, the ideology made them believe that their caring was a natural, empathic response to the blacks.

A striking example of how cultural values and practices comprise the operating mechanism of psychological phenomena is an incident that occurred in the early 1950s in North Carolina. A white boy and his friends were playing basketball with some blacks, all around 12 years old. One of the white boys tried to inflate the basketball using a needle he took from a black boy named Bobo. The white boy put the needle in his mouth to wet it before inserting into the ball. As he put it in his mouth he realized that Bobo had wet the needle a moment before. The racial element of this

situation generated a powerful emotional and sensory reaction: “The realization that the needle I still held in mouth had come directly from Bobo’s mouth, that it carried on it Bobo’s saliva, transformed my prejudices into a physically painful experience. The basketball needle had become the ultimate unclean object, carrier of the human degeneracy that black skin represented. It transmitted to me Bobo’s black essence, an essence that degraded me and made me, like him, less than human” (Ritterhouse, 2006, p. 128).

The boy delicately explains how his racial prejudice generated a physically painful sensation and emotion in him. His cultural thought about blacks became a sickening sensation in his body. The cultural concept became a psychological phenomenon. The psychology was continuous with the concept, it was a transformation of the concept into a psychological form. The two were two sides of the same coin. His prejudice was the operating mechanism of his sensation and emotion in that it generated their qualities in response to this particular situation.

His emotion and sensation were stimulated by the symbolic significance he attached to the basketball needle. The needle incarnated racist prejudice about black bodies and people, and the needle transferred this prejudice about black malevolence into phenomenological sensations and emotions.

A white woman, Sarah Boyle, recounts similar powerful, body-wrenching emotions that were generated by the racial code: “When a Negro didn’t ‘keep his place’ I felt outraged. My indignation was triggered by a sense of guilt. I had learned that equality with Negroes were WRONG, and that it was my fault if a Negro attempted them. Therefore, I was immediately on the defensive at the first hint of familiarity.” When a cleaning lady who had conversed with Sarah on numerous occasions called her Patty instead of Miss Patton, “I felt my entire interior congeal! A Negro had failed to call me Miss! And I was a guilty as she. How unseemly my attitude must have been to invite to such a thing! I experienced a terrible wave of depression, mixed with a kind of horror of myself.”

The cultural-emotional dynamic consisted of first learning a cultural concept (code) that equality was wrong and was her fault for allowing it. This cultural instruction that it was her fault became a feeling of guilt. Guilt is the feeling that an action is one’s own fault, and this feeling is simply the other side of the coin of the cultural instruction that equality was Sarah’s fault.

Boyle’s narrative, like the previous one, is exceptional in indicating the essential equivalence of cultural prescription and emotion (akin to the

essential equivalence of mass and energy). The cultural prescription was the operating system of guilt; it made guilt happen in response to particular situations. Culture is in the mind, subjectivity, mentality, consciousness, agency, psychology.

Furthermore, guilt is continuous with defensiveness, for if one feels guilty, one seeks to defend oneself from blame. Negroes' "misbehavior" made her look bad and feel bad, so she became angry at the immediate situation that generated this discomfort. (She overlooked the real cause of her discomfort which is the cultural prohibition against equal behavior. It was more convenient and socially acceptable to blame the black behavior than the cultural prohibition. Prejudice may be said to result from ignoring macro cultural influences on behavior. Macro cultural psychology is thus an important way to overcome prejudice.)

Each of these slides into the other like the levels of a spiral seamlessly slide into one another and become new levels of the original. The cultural prescription slides into guilt which slides into defensiveness which slides into anger.

Anger is not an independent thing that simply becomes conditioned to (associated with) blacks acting uppity. According to conditioning theory, culture functions like a kind of switch that simply links anger (as a given thing with natural, intrinsic, universal qualities) to black behavior. However, this psychological theory is wrong. Culture is not a switch that connects natural psychological processes to particular situations. On the contrary, cultural conditioning molds psychological phenomena to cultural factors. Culture makes psychology (anger) cultural, and imbues it with a specific cultural quality. Anger is converted into culture, it is not simply associated with culture.

Whites' anger at black people was the result of a net of assumptions and understandings about black peoples' psychology, nature, and cultural level which were internalized from the cultural code. These cultural assumptions became located within Sarah's "psychological infrastructure," forming it. Furthermore, white anger was not an immediate, quasi-physiological reaction to black misbehavior; it was the result of a string of spiraling transformations of a cultural prescription from guilt to defensiveness to anger. The prescription was therefore the operating system of anger that made it happen in response to a particular kind of situation. The situation itself, i.e., black behavior, did not mechanically generate anger by being moved into a proximate connection with anger. It only generated anger via the cultural prescription against equal behavior.

Behavioral theories, such as conditioning, which are drawn from simple animal behavior do not suffice to apprehend cultural psychological phenomena and must be replaced by a new cultural psychological theory. Whites' fury at black infractions was not an extension of a natural anger that all animals have. It was not a natural anger associated with a particular situation. The anger was a social anger, formed by social processes and incorporating social characteristics.

The cultural code of etiquette was also the operating system of Sarah's perception. The code oriented her to look inward at her behavior for the cause of blacks violating racial etiquette; it oriented her away from perceiving the oppressive Jim Crow system as the cause of blacks' resentment and resistance. The code also led her to regard "misbehaviors" of blacks as natural deficiencies on their part.

These examples reveal that the cultural code determines a) the kind of situation in which an emotion (or perception or self-concept) is elicited, b) the strength of the emotion, c) kind of emotion – anger, guilt, or depression, d) the concrete quality of the emotion – tinged with superiority or egalitarian, e) the dynamic of the emotion – how it is generated through concepts and related psychological phenomena (e.g., surprise, looking inward, feeling guilty, hating oneself, feeling defensive, feeling angry).

The cultural code is thus not an external, secondary "influence" on some inner "basic" processes of emotion. The cultural code is the mechanism of emotions and perception. It is central to them, inside them, and constitutes their basic processes.

Another cultural feature of the psychology implicated in racial etiquette was the manner in which it was socialized. Interpersonal socialization practices reflected macro cultural factors. Mothers were the primary agents of racist socialization because they were the primary caretakers. Since the social system was racist, the female socializers of children inevitably socialized racism in their children.

A searing example of maternal socialization of racism occurred when Sarah Boyle's mother responded to Sarah's unhappiness over a servant's telling a lie. Her mother said, "We never do [lie]. Rosemary is a Negro. They aren't like us. Promises don't mean anything to them." Her mother's statement socialized Sarah into the Jim Crow belief system: "I don't think I ever again – that is, never until I became integrated at the age of about 45 – expected the truth of a Negro, or held one fully accountable as I would a white person, for telling me a lie. Another stone in my inner segregation wall had been cemented firmly in place."

Micro level interpersonal interactions should not be idealized as a purely personal realm beyond macro cultural forces. Quite the contrary, macro forces are implemented in interpersonal relations. White domination was implemented in small, mundane ways such as a calculated bump with a shoulder, or calling blacks “boy,” or demanding blacks tip their hats, or requiring them to use the back door to enter a white house.

Micro level interpersonal interactions must recapitulate macro practices in order to inscribe subtle habits which will be conducive to accepting and participating in macro cultural practices. If micro level interactions contradicted the macro level, people would question, resent, and deviate from macro norms. Psychogenesis can never be free of, or contradictory to, macro cultural factors.

The socialization of racist psychology and behavior was a two-step process. White parents allowed their children to play with certain black children and to treat their black nannies as surrogate mothers. However, as adolescence approached, parents indicated to their children that they must distance themselves socially and emotionally. This was a specific cultural pattern of socialization that led to a specific emotional outcome vis a vis certain groups of people but not others.

Importantly, the adult structure of life overrode the innocent, playful interactions of childhood. These positive experiences of childhood did not immunize white youth from falling into the adult molds of segregation and discrimination. “For the vast majority, the ‘forgotten alternatives’ of childhood interactions remained forgotten” (Ritterhouse, 2006, p. 163). As Boyle said, “These incidents were little centers of genuine truth and experience which remained sealed off by my indoctrination and training, unable to permeate and purify my overall conception of the Negro people and their situation in the South” (ibid., p. 43).

This is a powerful statement about the power of culture to shape one’s cognition, perception, and agency, and to override direct positive experience with individuals.

Accounts of socialization during the Reconstruction period reveal an additional interesting cultural pattern. Psychological socialization was generally implicit in the sense that parents simply acted out racial etiquette and children imitated them without any particular instructions or explanation. Social life was structured to enforce racism, and explicit, verbal instructions were generally unnecessary. This made it difficult to identify racism because it was rarely explicit. “We were given no formal instruction in these difficult matters but we learned our lessons well. We learned the intricate system of taboos, of manners, voice modulations,

words, feelings, along with our prayers, our toilet habits, and our games” (Ritterhouse, 2006, p. 131).

Instructions were only given to children when they breached the etiquette, e.g., by being too friendly with blacks and not manifesting sufficient distance and superiority. One case was Lewis Killian’s experience in Georgia in the 1920s. When a black woman came begging at his front door he rushed to tell his mother “There’s a lady at the door.” His mother spoke with the woman and afterwards she rebuked Lewis: “You should have told me that was a colored woman. Ladies are white!” (ibid., p. 80).

The fact that interracial play was tolerated among children testifies to variability in the racist system. It was not monolithic and absolute. Alternatives were present. However, these alternatives were circumscribed physically and temporally. They were closed off in adolescence as whites and blacks settled into their adult positions in the racist social structure.

Moreover, after the informal interactions were closed off in adolescence, it was necessary that they be overlooked and repressed or forgotten so as not to contradict adult norms and raise questions about them. Perception became desensitized to discrimination as it became normalized. “I went along,” one white woman recalled, “I wasn’t very interested in race at all. I didn’t see any segregation or discrimination or anything else” (ibid., p. 161).

This demonstrates that memory/forgetting is also a cultural phenomenon. It has a cultural origin, character, operating system, and function. Its cultural character (content) was forgetting non-racist alternatives from childhood. Forgetting selectively forgot according to cultural rules. Cultural rules made selective forgetting happen.

Forgetting’s cultural origin lies in racist etiquette that demands alternatives be foreclosed. Parents insisted on terminating interracial play and relegating it to an insignificant episode of childhood unreality. In addition, the entire structure of white society drew whites apart from blacks and made earlier play psychologically insignificant.

After a certain amount of confusion, frustration, and even defiance, most children accept ‘the way we do things’ without question, especially when ‘the way we do things’ works to their advantage, as white supremacy worked to the advantage of whites. Interracial play and other forms of childhood racial contact did offer alternatives to a social pattern scripted by racial etiquette, but because they were stacked against the incentives of parental love and white

peer-group acceptance, not to mention personal pride and other possible gains in status, the emotional attachments of childhood were fairly easy to “forget” (ibid., p. 164).

Forgetting’s cultural function was to promote racism as the only conceivable life style (ibid., p. 9).

It was easiest to repress and ‘forget’ one’s fear or guilt or even one’s unacceptable affection for a black nurse or playmate. That was what most white adults counseled, usually implicitly rather than explicitly and often by invoking racial etiquette. In a society in which adult white southerners energetically repressed any political alternatives to white supremacy, despite their own stated beliefs in Christian and democratic values, forgetting was also what made the rest of a white child’s world comprehensible, his or her most important relationships with family and friends sustainable (ibid., p. 178).

In other words, forgetting early positive interactions with blacks, and also forgetting guilt over abandoning them in adolescence under the pressure of racial etiquette, enabled white children to accept the exclusiveness of their white adult social world. Memory thus had, and has, a cultural function of sustaining (acceptance of) social norms.

Agency was also constrained by racial etiquette and functioned to uphold it. As one white man recollected, “At the age of ten I understood full well that the Negro had to be kept in his place, and I was resigned to my part in that general responsibility” (ibid., p. 167). Lillian Smith recounts how she used her agency to serve Jim Crow by actively adjusting her psyche to participate in the racial code that framed her life: “I learned to believe in freedom, to glow when the word democracy was used, and to practice slavery from morning to night. I learned it the way all of my southern people learn it: by closing door after door until one’s mind and heart and conscience are blocked off from each other and from reality.”

All psychological phenomena have this social function. Racial etiquette could not have been maintained if blacks and whites had not developed appropriate perceptions, cognitions, motivations, emotions, and self-concepts to participate in it. If whites had developed an egalitarian, personal affection for blacks they would not have treated them in a patronizing, dominating manner. Their emotional affection had

to contain the paternalism of racist social relations in order for those social relations to be maintained. Whites' sexuality had to embody racist overtones in order distance them from blacks. Whites' perceptions and cognitions of blacks had to incarnate a sense of their inferiority in order to justify discriminating against them. Whites' memory had to selectively forget alternatives to racial etiquette.

This vivid historical example demonstrates that psychology is generated by cultural factors, its character/quality/content is cultural, it is formulated within cultural factors to construct cultural factors, its locus is in cultural factors, it is permeated by the class structure and politics of cultural factors, and it functions to maintain cultural factors (social institutions, cultural artifacts, and cultural concepts). Psychology is not a separate, internal, natural, or individual phenomenon.

Psychology has distinctive, subjective qualities that differ from objective qualities of macro cultural factors. Psychology is different from a classroom, it is different from a gun, it is different from the CIA and World Bank, it is different from the concept of family honor. This is why psychology deserves to be studied as a distinctive phenomenon. However, this study must emphasize the concrete cultural origins, character, and function of psychology which all permeate its subjective quality. This is what Ritterhouse does so masterfully, and what psychologists should imitate.

### Neoliberalism

The elements of cultural psychology that are evidenced in racial psychology may be extended to a contemporary cultural phenomenon, neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a central cultural force of our times. Its impact on psychology must be powerful, since psychology is an element of cultural factors. To understand the psychology of contemporary people, the manner in which it is organized by the pervasive neoliberal culture must become an important focus of study. This section will explore the objectives and content of neoliberalism and how it is institutionalized in our society. This in-depth analysis of its character and scope is necessary for generating constructs that can apprehend (explain, describe, predict, and improve upon) psychology in a neoliberal environment.

Neoliberalism is the brain child of the Mont Pelerin Society, which was founded in 1947. The Society was formed with business funding to counteract liberal economic and political ideas of Keynes, Laski, and others. It sought to



create a transnational network of academics and professionals to promote their image of the market as the central agent in human society, and thus shift government focus from public welfare to market creation and protection. Its first President (1948–60) was the Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek. Other early members were Karl Popper and Milton Friedman who was president of the Mont Pelerin Society from 1970–1972.

Neoliberalism brings together the classical liberal economic faith in the ability of properly functioning markets to improve social welfare with a new political commitment to expand market relations into traditionally public arenas such as healthcare, education, and environmental management. As it developed after World War II, neoliberalism diverged from classical political liberalism by renouncing the passive notion of a laissez-faire economy in favor of an activist approach to the spread and promotion of ‘free markets’. Contrary to classical liberalism, neoliberals have consistently argued that their political program will only triumph if it becomes reconciled to the fact that the conditions for its success must be *constructed*, and will not come about ‘naturally’ in the absence of concerted effort. This had direct implications for the neoliberal attitude towards the state, as well as towards political parties and other corporate entities that were the result of deliberate organization, and not simply unexplained ‘organic’ growths. ‘The Market’ could not be depended upon to naturally conjure up the conditions for its own continued flourishing. It needed a strong state (divested of its unnecessary social welfare encumbrances) and the backing of international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF to take its proper place in the neoliberal order (Lave, Mirowski, Randalls, 2010, 660-661).

Neoliberalism was and is a concerted, coordinated, sweeping effort (culture) to expand capitalist economic principles to every sector of society (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009; Schulman & Zelizer, 2008). This expansionist sweep consolidated in the 1970s and extended to governmental institutions (including the judiciary), education, medicine, news media, sports, scientific research, religion, national security and exploring outer space. All of these sectors have been privatized, or turned over to capitalist enterprises which run them for their

own profit, and to further their class hegemony over society. This occurred by depleting the country. A representative of the conservative American Enterprise Institute acknowledged that this corporate looting exploits working people and hamstring the economy: “Corporations are taking huge advantage of the slack in the labor market — they are in a very strong position and workers are in a very weak position,” he said. “They are using that bargaining power to cut benefits and wages, and to shorten hours.” That strategy serves corporate and shareholder imperatives, but “very much jeopardizes our chances of experiencing a real recovery” (New York Times, Jan. 9, 2011, p. WK4).

There has been a staggering rise in income inequality that is skewed toward the rich. In 1977, an elite chief executive working at one of America’s top 100 companies earned about 50 times the wage of its average worker. Three decades later, the nation’s best-paid C.E.O.’s made about 1,100 times the pay of a worker on the production line. (Similarly, the share of national income accruing to the top 1 percent of the Chinese population more than doubled from 1986 to 2003.) Inequality has even increased among the very rich. A study of pay in the 1970s found that executives in the top 10 percent made about twice as much as those in the middle of the pack. By the early 2000s, the top earners made more than four times the pay of the executives in the middle. This hegemonic domination of the ruling class makes it difficult for the lower classes to challenge the ruling class economically and politically. Neoliberal dominance is associated with low economic mobility. There is a 42 percent chance that the son of an American man in the bottom fifth of the income distribution will be stuck in the same economic slot. The equivalent odds for a British man are 30 percent, and only 25 percent for a Swede.

The hardening and widening of class division that neoliberalism institutionalized in the 1970s was abetted by mass incarceration that targeted the lower class. Thus, incarceration rates of white and black college-educated males did not increase, however, the rate for black and white men (combined) who did not finish high school increased three times from the 1970s to the year 2000. The importance of social class is revealed in the statistic that whites with a high school education are imprisoned 20 times as often as those with a college degree. Mass incarceration causes poverty, because it deprives families of potential wage earners, it decimates family life which increases the odds of children’s social failure, and it prevents ex-convicts from obtaining well-paying jobs. Mass incarceration also obscures poverty because inmates are excluded from unemployment figures. Mass incarceration also facilitates conservative, neoliberal political victories because it disenfranchises poor and minorities who

usually vote for Democratic politicians (New York Review of Books, April 12, 2007, pp. 33-36).

The increasing hegemony of the ruling class also stifles economic growth. Every decade since the 1960s has witnessed a decline in the rate of GDP growth (4.4% in 1960s, 3.3%, 3.1%, 3.1%, 1.9% from 2000-2009), a decline in the share of national wealth that goes toward people's wages, and an increase in the unemployment rate. Since 1980, the country's gross domestic product per person has increased about 69 percent, as the share of income accruing to the richest 1 percent of the population jumped to 36 percent from 22 percent. But the economy grew much faster — 83 percent per capita — from 1951 to 1980, when inequality declined. Stagnation of the capitalist system is further revealed in the slowness of recovery from recessions: After the 1990-91 recession, it took 23 months to add back the jobs lost. After the 2001 recession, it took 38 months. (And this recovery was fueled by one of the great housing and credit bubbles in American history which is unavailable any longer).

At the current rate, the economy will need 72 to 90 months to recapture the jobs lost during the Great Recession (New York Times, Jan. 9, 2011, p. WK4).

Neoliberal policies such as NAFTA eliminated around 1 million American jobs according to the report "NAFTA at Seven," from the Economic Policy Institute. Economic stagnation of capitalism is what led to massive borrowing to finance projects (mostly financial speculation rather than fixed investments), and living standards. From the 1970s to 2005, total outstanding debt in the United States leapt from 1.5 times the GDP to 3.5 times the U.S. GDP, close to the \$44 trillion world GDP. These facts reveal the lie of neoliberalism that it enhances economic growth and the freedom of the individual (New York Times, Dec. 27, 2010, p. BU1).

One telling example of privatization is research laboratories at major universities being funded and controlled by big oil and pharmaceutical companies. An examination of 10 contracts between leading oil companies and major universities, worth \$883 million over 10 years revealed the following details of corporate dominance over scientific research.

- In nine of the 10 energy-research agreements, the university partners failed to retain majority academic control over the central governing body charged with directing the university-industry alliance. Four of the 10 alliances actually give the industry sponsors full governance control.

- Eight of the 10 agreements permit the corporate sponsor or sponsors to fully control both the evaluation and selection of faculty research proposals in each new grant cycle.
- None of the 10 agreements requires faculty research proposals to be evaluated and awarded funding based on independent expert peer review, the traditional method for awarding academic and scientific research grants fairly and impartially based on scientific merit.
- Eight of the 10 alliance agreements fail to specify transparently, in advance, how faculty may apply for alliance funding, and what the specific evaluation and selection criteria will be.
- Nine of the 10 agreements call for no specific management of financial conflicts of interest related to the alliance and its research functions. None of these agreements, for example, specifies that committee members charged with evaluating and selecting faculty research proposals must be impartial, and may not award corporate funding to themselves. (see Jennifer Washburn, “Big Oil Goes To College,” Center for American Progress, [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/10/big\\_oil.html](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/10/big_oil.html); see also G. Bowley “The Academic-Industrial Complex, New York Times, Aug. 1, 2010: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/01/business/01prez.html?scp=1&sq=university%20industrial%20complex&st=cse>).

Neoliberalism has been as aggressive, expansionist, and hegemonic a social force as the Roman Empire and Catholicism were. It is a top-down movement that is directed by wealthy capitalists through a maze of private and governmental organizations which influence policy and propagandize the populace (Lazzarato, 2009; Stack, 2009; Mayer, 2010). It is not an accretion of individual behaviors, as classical free market economists, and individualistic psychologists, propose.<sup>2</sup>

The culture of neoliberalism entails a psychology – which Foucault called pragmatics of subjectivity, or technology of self that is formed by subjects under cultural pressure (Dean, 2009; Miller & Rose, 2008). One element of “neoliberal psychology” is violence. More than 30,000 people die from gunfire every year. Another 66,000 or so are wounded, which means that nearly 100,000 men, women and children are shot in the United States annually. Another element of neoliberal psychology is insecurity. “Contemporary policies regarding employment, for example ‘workfare’, which forces those in receipt of assistance to work, are policies that introduce degrees of insecurity, instability, uncertainty, economic and existential precarity into the lives of individuals. They make insecure both individual lives and their relation to the institutions that used to protect them. It is not the same insecurity for everyone, whatever the level and conditions of employment, yet a differential of fear runs along the

whole continuum.” “Neoliberal politics operate a reversal of institutions of protection into apparatuses that produce insecurity” (Lazzarato, 2009, pp. 119-120, 128, my emphasis). Work in capitalism is increasingly insecure in the sense that it is less protected by extended contracts, is less permanent, and more contingent. Employees (except for key personnel) become interchangeable, disposable, recallable, and transferable. Workers in high paid, high skilled jobs such as factory work have been terminated in droves and forced to accept unskilled, low paid employment. The new neoliberal social organization consists of a “micro politics of insecurity” which is simultaneously a cultural psychology of insecurity.

The winner-take-all paradigm of neoliberalism, which enriches and empowers dominant members of the ruling class, generates a psychology of resignation, resentment, and cheating among the losers who have little hope of success (New York Times, Dec. 26, 2010, p. BU 1). This psychology would be inexplicable without knowledge of neoliberalism’s structure described above.

Neoliberal culture also requires and fosters a new kind of commodified self. Foucault took up this topic with his usual perceptiveness. Lazzarato (2009, p. 121) explains it as follows:

Foucault’s analysis allows us to understand the role of capitalization as one of the techniques in the transformation of the worker into ‘human capital’ in charge of his/her own efforts to manage him/herself according to the logic of the market. The individual is an “enterprising self.” The individual becomes a ‘capital-competence’, a ‘machine-competence’; he or she cannot become the new homo oeconomicus without being ‘a lifestyle’, a ‘way of being’, a moral choice, a ‘mode of relating to oneself, to time, to one’s environment, to the future, the group, the family.’

Foucault observed that the individual becomes an entrepreneur not simply of businesses, but of herself. As ‘entrepreneur of herself, the individual maximizes herself as ‘human capital’ in competition with all other individuals (Lazzarato, 2009, p. 111). This is a pregnant statement because it states that people have internalized the commodification of people (labor) and treat themselves in the same way employers treat them, namely as human capital that is instrumentally used in economic relations to generate profit. People develop themselves into human capital so as to become profitable in that system. People do not passively suffer being commodified; they practice/institute commodification on themselves; they are agents of commodification. Commodification is the habitus, or dispositif, of individuals.

Agency has thus become commodified. Agency does not stand outside society and resist it so as to express an autonomous individual. On the contrary, agency acquires cultural forms. In this case it takes the form of entrepreneurship towards oneself.

The neoliberal, individualistic self-concept structures one's emotions, actions, worldview, and politics. In the year 2,000, 137 people who had been affected by neoliberal cutbacks were interviewed. Most of the subjects accepted individualistic neoliberal ideology and held themselves responsible for their plights. Accordingly, few expressed outrage, i.e., at the political economy. Nor did they engage in political action to improve the political economy. Even individuals who had gone to school to train for a job, and had worked hard getting and holding a job, reacted to displacement with doubt about their own decisions and motivation rather than anger at the power elite. Few of the displaced individuals emphasized structural factors and politics as responsible for their plights. Conversely, successful individuals prided themselves on their foresight and motivation. They never acknowledged social factors that contributed to their success. This is an important example of how psychology (of self) depoliticizes behavior by ignoring macro cultural factors, and by generating emotions that blame the individual (e.g., self-doubt) rather than blaming cultural factors (e.g., anger).

These individuals did not resist, negotiate, modify, or transcend prevailing neoliberal ideology and psychology (Braedley & Luxton, 2010, chap. 8).

This neoliberal individualistic self-concept, with its notion of personal choice and responsibility, has permeated the notion of agency. Social scientists embrace individualistic agency because they construe it as peoples' liberatory capacity to resist, negotiate, and modify cultural factors. Ironically, individualistic agency/self impedes understanding, critiquing, and modifying cultural factors, because they are perceived as outside the individual realm where they neither affect the individual nor are affected by him. Consequently, interviewees who espouse the individualistic self concept manifest significant helplessness, fatalism, and resignation. Individualism breeds a sense of reification and fatalism. Individualism, i.e., agency, cannot resist and transcend capitalism because it is a product of capitalism. One can only imagine that the individualistic self/agency transcends capitalism if one ignores the (capitalist) social basis of the self and agency and misconstrues it as being a personal or natural construct.

Neoliberal cultural psychology is organized and socialized by the various elements of the social system. Education is a major socializer of neoliberalism through its central role of teaching children how to think and learn and conceptualize things. Neoliberalist political-economy has transformed higher

education in line with capitalist principles: “the commercialisation of education is a ‘global’ phenomenon, driven by international policy concerns through international institutions such as the World Trade Organization.” “Within the UK, this trend towards higher educational reform has been developed through a number of government policy initiatives and commissioned reports.” Within the United States, Obama has reinforced Bush’s neoliberal agenda to privatize schools (along with the military, space exploration, health care, the media, etc.). Specifically, “the neoliberal. commercial model is an ‘instrumental’ education, in the sense that it is about the development of human resources and economic prosperity much more than notions of personal achievement, growth and fulfillment and the promotion of education for the social good.” (Lambert, et al. 2007, pp. 526-527).

This economic, sense of education is reflected in the reduction of education to preparing for quantitative, rote memory tests. Neoliberals use the procedure of testing for knowledge as an insidious means to re-engineer the entire pedagogical process in accordance with the capitalist political economy. Pedagogy becomes narrowed to simple, formulaic concepts that can be regurgitated on standardized tests. Testing-oriented pedagogy reduces critical, conceptual reasoning and explanation that cannot be readily measured. It reduces education and knowledge to a quantitatively measurable commodity. In this, way, knowledge and thinking become compatible with neoliberal capitalism.

A key link in this synchrony is the industrialization of grading standardized school tests. Standardized testing across school districts, cities, or states is scored and graded by a few multinational corporations. One of them, Pearson, owns the Financial Times, The Economist, Penguin Books, and Prentice hall publishers. These corporations employ thousands of part time employees to work in centers. Employees receive the tests electronically and score them individually in cubicles. There is no social interaction or communication at work. Employees are former security guards, office workers, anyone with a bachelor’s degree. When work slows down, they are given two hours’ notice that the work will end and they are terminated. Even the offices and computers are leased temporarily. Scorers earn 30-70 cents per paper; at 30 cents they must score 40 papers an hour to earn \$12 per hour. This piece rate incentive system encourages scorers to score rapidly with little involvement in order to maximize pay. Scoring standards are passed onto scorers by company leaders, and if scores deviate from a pre-determined scoring curve, the scorers are instructed to increase or decrease the grades. With test scoring made into a for-profit industry, the tests must be congruent with this process. In other words, the test scoring industry is synchronous with the test format. The “MacDonalidization” of test scoring reaches back to affect test construction.

Only a superficial, quantitative test can be scored profitably in the scoring combine. Test construction and test scoring are commodified industries which complement each other. And this entire corporatized, standardized testing industry acts back to structure teaching pedagogy. It thereby structures the educational psychology of students. A common response to the question “What is one of your life goals?” is “to talk less in class” and “listen to the teacher” (DiMaggio, 2010).

This culturally formed thinking, learning, and motivation then find comfort with commodified products and relations; they function smoothly within capitalist products and relations, and they desire them as well. They find non-commodified phenomena too demanding, complicated, and dull.

Neoliberal policies are restructuring education in line with the needs of contemporary capitalism (Ravitch, 2010; Packer 2001). As work becomes increasingly deskilled under the domination of technology and management, sophisticated education is less necessary. Today in Britain, well over 80% of work is in service sector jobs that are dominated by low grade and poorly paid occupations in the healthcare, hospitality, cleaning, fast food, catering and retail sectors. Sophisticated education is dysfunctional for this economy. It would lead to “unrealistic” aspirations among the populace and cause them to feel resentful and rebellious about their low social position. Neoliberal policies are curtailing education to conform to the political economy. The conservative government in Britain, in 2010, has drastically cut funding for higher education. Neoliberalism exacerbates inequality, exploitation, and consumerism (Braedley & Luxton, 2010).

All the sentimental waxing by the capitalist class about the need to strengthen education to remain competitive in the world economy is sheer rhetoric. Nowadays, educated individuals cannot find jobs at their level and are forced to take unskilled jobs for which they are overqualified. At the very moment that capitalists are reducing the need for high skilled, high paid employment, and are promoting policies that reduce government spending on education, they pretend that they are creating jobs that require a well educated work force. This shifts the problem from their neoliberal policies to deficiencies in the populace who do not educate themselves, or to deficiencies in teachers who are not educating students to take advantages of the high-skilled that the capitalists are supposedly creating. But if these jobs exist, why are educated people taking unskilled, low-paid jobs? In fact, the limited need for educated employees can be met with a few elite universities in the home country, and supplemented by importing educated employees from abroad. Even educational expenses are outsourced in this manner, as foreign countries (India, Iran) expend their resources to educate employees that eventually work for



capitalists in the first world countries.<sup>3</sup>

The neoliberal form of education entails a corresponding psychology of self, cognition, and conceptualizing things. Other people, the self, and natural objects and animals tend to be conceptualized as commodified resources to be used instrumentally for exchange and profit. The “use-value” of people, animals, and things is subordinated to their exchange value. Neoliberal education also has profound implications for the motivation, attention, dedication, and understanding of material by students in school. Students tend to treat education as an instrumental means for their own social status and material income. They will focus more on superficial ways that knowledge and educational resources can be exploited rather than on deeply understanding them. They will try to maximize their educational outcome (measured in grades) and minimize their psychological input, in keeping with the neoliberal business model. Students will favor simple, quantitative evaluation of their work because the criteria are easy to understand and meet. In contrast, more conceptual demands for comprehending material are difficult to achieve and less clear-cut to evaluate. All that complexity is anathema to neoliberal efficiency and productivity which students come to embrace.

“Neoliberal cultural psychology” is organized by neoliberal political economy, and it reciprocally enacts neoliberal culture. Students’ educational psychology reinforces neoliberal education and neoliberal culture in general. Armed with neoliberal psychology makes students into agents of neoliberalism, just as consumer psychology makes consumers into agents of consumerism. This is the reason that psychology is culturally organized. Culture needs psychology to enact cultural behavior that sustains a particular social system.

The cultural psychology of the instrumental, commodified self, instrumental-commodified cognition, and insecurity is built into the social organization of our dominant macro cultural factors. At the same time, this cultural psychology is often obfuscated by official pronouncements that claim to be ensuring our security, personal growth, fulfillment, and social interactions. The culture thus mystifies people about itself. Mystification is built into cultural praxis.<sup>4</sup>

The case study of neoliberal psychology illuminates and verifies the principles of cultural psychology. Like the example of racial psychology, it shows that psychology is part of cultural factors. It is the subjective side of cultural factors that animates them. Psychology is contained in cultural factors such as neoliberal policies and practices. This psychology is objectified and objective, as well as objectifying of experience. It is formed by cultural factors and takes on their features. For instance, insecurity is a social condition of neoliberal political economy in the sense that people objectively have little security in their jobs,

pensions, investment; they are thrown into perpetual competition where they can always lose, and they are pawns in the movement of capital to more lucrative returns.<sup>5</sup> This social insecurity takes a psychological form. People subjectively feel insecure. They are anxious and uncertain about their future. One symptom of this is that young adults are postponing marriage and commitment because they are uncertain about their geographical and social and financial future. For the first time, more Americans aged 25-34 are unmarried than married. This subjective sense of insecurity is the subjective side of social insecurity. (Of course, mainstream psychologists and psychotherapists ignore this and concentrate on identifying personal or biological causes of insecurity and anxiety.)

Psychological insecurity is both generated by the social state of insecurity and it is a way of coping with this state. Psychological insecurity and uncertainty has become normalized as “that’s how life is,” and a lifestyle has been created around it: “I don’t know what I’ll do after I graduate; I’m just looking forward to what life will bring me.” “I’m not sure if I can hang out with you tomorrow since something might come up, but I’ll text you if I can.” Adapting to, and enacting, psychological insecurity is culturally functional (and conformist) in that it prepares people for expecting, accepting, and participating in social insecurity and the cultural factors that underlie it.

Cultural practices are utilized as templates of normal behavior. The precariousness of neoliberalism is recapitulated in personality attributes such as being “flexible,” “adaptable,” “tolerant of ambiguity,” and “multitasking.” These are a cultural technology of the self (as Foucault would call it) that is the subjective accommodation (acquiescence) to neoliberal political economy. Normalized psychology normalizes (facilitates) its social basis. Extolling uncertainty and uncommitment as “cool” is to extol neoliberalism as “cool” because uncertainty – in our time – is a symptom and a prop of neoliberalism.

### Mental Disturbance

Cultural practices and psychology of society may be debilitating. This is certainly true in neoliberal society. Insecurity, competition, alienation, continual acquisitiveness and materialism, impulsiveness, and continual distraction by competing products take their toll on people (as research demonstrates). This toll consists of impeding other behaviors that are socially and psychologically desirable. The foregoing cultural practices impede generosity and altruism,

accepting advice from others, thoughtfulness, and concentrating on a particular task. For instance, consumerism constantly distracts us by prodding us with myriad ads and products that vie for our attention and money. We are supposed to continually look for new products, and be attracted by superficial features to forsake older products and impulsively buy new ones. Internet search engines such as Yahoo, and sites such as MySpace and The Huffington Post, distract concentration by providing hyperlinks that draw attention away from what one is reading to numerous extraneous web pages – the reason for this is that the sites receive advertising revenue for every click that viewers make on the hyperlinks. Many web users report a drop in their ability to finish reading a single work because of being attuned to distracting hyperlinks. This distraction is compounded by multi-tasking at work so that every moment and space is constantly productive (i.e., generating capital). Workers are required to shift between several tasks at a time in order to be as productive/profitable as possible and never “waste” a moment. People conduct business using cell phones while going to the bathroom! Profit-generated multi-tasking at work and in consumerism has become a cultural icon and is carried over into personal time where people feel excited talking to one set of friends on the phone while having dinner with another set of friends. Deep involvement (attention to) in one activity is diluted through this transient involvement (attention) in multiple activities. Yet, culture also insists that we concentrate and follow through on tasks – pay attention in school, avoid distractions, keep to commitments.

Similarly, the individualism and materialism of consumer capitalism impedes social solidarity, altruism, concern with personal issues, and social support. (Milton Friedman said, “So the question is, do corporate executives, provided they stay within the law, have responsibilities in their business activities other than to make as much money for their stockholders as possible?” And my answer to that is, “no they do not”. In fact, the “corporate system”, say analysts, “has no room for beneficence toward employees, communities, or the environment.”) Yet people are expected to be benevolent, caring, and supportive.

This contradiction between competing social values is epitomized in the contradiction between cultural aesthetic ideals of a slim body and the ubiquitous plying of junk food to people.

The contradiction between competing social values places people in untenable situations. It Accepting one of these values makes it difficult to achieve the other. Dieting to achieve a slim body fails because it is contradicted by the ubiquitous presence of junk food temptations.

This untenable state of affairs that tears people in conflicting directions and makes success difficult, is a pathological feature of the society; a social pathology. Eric Fromm (2010) calls it “a socially patterned defect” or “the pathology of normalcy.” Rieber calls it “psychopathy of everyday life.” I call it “the psychology of oppression.”

As oppressive practices and psychology become more intense and extensive, and as they impede achieving more positive cultural ideals which formerly mitigated them, more people become more seriously impaired. Insecurity, distraction, impulsiveness, hyperactivity, competitiveness, egoism, acquisitiveness, and materialism become uncontrollable and dysfunctional as people become increasingly bereft of social support, solidarity, commitment, coherence, and the concentration necessary to master skills. Psychological disorder reigns in accordance with social disorder. Today, as many as one-third of the American population takes (legal) psychotropic drugs to palliate their social-psychological stresses. Forty-six percent of college students said they felt “things were hopeless” at least once in the previous 12 months, and nearly a third had been so depressed that it was difficult to function, according to a 2009 survey by the American College Health Association. In recent years, more than 1,000 depression screenings were given to students, with 22 percent indicating signs of major depression. New York Times, Dec. 20, 2010, p. A1).

Perversely, psychological disturbances are treated at the individual level by punishing and controlling individual behavior. The social pathology at the heart of psychological problems is ignored. In addition, false claims of biological etiology deny social causes. This, of course, makes treatment inadequate.

For example, hyperactive people are treated so that they can concentrate on tasks, while still participating in consumer culture with all of its distractions. Hyperactive people are expected to concentrate their attention in school and work while simultaneously attending to myriad advertisements, shifting their attention among competing products, superficially skimming magazines for whatever strikes their fancy, feeling bored when not stimulated by novel sensations, waiting passively for new external stimulation and sensations to energize behavior, shifting tastes to accommodate external stimulation (from marketers and also peers), and impulsively buying whatever they feel like at a moment’s notice. Hyperactives are never directed to understand or renounce these cultural demands which are the root of their hyperactivity. There is no concern about forming new cultural factors that would stimulate and support virtuous practices. Consequently, the roots of pathological behavior persist and undermine individual efforts to practice virtuous behavior.

In the standard approach of treatment, individuals are supposed to find inner strength within themselves, in the form of psychological strategies of concentration, dieting, anger management, or emotional expression, to act in fulfilling ways. Yet pathological practices are institutionalized in neoliberal cultural factors. In this struggle between administered, funded, organized institutions, and isolated individuals, it is clear which side will be victorious and which will lose.

People are not treated so as to be free of impulsiveness, fickleness, insecurity, alienation, competitiveness, egoism, materialism, and other debilitating values and actions – for that would require a social consciousness and social activism that would challenge the debilitating, neoliberal status quo. People are encouraged to use psychological strategies to manage themselves to endure (cope with) normal social and psychological life with all its debilitating features.

This trend of psychiatric treatment demonstrates that normal world of social practices determines how people are treated by the helping professions. “Help” is not a generic abstraction. It is informed by concrete cultural qualities that reflect and reinforce the social system. The helping professions may be as corrupted by the broad culture (political economy) as any sector is.

Psychological treatment takes the form of pep talks that extol the virtues of the status quo and encourage compliance to it. Treatment also takes the form of teaching coping skills to manage taken-for-granted, “normal” insecurity, alienation, egoism, competition, materialism, and distraction, so that one can concentrate on mastering tasks, having close personal relations, honoring commitments, and being well-informed and socially active.

A more common tactic is to desensitize people to the conditions which generate their dis-ease. Medication is the prime means of doing this. Psychotropic drugs desensitize people to their environment and dampen their reactions to it. This is the real meaning of curing psychological disease.

(Medication does not treat specific biochemical mental illnesses, because these are not an issue in the context which we are discussing. Of course, there are cases of biochemical disorders and brain injuries which incapacitate people psychologically. But these are irrelevant to the widespread social-psychological disorders we are discussing. Mental illness as a social problem is first and foremost due to oppressive cultural factors. This is overlooked in most psychological accounts. Even cross-cultural and cultural psychologists confine

their attention to describing distinctive cultural features of symptoms while neglecting the oppression that generates them. In our context of mental disorder as a widespread social phenomenon, there are no discrete biochemical mental diseases; rather there are diverse symptomatic behavioral/psychological responses to cultural stressors. Medication tranquilizes this broad variety of responses. Psychotropic drugs have general desensitizing effects (on perception and reaction) and this is why medications are interchangeable; they are not specific to specific mental illnesses.)

Psychiatric cure includes desensitizing people to their injurious normal environment, rather than expanding awareness of it and changing its injurious features. The refusal to challenge debilitating cultural factors inexorably leads to accommodating the individual to them. Psychiatric treatment insidiously cripples the individual to enable her to function in a debilitating environment. Rather than eliminating cultural stressors materially and objectively, they are eliminated from view through distorting the perception (consciousness, subjectivity) of individuals. (This social and political conservatism is rationalized by subjectivistic epistemology that claims reality is reducible to subjective perception. Social problems are figuratively disappeared by adopting new views of them, rather than by changing objective social structures.)

Despite its inadequacy, psychiatric treatment occasionally enables individuals to achieve success in business, politics, or school. However, this success still comes at a psychological price of curtailed sensitivity and reactivity imposed by the facilitating treatment. It is analogous to wearing gas masks during periods of lethal air pollution: The masks enable people to function in that adverse condition by greatly restricting their sensitivity and freedom of movement.

### Neglect of culture by cultural psychologists

Cultural psychologists could fruitfully use this analysis of neoliberalism to further study the extent to which its features are actually recapitulated and embedded in psychological phenomena. E.g., to what extent is the social contradiction and mystification among cultural factors reflected in people's consciousness; to what extent do people experience and understand insecurity in their lives, and in what ways is it obscured, disguised, sublimated or misunderstood because of obscurantist political propaganda and other practices? Other fertile questions for cultural psychologists to explore include

the extent to which commodification, mystification, individualism, instrumentalism, and other aspects of neoliberal culture are embodied in people's self concept, motivation, reasoning, emotions, learning, and understanding. Another question is how neoliberal psychology is learned/acquired/socialized. Another cultural psychological question is the extent to which individuals are aware of their role as social agents whose psychology serves to reinforce cultural factors.

Unfortunately, cultural psychologists ordinarily aver this kind of concrete study of culture and psychology. For instance, cultural psychologists who study educational psychology typically ignore the neoliberal political-economic character of education and its impact on students' psychology. Proposals to improve education and educational psychology do not challenge the neoliberal basis, characteristics, and function of educational issues. In an article entitled "Construction of Boundaries in Teacher Education: Analyzing Student Teachers' Accounts," in *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 17: 212–234, 2010, two authors used "cultural historical activity theory" (CHAT) to analyze the interaction of two activity systems: student teachers' learning trajectories and the learning by pupils. The authors analyze student teachers' accounts of their teaching "to explore how boundaries are constructed in interaction and how this creates limitations and opportunities for the student teachers' learning trajectories. In our study, boundaries are defined through the relations within and between activity systems; they are dynamic and evolving, constructed in the situated negotiation of the tools, rules, and divisions of labor of each of the interacting activity systems" (p. 215). The authors assume that activity systems are interpersonally constructed. Institutional rules are selected and utilized by participants, they do not structure behavior. Given these assumptions, it is not surprising that the authors fail to describe the sedimented history, structural and coercive aspects of institutional factors. They say they are interested in these, however they do not address them in the way we have identified neoliberal cultural and political features of pedagogy, testing, privatized education. Their individualistic theory of activity leads them to regard institutional issues as mere opportunities for participants to utilize according to their own purposes. History, culture, and politics are thereby dissolved into individual constructs and "goal-oriented activity." "We analyze how the participants produce accounts for maintaining, challenging, or transforming the prevailing boundaries" (p. 220). This renders unnecessary any detailed description of history, culture, and politics because they are always recreated by individuals. The eliding of culture, politics, and history by individualistic reconstructions as personal goals is exemplified in the authors' statement that, "Positioning reflects cultural and historical distributions of

power, legitimacy, and authority but is enacted in situated actions. In other words, positioning is collectively accomplished in a discursive process where one positions oneself and the other participants. In an utterance one makes available a subject position, which other speakers may or may not take up" (p. 220). Culture, politics, and history are mentioned but immediately displaced by voluntary choices in word use. If positions are voluntarily (may or may not be) taken up by individuals through their discourse, and thus readily changed by changing one's words, then power, legitimacy, and authority play no significant role in positioning. The individualistic, subjectivistic focus inexorably leads to stripping out cultural, political, and historical content from psychology and behavior and describing them in mundane, abstract ways. Thus, formulations about neoliberal, oppressive, class-based, profit-oriented, stupefying school testing are replaced by homilies such as: "In the two learning spheres, the student teachers work on the object by asking questions, bringing up dilemmas and problems, and making suggestions that are supported and elaborated by the others" (p. 226).

Additional examples of how culture is ignored under the rubric of cultural historical activity theory are found in Chaiklin (2001). Chapter 9 has the stated aim "to analyze instructional interactions in which one participant structures the overall solving of the task so that the other participant internalizes the skills and abilities that were accomplished jointly" (p. 148). This chapter concerns interpersonal interactions, not history or culture. It focuses on micro interactions such as whether instruction is direct or indirect. Broader culture and history are never mentioned as descriptive constructs to deepen the description of the interactions (which I did with the example of school testing), or as explanatory constructs to help understand why the interactions occurred. This approach de-culturizes, de-historicizes, and depoliticizes interpersonal interactions. It ignores the powerful cultural shaping of behavior – e.g., by neoliberal politicians and businesspeople who relentlessly restructure educational activities and their boundaries – to create an imaginary sense of personal, subjective freedom apart from culture.

Chapter 10 would appear to include more culture and history in relation to psychology based on its title "Intersubjectivity in models of learning and teaching: Reflections from a study of teaching and learning in a Mexican Mazahua community." However, the chapter exclusively concerns individual interactions which are never related to the culture. A typical statement is, "In Mazahua parent-child pairs, parents would initiate the activity by undertaking actions themselves while at the same time activating the child, mostly by giving the child an assignment" (ibid., p. 186). Mazahua culture is never described or implicated in psychology/behavior. It is simply mentioned as the name of the



locale where the interactions occurred. Mazahua culture is never invoked as a descriptive or explanatory construct. Yet this analysis is called cultural-historical activity theory.

Using wrong words to describe action creates misimpressions as George Orwell observed. In this case it creates the misimpression that culture is reducible to voluntary interpersonal interactions, and that to study culture is to study these abstract, non-cultural, non-historical, non-political behaviors.

The ignoring of culture in cultural psychology is demonstrated by the fact that the word neoliberalism only appears once in 16 years of articles in the journal Culture & Psychology. It is never mentioned in the 17 year history of Mind, Culture, Activity. The word neoliberalism never appears in any article in The Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, which has been publishing for 30 years. The most dominant cultural force in the world over the past three decades is never mentioned (much less discussed) in the leading journals on culture and psychology. While the editors and editorial boards of these journals have failed to mention cultural and psychological aspects of neoliberalism in their publications, other journals in anthropology, geography, sociology, cultural studies, education, and social studies of science, have devoted special issues to these central cultural and psychological issues. In view of this disparity, editors and editorial boards of psychological publications are negligent (Ratner, 2011a).<sup>6</sup>

### Sense of Time

Our third in vivo example of cultural psychology is sense of time. Time sense is a psychological phenomenon and a cultural factor.

Time is a cultural concept that is culturally specific and culturally variable. Time sense is a cultural factor that is objectified in clocks, parking meters, calendars, timed buzzers in school and at basketball games. It is required for specific forms of life activity. Socially inappropriate senses of time can undermine a particular cultural system, or way of life. A precise, punctual, quantitative sense of time is necessary for modern social life, and a person who lacks this cannot function in this kind of social system. If too many people lack this modern cultural time sense, the system will be jeopardized.

Time sense is also a subjective, psychological phenomenon. The cultural concept of time carries a psychological/subjective side which people experience as a clock inside their mind. One understands the importance of punctuality, one

strives to be punctual by keeping track of time, one feels anxious about being late, and sorry when one misses a deadline. People feel annoyed (and suspicious) when someone misses an appointment with them. Our subjective sense of time reflects the social concept of time, just as personal insecurity reflects cultural insecurity, and racial psychological attributes reflected the socioeconomic position of blacks and whites. We have repeatedly emphasized that psychology must reflect and recapitulate cultural factors if the latter are to be maintained and if individuals are to succeed in cultural activities. This is why society rewards and punishes people for the kind of psychology they manifest. Society has a vested interest in inculcating psychology. It is not a personal choice. If psychology were personal and idiosyncratic, society would not inculcate it through rewards and punishments.

The historian E.P. Thompson (1967) has illuminated the connections between people's inward sense of time and the restructuring of industrial working habits and changes. He asked, "If the transition to mature industrial society entailed a severe restructuring of working habits - new disciplines, new incentives, and a new human nature upon which these incentives could bite effectively - how far is this related to changes in the inward notation of time?" (p. 57). This is a pregnant question that poses issues in terms of cultural psychology. For Thompson suggests that cultural incentives to work in a new fashion require a new psychology, or human nature, which will be receptive to them. (Just as incentives for consumerism require new needs, perceptions, and motives that will accept the incentives and act appropriately toward them.) A new subjective sense of time is thus an integral part of external work organization.

Thompson challenged the popular view that changes in time-discipline were simply by-products of new manufacturing techniques. He argues that time-discipline involved much broader, systemic cultural changes: a transformation in work ethic and orientation to labor. Time incarnated and reinforced a new social system of labor and capital. Time became treated as currency. It took on the features of money, it becomes monetized. This is why time was regularized/standardized, quantified, mastered, saved, wasted, calculated, and used up ("time is up, stop the game, hand in your exam"). Time was not simply "emphasized" in capitalist production; it was socially reorganized to include a new social character.

Time orientation replaced task orientation. Pre-capitalist time derives from working on a task; tasks defined time, e.g., planting required X days. This became reorganized by managerial demands of time - "produce a task in 15

seconds.” Rather than the task determining time, time comes to define the task (how it is accomplished). Natural, irregular time became replaced by unnatural, regularized time. This culminates in changing nature itself to follow imposed time frames rather than natural rhythms. This is the basis of genetically modifying plants and animals – to make them grow quickly to maximize turnover, productivity, and profit. Time/speed determine the organism (how it will grow), rather than the quality of the organism determining the time to harvest it.

Capitalist time becomes abstracted from work/task so it may become the parameter of work/task rather than the result of work/task.<sup>7</sup> The new time orientation clearly represents capital; it generates capital. Earning capital thus requires a new sense of time in which capital is incarnated. “We are concerned simultaneously with time-sense in its technological conditioning, and with time-measurement as a means of labour exploitation” (Thompson, 1967, p. 80).

Capital exerted enormous pressure on the populace to adopt its time orientation.<sup>8</sup>

Thompson (1967, p. 69) notes the interdependence of the expanding time orientation throughout the populace and the increasing standardization of labor: “a general diffusion of clocks and watches is occurring at the exact moment when the industrial revolution demanded a greater synchronization of labour.”

Time orientation was the subjectivity that drove capitalist productivity. Time orientation was not simply associated with productivity, and was not mechanically caused by it as a dependent variable is caused by an independent variable. Thompson explains how the need for clocks was a culturally created need that drove people to work for capitalism. “The small instrument which regulated the new rhythms of industrial life was at the same time one of the more urgent of the new needs which industrial capitalism called forth to energize its advance” (ibid., p. 69). The artifact of the clock embodied and promoted a need for monetized time, which drew people into capitalist production and labor.

Because time sense represented and reinforced a particular political economy, it was contested by the same parties who struggled over the political economy. It was supported by the commercial elite who dominated the capitalist political economy, and it was resisted by the working class who was exploited by the elite.

Throughout the whole medieval period, there was a conflict between the cyclic and linear concepts of time. The scientists and scholars, influenced by astronomy and astrology, tended to

emphasize the cyclic concept. The linear concept was fostered by the mercantile class and the rise of a money economy. For as long as power was concentrated in the ownership of land, time was felt to be plentiful and was associated with the unchanging cycle of the soil. With the circulation of money, however, the emphasis was on mobility. In other words, men were beginning to believe that "time is money" and that one must try to use it economically and thus time came to be associated with the idea of linear progress (Whitrow, 1973, p. 402).

Accepting the modern time sense was tantamount to accepting its capitalist basis. This struggle over time is recapitulated in contemporary health care. Insurance companies pay physicians for 15 minute appointments with patients. They utilize time as a labor enforcement tool, just as factory managers did. Calculating physician=patient interactions in terms of time is not simply technical record keeping, it is a means of labor exploitation as Thompson said. Standardizing interactions in terms of time is a proxy for the capitalist political economy (which demands and promotes this). Physicians correctly resist this kind of temporal standardization of medicine because they recognize it as a mechanism of control over their work, not simply an efficient form of record keeping and allocating their time. (Under a different political economy, the technical and exploitive aspects of standardized time could be differentiated. Standardized time could serve as information for efficiently allocating work to better serve people, as opposed to subjecting them to control by capital.) Physicians also recognize standardized, commodified time as a mechanism that subordinates human interaction and quality medicine to profit for the insurance companies -- who are the new owners and bosses of medical labor. Because standardized time embodies, represents, and promotes capitalist political economy, resisting the imposition of standardized time in medical, educational, and other settings requires resisting its political economic foundation. Short of this, resistance to time itself is futile.

Glennie, & Thrift (1996, p. 277) explain how the new cultural time sense was introduced externally but then became internalized:

New time-disciplines were initially externally imposed through official timepieces and systems of communicating time to the workforce an enforcing continuous work during the working day. But these disciplines became internally realized in quite new

everyday time-senses among the labor force, and came to dominate society as a whole, not least through the school system. This process of internalization was greatly facilitated by time ethics that had evolved from 17<sup>th</sup>-century Puritanism.

The new industrial time orientation was bolstered by educational and religious institutions. These applied the time orientation to subjective thinking processes (e.g., timing the speed of learning and regurgitating information). Time discipline was a major emphasis of schools in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Puritan religion also emphasized industrial time discipline as valuable for good character and salvation. "Puritanism, in its marriage of convenience with industrial capitalism, was the agent which converted men to new valuations of time; which taught children even in their infancy to improve each shining hour; and which saturated men's minds with the equation, time is money" (Thompson, 1967, p. 95).

Thus Baxter, in his Christian Directory (1673) plays many variations on the theme of Redeeming the Time: "use every minute of it as a most precious thing, and spend it wholly in the way of duty". The imagery of time as currency is strongly marked. "Remember how gainful the Redeeming of Time is in merchandize, or any trading; in husbandry or any gaining course, we use to say of a man that hath grown rich by it, that he hath made use of his Time" (ibid., p. 87). Evangelicals went so far as to condemn sloth as murderous, and sleep as felonious:

Thou silent murderer, Sloth, no more  
My mind imprison'd keep;  
Nor let me waste another hour  
With thee, thou felon Sleep.

Once consciousness itself had become re-engineered to operate according to monetized, abstract time, it would apply this capitalist orientation to everything it considered. Re-engineering consciousness is a more effective form of social control than conditioning single behaviors one by one.

Thompson observes how effective this coordinated network of institutional pressures were on generating a systemic psychology that centered on an internalized sense of time: "By the 1830s and 1840s it was commonly observed that the English industrial worker was marked off from his fellow Irish

worker, not by a greater capacity for hard work, but by his regularity, his methodical paying-out of energy, and perhaps also by a repression, not of enjoyments, but of the capacity to relax in the old, uninhibited ways” (ibid., p. 91).

This industrial cultural psychology of time is similarly revealed by contrasting it with the psychology of non-industrialized people:

the Nuer have no expression equivalent to "time" in our language, and they cannot, therefore, as we can, speak of time as though it were something actual, which passes, can be wasted, can be saved, and so forth. I do not think that they ever experience the same feeling of fighting against time or of having to co-ordinate activities with an abstract passage of time because their points of reference are mainly the activities themselves, which are generally of a leisurely character. Events follow a logical order, but they are not controlled by an abstract system, there being no autonomous points of reference to which activities have to conform with precision (ibid., p. 96).

Glennie & Thrift refine Thompson’s analysis by emphasizing that the industrial time sense was not monolithic, despite its cultural pervasiveness. Other senses of time persisted in the family and other domains. Some differences in experiencing time devolve around gender.

We must recognize that these alternatives are increasingly dominated by industrialized time. Time spent in hospital, or the doctor’s office, has become commercialized and abbreviated and depersonalized. Family interactions are increasingly gauged by how much time can be allotted to them from work time. Vacations and childbirth are bounded as time off from work and they are squeezed into (and haunted by) this boundary. Cultural factors, and psychological phenomena, tend toward coherence and hegemony because social coordination requires commonality. People must work for common ends using common means – including mental means -- in order to pool their strengths and support each other. This is the advantage of culture.

The case study of time illustrates the principles of cultural psychology that the two previous case studies revealed. All three indicate that psychology is deeply rooted in cultural-historical processes. The examples indicate that psychology is a public, objective, cultural, political phenomenon, designed in

cultural factors, to promulgate/coordinate cultural factors, politicized by cultural factors, socialized by cultural factors, and struggled over in cultural factors. Understanding psychology requires understanding these cultural dimensions.

Cultural psychology emphasizes the importance of comprehending the concrete cultural features of psychology which stem from concrete cultural factors. In our case studies we have emphasized that the emotions, perceptions, and memory of whites during Jim Crow had specific qualities that reflected particular features of the racial code. We emphasized how the self concept and learning style of students in a neoliberal political economy and educational system have particular characteristics that reflect the system. Thompson similarly emphasizes that the modern time sense reflects concrete features of industrial capitalism, not more abstract aspects of culture: "Above all, the transition is not to 'industrialism' tout court but to industrial capitalism... What we are examining here are not only changes in manufacturing technique which demand greater synchronization of labour and a greater exactitude in time-routines in any society; but also these changes as they were lived through in the society of nascent industrial capitalism" (Thompson, 1967, p. 80). All too often we overlook the concrete cultural-political basis and character of cultural factors and psychological phenomena. We concentrate on their technical, or abstract, aspects. Cultural psychology brings us back to concrete cultural-political aspects of cultural-psychological phenomena -- including time, school tests, love, childhood, sex, and mental illness.

### Methodology and Cultural Psychology

#### Objectivity and Cultural Psychology

Cultural psychology is an objective, universal theory. It says that all psychology of all people is part of culture and embodies cultural features. Cultural psychology explores the particular cultural factors in different societies to understand how they generate culturally specific psychological phenomena. Thus, the universal theory of cultural psychology accounts for cultural variations in psychology. Cultural psychology is thus a paradoxical theory, for it posits a general, universal truth about psychology that paradoxically emphasizes cultural variations in psychology.

Equally, paradoxical is the fact that indigenous theories of psychology, proposed by a specific culture, may not acknowledge cultural factors as central

to psychological phenomena. Mainstream Western psychology is a case in point. The psychological theories that have arisen in Western culture typically explain psychology in natural or personal terms such as genes, hormones, neurotransmitters, personal choices. Indigenous Western psychological theories are overwhelmingly non-cultural. They do not acknowledge the centrality of cultural factors to psychology. Indigenous psychological theories are not necessarily cultural psychological theories.

Indigenous explanations of psychology may postulate non-cultural explanatory constructs. In this case, a culture's own psychological theory may not be a cultural theory of psychology. The fact that a culture proposes a psychological theory must be distinguished from the kind of theory that it is, and it may not be a cultural theory of psychology.

Whereas a particular culture's theory of psychology may be non-cultural, the universal theory of psychology known as cultural psychology is a cultural account of psychology. Therefore the universal theory of cultural psychology must supersede and correct culturally specific explanations that are non-cultural. The universal theory of cultural psychology may be more culturally oriented than indigenous cultural theories of psychology.

For instance, extensive research on the origins and character of the self, or personality, demonstrates that the self is dependent upon the stimulation, support, and structuring by cultural factors and cultural actors. Yet a number of cultural myths deny and obfuscate this objective, social character of the human self.

Many Western and Eastern cultural myths misrepresent the nature of the self. Western individualism misrepresents the self as individually formed by free will (personal choice), or as formed by biochemical processes such as genes, hormones, or neurotransmitters. Religious ideas claim that god gives people free will and intelligence. All these concepts ignore the profound impact that cultural factors have on the person. These concepts do not constitute a cultural understanding of psychology. They impede understanding and changing the origins and features of self – which are social. Eastern myths such as reincarnation equally misrepresent the self. Reincarnation proposes that the self is transmitted from a former life into a present one. The self, or soul can even be reborn in another species such as a spider or a carrot. The self is regarded as a disembodied spiritual entity that jumps from a dead organism to a living organism across species depending upon the acts that it has performed. This myth is not a cultural account of psychology.

Indigenous theories of psychological disturbance (“mental illness”) may be similarly flawed. “In current-day traditional Chinese medicine practice, depression is conceptualized as a disorder of qi (the life force that flows around



and through the body). In traditional Chinese medical texts, depression is called yuzheng, which literally means a stagnation disorder. Within this model, depression is caused by qi stagnating in liver, spleen, and lung, and recovery is brought about by dispersing the stagnation of qi with herbal medicines or acupuncture (Lee, et al., 2007, p. 6). This indigenous theory is an interesting commentary on Chinese cultural concepts about depression, but it is not an accurate scientific account of it. Doctors cannot specify what qi is empirically, nor can they explain why or how it accumulates in the spleen, nor can they empirically locate any qi in the spleen – just as god and Jesus are not locatable in the sky. Lee, et al. conclude that the symptoms of their contemporary Chinese patients did not accord with the traditional account. “The centrality of sleeplessness in our informants’ narratives is in sharp contrast to the qi and mood conceptualizations of depression” (ibid., p.6).

Moreover, the Chinese account of psychological disturbance does not make any reference to macro cultural factors that generate the causes or symptoms of mental illness. These have been identified by empirical research and by cogent psychological theories. Herbal medicine may help patients feel better, just as pharmaceutical medication may help patients to relax or become less reactive. But in neither of these cases do the medications eliminate the cause of the problem in a way that resembles an antibiotic killing the cause of an infection.

Unscientific cultural myths about self offer no insight into the real origins, features, and function of psychology. On the contrary, these cultural myths only reveal that people can be wrong about their own psychology.

Cultural myths about psychology may comprise a psychology of mass delusion. This consists of suspending rational, logical, empirical thinking, and accepting on faith ideas about the self that are unintelligible. In the case of reincarnation, there is no conceivable way to explain how a human self becomes detached from its body, floats around intact in space, and then enters another body of a human or a spider or carrot and persists intact. The whole concept defies rationality, or empirical evidence.<sup>9</sup> The psychology of delusion also includes compartmentalizing thinking into a sphere of irrational, illogical faith that co-exists alongside a sphere of logical, rational, empirical thinking.

Uncritically accepting indigenous psychological constructs as true insights into psychological phenomena

- prevents understanding how psychology truly works
- prevents detecting erroneous concepts about psychology
- traps people in ignorance
- prevents people from knowing how to create fulfilling selves

- denies the psychology of delusion
- prevents studying the psychology of delusion

An objective critique of subjective errors does not demonize or persecute the individual, nor does it leave one bereft of identity. The point is scientific and educational: to help people understand the social character and social bases of their psychology so they can better understand who they truly are and why they are that way. This enables them to realistically evaluate their identity and improve it by improving its social basis.<sup>10</sup> An objective psychological critique thus leads to improving society and freeing people from mystifying cultural factors. Cultural psychological science has political value.

If we did not have an objective psychological analysis, we would never know that indigenous understandings of self were erroneous; we would never know to search for malevolent cultural factors that mystify people about their psychology; nor would we attempt to improve cultural factors in ways that would enlighten people about their psychology (we would deem them to be already enlightened, or we would use indigenous treatments such as psychotropic drugs or herbs, or we would place an article of clothing on a stick and wave it around to call home a wayward spirit).

Abandoning critical psychological science superficially appears to validate people by accepting their indigenous psychological understanding; however, it actually traps people within mystified understanding and mystifying cultural factors (Ratner, 2011, a, b). If people believe that their unfortunate social position and psychological state are due to their former lives as spiders this prevents them from effectively analyzing and challenging the true causes of their misfortune. And if you treat mental illness with medicine instead of analyzing and altering distressing social factors, this distracts from real treatment and prevention.

### Denying universal science

Multiculturalists generally denounce external, scientific critiques of culture and psychology as being elitist, patronizing, and dismissive of indigenous culture. The very attempt to evaluate another culture is denounced in principle. However, this is a misguided criticism. Expert, objective, scientific analysis is beneficial to help people understand and control events that affect them. When you go to a doctor to treat your cough, which you believe is caused by a cold, and he tests you and tells you that your cough is caused by lung cancer, he is providing an expert, scientific diagnosis that contradicts your own limited, incorrect knowledge. Yet this is beneficial to you; it is not dismissive, patronizing, or elitist. The same is true of psychological scientific analysis of

psychological phenomena. The fact that it contradicts a people's indigenous opinion about the origins and characteristics of psychology does not make it dismissive, patronizing, or elitist. On the contrary, it provides useful information to people about the origins and characteristics of their psychology.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, psychological science is not as advanced as medical science, however the principle of using objective scientific methods to arrive at conclusions which dispute people's common sense about psychology is constructive, salutary, and empowering in both cases. This viewpoint leads to improving psychological science whereas the multicultural adulating of indigenous psychological constructs leads to rejecting psychological science that could critique these.

Nowadays it is fashionable to disparage science as a fantasy about illusory objectivity and truth. Skeptics of science claim that all observation is ultimately subjective interpretation, constantly changing, and devoid of independent objectivity or truth (see Sokal, 2008; Koertge, 1998, chaps. 1-3 for a critique of this claim). This claim misunderstands subjectivity and objectivity. It is true that science involves subjectivity and interpretation, and scientific truths are struggled over and revised in line with new knowledge. However, science is based upon ontological and epistemological principles, including experimental controls and rigorous examination of empirical evidence and rigorous logical reasoning. This is far different from subjective opinion. Science does discover enduring facts about things. Even refinements in scientific knowledge reach greater truth about things; they do not testify to the impossibility of objectivity. We certainly know more about more things than in previous times. New scientific concepts are not random fluctuations in subjective opinion which disregard and disprove objectivity.

This is true in social science as in natural science. Cultural psychological science discovers facts and principles concerning the origins, characteristics, and function of psychological phenomena. This is what gives it value. Although social and psychological phenomena are human constructions, they are real constructions. The President has real power despite the fact that it is socially-bestowed power. Money too has real power although it is socially bestowed. A person's anger is real and has devastating consequences, despite the fact that it is a humanly generated subjective state. These real facts have objective existence that can and must be accurately comprehended. One can be wrong in one's understanding of these phenomena. One can even be confused about one's own subjective state. Mistakes in this area have devastating consequences. Therefore, objective science is possible and necessary to apprehend humanly constructed phenomena.

Science skeptics falsely dichotomize subjectivity and objectivity. They

believe that subjectivity and objectivity are antithetical. In their view, subjectivity prevents and refutes objectivity, and objectivity is mechanical, naïve realism that displaces subjectivity. This dichotomy is false. Subjectivity and objectivity are dialectically complementary. The whole point of subjectivity is to comprehend the world. Human subjectivity comprehends things far more thoroughly than simple, sensory, animal processes do. It is indisputable that humans have more advanced subjectivity than animals and that we understand things far better than animals do. Our understanding of electrons, enzymes, and entropy is accomplished by subjectivity, it is not clouded by subjectivity. Conversely, objectivity requires and stimulates subjectivity, it does not contravene it. We must develop our subjectivity to comprehend the marvels of nature. They do not mechanically impose themselves upon our sense receptors without active subjectivity.

Subjectivity reaches beyond itself to the world; it is not absorbed in itself. Science skeptics reduce subjectivity to self-absorption. They reduce it to a personal process, located inside the person, colored by the person's individuality, and oriented toward the person. For them, subjectivity expresses and validates the person. Any attempt at apprehending a world beyond the person is not only impossible (because it is always refracted through personal attributes), it is depersonalizing in that it orients subjectivity away from the person. This desire to prioritize and affirm the individual in every act (and the fear of losing the individual in a larger world), is what stokes the passionate denial of a real, objective world beyond the individual that can be apprehended by science. The denial of science is essentially a political, social position (to affirm the individual), as most intellectual issues are.

Affirming science is equally social-political. It affirms worlds (natural and social) beyond the individual that can be known by directing subjectivity away from the individual to the greater worlds of which he is a part. Science is world-centric, while denying science is ego-centric. Affirming science brings the individual out of himself to vast worlds beyond him which he can and must understand and enhance. This growth requires subjecting his ideas to critical scrutiny from others and from nature. He cannot construe nature and society as he wishes, as his personal construction, within his own subjectivity. He relies on other people and natural phenomena to refine his own constructs. He has to work with them and through them to enrich his own life. All of this is implicit in the scientific outlook.

Science is a zone of proximal development in Vygotsky's sense. It is a good thing to subject the individual to social scrutiny and correction, as any teacher, parent, or friend does. This expands and enriches the person, it does not diminish him. This social view of people is implicit in the collaborative nature of

science. Science skeptics have an individualistic view of the person.

### Qualitative Methodology

An important methodology for arriving at a comprehensive, objective, scientific explanation and description and prediction of psychological phenomena is qualitative methodology. Qualitative methodology probes deeply into the quality of psychological phenomena which contains cultural and personal constituents. While psychologists prioritize positivistic methodology as scientific, and reject qualitative methodology out of hand, without knowing anything about it, this is a gross error. I have explained this issue in my book, Cultural Psychology and Qualitative Methodology. I will identify the flaws in positivistic methodology in the next section on cross-cultural psychology. Now, I will indicate the advantages of qualitative methodology for cultural psychology through the use of one example.

The example is a qualitative study on Chinese mental illness by Lee, Kleinman, & Kleinman (2007). They examined depressive experiences of participants by open-ended, in-depth, ethnographic interviews which were content-analyzed. These methods revealed six categories of affective experiences among the participants: Indigenous affective lexicons, embodied emotional experiences, implicit sadness, preverbal pain, distress of social disharmony, and centrality of sleeplessness. For instance, embodied emotional experiences combined affective distress with bodily experiences.

The compound terms nearly always involved the heart—*xinhuang* (heart panic), *xinjing* (heart dread/frightened), *xinfan* (heart vexed), *xintong* (heart pain), and *xinyi* (heart dysphoric/depressed/clutched/compressed). Some informants were adamant that emotional distress could be felt right inside or over the heart. Other compound terms showed that *xin* (heart) could be both the anatomical heart and the metaphysical mind, as *xinxing* (heart wakeful) and *xinlei* (heart exhausted) indicated. It has been suggested that “heart-mind” is the best formulation of *xin* as an embodied term.

“I felt my head swelling, very distressed and painful in the heart [*xin hen xinku*], my heart felt pressed . . . So . . . [sighing] . . . I felt my heart very irritated [*xin hen fan*], very upset . . . I felt my heart clutched and dysphoric [*xinyi*] . . . My brain swollen, so swollen inside. It is heart pressed and brain

swollen [xinyi naozhang]” (ibid., p. 4).

Qualitative methods revealed the cultural-psychological quality of depression in a rich way that is important to cultural psychology and to an adequate understanding and treatment of psychology in general. No other methodology can reveal the nuanced quality of psychological phenomena that is necessary for understanding and treating them.

The cultural quality of psychological depression is real and essential.

“Bodily complaints” are not best thought of as figurative or disguised symptoms. Rather they are bona fide experiences, as true as any other symptoms of depression, that deserve the same level of recognition and attention. Instead of regarding embodied symptoms, such as head swelling or chest pain, as atypical, metaphorical, or rudimentary, clinicians should view these expressions as windows that cast light on the deep sensibilities, personal and cultural, of being depressed. The failure to respect embodied affect can lead to therapeutic non-engagement. The failure of conventional diagnostic instruments to detect and capture embodied affective experience, as well as other ethnocultural expressions of depression, may explain the unusually low prevalence of depression reported in lay interviewer-administered epidemiological surveys among urban Chinese and in other societies.

We would like to emphasize that we are not presenting a critique of the DSM per se, but rather of psychiatry in general. We want to point out that contemporary psychiatric knowledge—as captured in the textbooks and diagnostic criteria—more accurately depicts depression in the West than in China. This result is unsurprising, given that the criteria and textbooks are based on Western patients. Nonetheless, we hope that the readers are aware that the phenomenology of depression is different in China and doubtless other non-Western societies. Hence, psychiatrists and researchers working with non-Western patients need to ask different questions in order to elicit the depressive symptoms and illness experience (ibid., p. 7).

I would add that not only do conventional Western diagnostics fail to

adequately apprehend the experience of contemporary Chinese mental illness, but traditional Chinese accounts, such as qi stagnating in the spleen, do not apprehend it either – as Lee, et al. mentioned in our discussion of objectivity.

Shweder, et al. (2008) employ qualitative methodology to elucidate the cultural qualities of emotions. The authors usefully identify 8 dimensions of emotions which are axis for comparing analogous emotions in different cultures. The authors employ qualitative methodology to identify the features of each axis. This yields a comprehensive qualitative portrait of all the dimensions of a particular emotion in different cultures. For instance, American anger is compared with its analog lung lang in Tibet. On the dimension of somatic experience, research reveals considerable overlap or similarity. Feelings of tension, anxiety, and heat were common to both cultures. However, affective phenomenology manifested significant qualitative differences. Americans were far more likely to experience anger lingering after the provocative event, whereas Tibetans were likely to have dissipated lung lang and replaced it with dysphoric feelings such as shame, regret, and unhappiness. This undoubtedly stems from differences in another emotional dimension, “normative social appraisal”: Tibetans regard lung lang as morally bad and leading to bad karma, whereas Americans regard their anger as morally ambivalent, neutral, or natural. Americans frequently emphasized the positive aspects of anger such as giving people energy to respond to problems or injustice. The different social appraisals of anger and lung lang also were the likely root of differences in another dimension, “self-management.” Tibetans were likely to believe that anger could be controlled and prevented; Americans did not believe this was possible or desirable. Americans felt that anger is natural and should be expressed for the benefits it yields. Tibetans felt their emotion is harmful and so it can and should be controlled and prevented. This also explains why Tibetans were quick to forget about anger while Americans continued to experience and recall it.

This qualitative research reveals how an emotion is an integral complex of qualitatively congruent dimensions that have an internal logic.

These examples demonstrate how qualitative methods apprehend the rich cultural-psychological quality of psychological experience/states. Since the objective of psychological science is to thoroughly comprehend the full complexity of psychological phenomena, qualitative methods may be said to be objective. They are clearly useful for elucidating subtle, nuanced cultural qualities of psychological phenomena. Positivistic methods are far less objective in this sense. They limit responses to simplistic, superficial, fragmentary responses to ambiguous, truncated test materials. This is evident in the shortcomings of cross-cultural research which rely upon these methods.

## Cross-cultural psychology from the perspective of cultural psychology

To fully appreciate the distinctive emphasis of cultural psychology, it is useful to compare it to cross-cultural psychology. Cultural psychology arose out of dissatisfaction with cross-cultural psychology (Shweder, 1990). This dissatisfaction must be elucidated in order to capture the genesis, motive, and telos that informs cultural psychology. There still remains a tension although cross-cultural psychologists have recently sought to downplay the differences and declare a “big tent” in which everyone concerned with culture and psychology can join hands. Several cross-cultural psychologists have written pieces and edited books on cultural psychology. However, differences in principle remain unresolved. “The big tent” is wishful thinking that papers over, rather than resolves, principled differences. This is harmful because it allows the weaknesses in cross-cultural psychology (that provoked cultural psychology to arise as a corrective) to persist. Eclecticism is regressive not progressive because it allows weaknesses to persist in “the big tent” and it blunts the critical effort to correct them. The controversy that existed in the 80s and 90s was healthy because it exposed the errors and fleshed out more valid directions in cultural psychology. However, eclecticism stifles controversy and criticism, and it embraces errors as just another viewpoint that has something to offer.

Because cultural psychology strives to avoid weaknesses of cross-cultural psychology, it is important to know what these are in order to understand the thrust of cultural psychology. Cultural psychology, like any discipline, is defined in part by what it avers, because its aversions determine its direction along new lines.

We shall examine a representative example to illustrate the characteristics of cross-cultural research. The characteristics we shall encounter are the following: The authors rely on the positivistic ontology and epistemology that dominates mainstream, general psychology. This undercuts their efforts to identify and compare psychological content in particular cultures. The positivistic framework reduces complex, concrete factors that are interrelated in a specific social system, to fragmented variables which are abstracted from real systems and thus lose the nuanced, concrete content that they have in real life. Additionally, positivists’ operational definitions of psychological and cultural variables are simplistic, superficial, and oftentimes irrelevant to the topic being investigated. They are usually developed to elicit expedient, easily quantifiable responses rather than to probe the psychological content/quality of an issue.



The tests and measures thus provide little information about the topic of research. Oftentimes, detailed knowledge of cultural-historical factors is lacking, and is replaced by superficial, abstract, notions. Finally, statistical procedures supersede sensitivity to psychological issues. Statistical tests, which only indicate statistical probabilities, are used as criteria for whether research is significant. No psychological criteria are developed to assess whether empirical results are psychologically significant. This is a surreal situation that prevents psychologists from having any idea about the psychological significance of their research on psychological issues. Moreover, they do not see this as a problem that warrants correction. Instead, they blithely continue to use psychologically irrelevant criteria for assessing psychological research. This is as absurd as using psychological criteria for assessing research in physics – e.g., using the results of personality tests on physicists as criteria for whether their research on subatomic particles was significant (see Ratner, 2002, 2006, pp. 26-30 for a comparison of cross-cultural psychology and cultural psychology).

### Emotional complexity

Our representative case study of these characteristics is Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, & Wang's (2010) research on emotional complexity (EC) -- the co-occurrence of pleasant and unpleasant emotions. The authors assert that EC is more prevalent in East Asian than Western cultures. Euro-Americans traditionally show an inverse relationship between good and bad feelings; individuals who report experiencing positive affect frequently or intensely also report experiencing negative affect less often or intensely. In contrast, "In East Asian representations, constructs such as happy/sad are viewed as mutually dependent, coevolving, and existing in a state of balance. East Asians conceptualize the self in a dualistic manner and are more tolerant of contradiction. Consequently, they may have more complex emotional reactions to self-relevant experiences" (p. 110).

This description presents Asians as complex, balanced, and tolerant of contradiction and nuance. In contrast, Westerners are simple, one-sided, and crude.

This characterization of the populations is politically laden. The labels are implicitly demeaning to Westerners and congratulatory of Asians. Emotionally complex-balanced-tolerant is regarded by most people as more positive than simple, one-sided, crude emotionality.

In addition, applying the positive label of emotional complexity to experiencing multiple emotions simultaneously is a political act. This

experience could just as well be labeled emotional confusion, or emotional inconsistency. Conversely, the Western separation of positive and negative emotions could be labeled as emotional consistency or emotional clarity. This choice of labels would reverse the positive and negative connotation of Easterners' and Westerners' psychology. Thus, the authors are engaging in a political act of degradation or glorification in their choice of psychological labels. Their choice is arbitrary because it could just as well have been reversed. (In the old days, Western male psychologists used labels in similarly political ways. They labeled the psychology of women and minorities with pejorative terms, which women and minorities objected to. Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, & Wang simply reverse this psychological imperialism and direct it against Westerners – just as it is now fashionable to label men as less emotionally sensitive, expressive, and complex than women.)

Indeed, the authors' measure of emotional complexity did formerly carry an opposite designation. The authors acknowledge that “In this study, complexity scores are used to measure the extent to which participants reported experiencing both good and bad feelings over the past few weeks. Originally developed to measure ambivalence, these scores index the extent to which individuals hold both positive and negative attitudes or emotions” (p. 110). Thus, the correlation of positive and negative emotions was originally deemed to have a pejorative connotation of ambivalence, however the authors arbitrarily reversed this connotation into a positive one of emotional complexity. This is a political act posing as social science.

Equally problematical is the validity of the conclusion that emotional complexity (EC)—the co-occurrence of pleasant and unpleasant emotions—is more prevalent in East Asian than Western cultures. Common knowledge about social life in China and the United States refutes the authors' generalizations. Americans readily experience the complexity of emotions and the co-presence of sadness and happiness. Americans frequently experience a mixture of sadness and happiness when an infirm elder relative dies. Although we are sad at the departure of the loved one, we also feel relieved and happy that her (and our) suffering has ended. Upon marriage, almost all Americans feel a nuanced happiness that contains elements of worry about whether the marriage will end in divorce as 50% do. Most couples feel a mixture of love and disappointment for their partners. Hardly any Americans are deliriously happy about every aspect of their partner and have no grievances. Even losing a job can provoke a mixed sense of loss but also excitement at a

new opportunity for a different kind of life. Graduation from high school or college typically provokes a nuanced sense of loss and excitement. Catholicism, which is believed by millions of Westerners, construes death as bittersweet because it is a passage to salvation at the same time it is a loss.

Conversely, Chinese often experience single, overriding emotions. During the Nanking Massacre, Chinese people felt overwhelming, single-minded hatred of the Japanese perpetrators. They did not feel a balance of fury and love for them. When a Chinese student is rejected from an elite university, his emotion is overwhelmingly sad; there is little tinge of elation. Conversely, when Chinese gymnasts win a gold medal, Chinese citizens feel elated; they do not feel a mixture of elation and depression.

The authors will say that they are only comparing degrees of emotional complexity so of course some contrary cases will be expected in both populations. However, the counter examples I have enumerated are widespread, and not notably different in the two countries.

The authors do not assess these kinds of real life emotions in their study. Their measures do not tap real life practice/experience as I shall now explain.

Emotional complexity was assessed using 20 items adapted from the PANAS. Participants indicated “the extent to which you have felt this way during the past few weeks” on a unipolar scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 9 (very much). They rated 10 positive emotions (confident, content, calm, proud, bold, satisfied, pleased, energetic, happy, and interested) and 10 negative emotions (sad, tired, bored, upset, disappointed, nervous, insecure, ashamed, angry, and embarrassed). EC scores were computed using the negative acceleration model by applying the formula,  $([2 \times S] + 1)/(S + L + 2)$ , where S is the smaller and L is the larger mean affect rating. Higher scores indicate greater EC.

This measure actually contradicts the sense of emotional complexity the authors present. Emotional complexity only exists when a given experience includes both positive and negative emotions, as in the aphorism which the authors cite: “For misery, happiness is leaning against it; for happiness, misery is hiding in it. Happiness and misery are interdependent and interpenetrating.” However, the authors’ positivistic measure of EC asks Ss to recall positive and negative emotions that were experienced separately during several weeks. Ss who experienced a positive emotion in one event and a negative emotion in a separate event would receive a score of 9 and be defined as emotionally complex.

However, each emotional experience would have been simple and one-sided. The authors mistakenly equate a sum of separate emotions with an integrated, complex emotional experience. Their measure of EC violates the psychological meaning of emotional complexity which is an integrated, complex, nuanced emotional experience. Designating the measure as “emotional complexity” is a misnomer.

In addition, the operational definition relied on Ss’ memory of their emotions, it did not tap emotions that were actually experienced. Presenting, and entitling, the research as involving emotions is not quite accurate.

### Statistical significance

Another methodological problem with the research is that it subordinates psychological significance of the findings to statistical significance. For instance, the difference between Chinese and American students on EC was .06 ( $M = .76$  for Chinese and  $.70$  for Americans) which is miniscule and psychologically insignificant. Nobody would conclude that two people (or groups) whose score on a crude questionnaire about memory of events over a two week period differs by 0.06, are psychologically different, in a significant, meaningful way. (Of course, a more thorough psychological assessment of the data needs to be accomplished. However, positivists have resisted developing this kind of psychological assessment, so their study does not report any. We are forced to infer the lack of psychological difference from the minuteness of the score differences and from the crudeness of the measure of EC.) However, this difference in scores was statistically significant at the 0.05 level which the authors take as indicating their hypothesis.

But, statistical significance has nothing to do with psychological significance. The authors use a non-psychological criterion of statistical significance to produce a finding of significance, when a psychological assessment of the results indicates no significance (i.e., data indicate no significant psychological difference). They can only pretend their results are significant by using an irrelevant measure of significance. A true (psychological) assessment falsifies their results, so they use a false (statistical) assessment to validate their results. The false assessment converts the false results into significant results. The right assessment produces the wrong conclusion (no difference), for them, so they use a wrong assessment to produce a right conclusion, for them. They use an unscientific criterion to generate a socially acceptable conclusion because a scientific criterion generates a socially unacceptable conclusion (of no

difference). They subjugate science to serve their social purpose of generating significant data (that will be socially rewarded by publications, social prestige and positions, and monetary rewards).

The authors, and all positivists, take the statistical finding of 'significant' and transpose it to the psychological arena where it does not apply. This is nominalism. It uses a word to imply a reality that does not exist.

### Dialectical thinking

Another problem with this study is the authors' ignorance of cultural factors in China and the U.S.

The authors attribute emotional complexity to dialectical philosophy in Asian cultures. Yet it is not clear why the authors presume that dialectical thinking is an Asian attribute. Dialectics was developed by Western philosophers such as Plato, Hegel, Marx, Adorno, and Marcuse. Dialectics is an important element in Western philosophy. Vygotsky, for example, utilized dialectical thinking in many of his formulations. The word dialectics was coined in Ancient Greece, not in Asia. (Ratner & Hui, 2003 have pointed out the error of identifying dialectics as Asian thinking.) So why do the authors presume that dialectics is the basis of Asian emotional complexity, rather than Western psychology? This is as unwarranted as presuming that emotional complexity is an attribute of Asian emotionality.

In addition, the authors do not understand dialectical philosophy. They operationally define it in a Dialectical Self Scale whose items include: "My outward behaviors reflect my true thoughts and feelings." (reversed) This has nothing to do with dialectics. It would make lying the epitome of dialectics.

"I am constantly changing and am different from one time to the next." This makes an unstable personality into the epitome of dialectics.

"My core beliefs don't change much over time." (reversed) This means that one is a dialectician if one changes a core belief that racial discrimination is bad to believing it is good.

Another item is: "When two sides disagree, the truth is always somewhere in the middle." Thus, if one side says the Holocaust occurred, and the other side denies it, then believing something in the middle is dialectical! Another item: "When I hear two sides of an argument, I often agree with both.". That would mean that someone who believed humans co-existed with dinosaurs, and also believed humans did not co-exist with

dinosaurs was a dialectician! Dialecticians such as Plato, Hegel, and Marx were a bit more sophisticated than this.

The DSS is a misnomer that reflects a profound ignorance of dialectics.

Dialectics does not accept two sides of an argument. Quite the opposite, it strives to identify inconsistencies in an argument which refute it as it stands. Socrates, for example, cross-examines his interlocutor's claims and premises in order to draw out inconsistency among them that warrants abandoning them.

For instance, in The Republic he argued that justice is antithetical to harming someone: "It is not then the function of the just man to harm either friend or anyone else, but of his opposite, the unjust....If anyone affirms that it is just to render to each his due and he means by this that injury and harm is what is due to his enemies...he was no truly wise man who said it. For what he meant was not true. For it has been made clear to us that in no case is it just to harm anyone." Socrates' dialectical argument culminates in a decisive, absolute position -- in no case is it just to harm anyone -- which refutes the opposite argument as unwise and untrue. Nothing could be more false than to claim that dialectical argumentation accepts both sides., a middle ground, or no truth.

Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit follows Socrates' dialectical procedure of detecting inadequacies in philosophical positions (i.e., "untrue consciousness") and correcting them to discover truth. The Introduction to the Phenomenology announces the subject of dialectical philosophy as "the actual knowledge of what truly is." This is achieved by "The dialectic process which consciousness executes on itself, in the sense that out of it the new and true object arises..." The authors misunderstand dialectics to be the opposite of what Hegel says, i.e., to be compromising and denying truth. One of the measures of dialecticism on the Dialectical Self Scale is: "When I am solving a problem, I focus on finding the truth. (reversed)"

Marx condemned errors and distortions committed by bourgeois economists. He never accepted them along with his dialectical materialism. Mao explained dialectics in his essay "On Contradiction." He recognized that "Hegel made most important contributions to dialectics," and he embraced Marx's dialectical thinking which he distinguished from Asian philosophy that he dubbed "metaphysical," static, and reactionary (cf. Ratner & Hui, 2003). He used it to denounce and correct erroneous thinking (including Chinese philosophical beliefs). He did not use dialectics to embrace all perspectives as equally true.

## Confucianism

One might suggest that the measure of dialecticism is simply mistakenly labeled and is rather an indicator of Asian philosophy such as Confucianism -- which includes The Golden Mean and other modest concepts. Perhaps the operationalization should simply be retitled as Confucian thinking and then re-word the conclusion: Confucian thinking generates emotional complexity. However, the superficial, simplistic scale items are as divorced from Asian Confucian principles as they are Western dialectics. The study cannot be accepted as researching Confucian thinking.

Items such as “My outward behaviors reflect my true thoughts and feelings,” (reversed) “I am constantly changing and am different from one time to the next,” “I sometimes find that I am a different person by the evening than I was in the morning,” “I have a hard time making up my mind about controversial issues” do not represent Confucian thinking.

Confucius was a conservative thinker who emphasized the stability of kingdoms ruled by an aristocracy. Citizens must abide by social rules in order to maintain the system. Stability, order, commitment, obedience were the core values of Confucianism. Capricious individual behavior and uncertain, indefinite, unstable values (that are denoted by the study’s test items) would undercut the stability of the kingdom. They are as inconsistent with Confucianism as they are with dialectics.

This is clear from a number of Confucius’s statements: “The man who in view of gain thinks of righteousness; who in the view of danger is prepared to give up his life; and who does not forget an old agreement however far back it extends - such a man may be reckoned a complete man.” This is a definite, principled code of action that emphasizes adhering to old agreements. There is no hint here of constantly changing one’s behavior in different situations, or being uncertain or compromising about what is virtuous and true. Confronting gain and righteousness, the complete man definitely chooses the latter over the former. “The firm, the enduring, the simple, and the modest are near to virtue.” This is another clear statement about the value of the firm and the enduring. There is no celebration of change, unpredictability, and uncertainty. “To be able to practice five things everywhere under heaven constitutes perfect virtue...[They are] gravity, generosity of soul, sincerity, earnestness, and kindness.” Again, Confucius espouses consistent perfect virtue everywhere, in all action. Of course, virtue is rarely achieved, and is always a state of striving, however, Confucius makes it crystal clear that

virtue consists of particular, definite, universal attributes. He says, "Wisdom, compassion, and courage are the three universally recognized moral qualities of men." His statements are completely at odds with the authors' test items: "I often change the way I am, depending on who I am with." "I have a definite set of beliefs, which guide my behavior at all times." (reversed) "I prefer to compromise than to hold on to a set of beliefs."

Confucius clearly believed in right and wrong and in consistently upholding the former. He believed in absolutes such as virtue. He went so far as to espouse one word which serves as a rule of practice for all one's life: "Tsze-Kung asked, 'Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?' The Master said, 'Is not Reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.'" This is clearly not open to change depending on circumstance and who I am with.

Finally, Confucius said, "When you know a thing, to hold that you know it, and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it - this is knowledge." In other words, knowledge is holding to what you know. The authors invent an opposite notion that "I often find that my beliefs and attitudes will change under different contexts."

The authors have concocted a set of measures that correspond neither to dialectics nor to Asian Confucianism.

Agreeing with two sides of an argument, or with a middle ground, is akin to postmodern relativism and eclecticism, and plain old lazy-mindedness, not dialectics or Confucianism. It is quite prevalent in American culture. Americans commonly say that many belief systems contain truth, they believe truth is a compromise among positions, and they accept multiculturalism that embraces all cultures as valuable. This contradicts the authors' claim that Americans think in either-or absolutes, and eschew nuance, balance, and complexity.

The authors do not understand the cultures they study or the psychology of emotional complexity that they study. They erroneously attribute dialectical philosophy to China, and they completely misrepresent dialectical philosophy in their operational definition of it. Plus, they rely on crude positivistic quantitative measures and tests of significance which do not apprehend psychological issues.

Comparing cross-cultural psychological research to cultural psychological research



This cross-cultural psychological research pales in comparison with Lee, Kleinman, & Kleinman's qualitative study of Chinese depression. Qualitative methodology elucidated the felt experience of depression, while cross cultural research blocks out experience by imposing simplistic, superficial, fragmented tests that reduce responses to similarly simplistic, superficial, fragmented, overt answers.

The cross-cultural research also pales in comparison with Ritterhouse's cultural psychological research on racial etiquette and psychology. That research was informed by a deep historical understanding of the topic. The cross-cultural psychologists were ignorant and confused about the historical character of their topic.

In addition, Ritterhouse dealt with a historically concrete, rich cultural factor -- the code of racial etiquette -- and elucidated its psychological elements that were internalized by southern whites. It elucidated the internal relationship between psychological phenomena such as emotions, memory, perception, self, and reasoning, and the cultural complex of values, strictures, power relations, property ownership, and legitimating-mystifying ideology. The mutual dependence and support of psychology and the cultural complex in which it was embedded was made clear. The richness of the cultural complex clarified and concretized the specific details of psychological phenomena, including the situations that provoked them and did not provoke them, their quality, their contradictions (e.g., violently attacking a black person who touched them on the street, or called them by their first name, but then allowing them to care for their children), their dynamics and organization.

In contrast, the cross-cultural research studied an ambiguous psychological issue, emotional complexity, that had no ostensible social importance. There was certainly no ostensible real life difference in EC between Americans and Chinese (as I noted) that could have provoked the authors' interest in studying it. The lack of social significance made EC socially and psychologically ambiguous and poorly defined. This contrasts with the glaring social significance and definiteness of white behavior toward blacks that Ritterhouse studied.

Our cross-cultural psychologists further deprived EC of social and psychological significance (reality and definiteness) by operationalizing it as a few superficial, simplistic questions that violate any meaningful sense of emotional complexity. Furthermore, the questions inquired about their recollection of their experience, which is clouded by all the distortions of long term memory. Emotional complexity, per se, was not even studied.

Inadequate operationalizations similarly distorted the independent variable, “dialecticism.” The test items that operationalized it represent no recognizable cultural or historical phenomenon. The items are a self-contained invention that have no cultural basis or significance. They do not represent dialectics; nor do they represent Asian philosophy such as Confucianism. Taken at face value, they indicate a deceitful, vacillating, uncertain, lazy-minded, conformist, unprincipled, uncontrollable person. How this could be equated with dialectical or Confucian thinking is not clear.

It seems that every aspect of the cross-cultural study contorted real issues into unreal caricatures and misnomers. The authors concocted a realm of surreal constructs, tests, measures, and indicators that have no connection to the real issues these were said to denote. They create an Alice in Wonderland inverted world where nothing is as it seems. E.g., the wrong test/criteria generates the wrong empirical conclusion (e.g., significant differences), yet these are presented as the right test that generates the right conclusion. The wrong operational definitions are used yet they are presented as objectively measuring psychological and cultural phenomena.

Consequently, conclusions based on the study’s methodology are phantoms. They are uninformative, and misleading about, actual cultural psychological issues such as dialectics, emotional complexity, and significance. The authors violate Confucius’s dictum: “The whole end of speech is to be understood.” Violating this dictum has serious consequences which Confucius pointed out: “If names are not right, words are misused. When words are misused, affairs go wrong. When affairs go wrong, courtesy and music droop, law and justice fail. And when law and justice fail them, a people can move neither hand nor foot.”

This study pales in comparison with Ritterhouse’s cultural psychology in that it fails to elucidate any psychological connection between “dialecticism” and “emotional complexity.” There is no indication of why “dialecticism” fosters “emotional complexity” or how it does so. Cross-cultural psychology has no broader psychological theory of why culture affects psychology. What is the internal relation between the two? Why does psychology have a cultural genesis, character, and function? More specifically, what is the relation between cognition (a belief system, a way of thinking) and emotion?

In contrast, cultural psychology develops a psychological and cultural theory that explain these relationships, and refines the explanation through empirical research (Ratner, 1991, 2006).

Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, & Wang's research was conducted by prominent psychologists and was published in a prominent journal after being peer reviewed by prominent psychologists. Moreover, it continues a series of similar research that the authors have published over the years in other venues approved by diverse peer reviewers and editors. It is therefore representative of cross-cultural psychology.

Not all cross-cultural research is this flawed. However, positivistic methodology generates errors which are never completely avoided by cross-cultural psychologists. Positivistic methodology is a flawed, limiting methodology that dominates the best intentions of researchers. Even when positivists have a historical understanding of significant cultural and psychological factors, their methodology renders these unrecognizable by contorting them into simplistic, superficial, abstract, contrived, misbegotten definitions-measures (e.g., collectivism, parental control, responsiveness, and expressiveness that are devoid of cultural content) which are treated with statistical procedures having no bearing on psychological significance (Ratner, 1997).

This is why cultural psychologists such as Shweder developed cultural psychology in opposition to cross-cultural psychology.

Positivistic methodology should not be confused with rigorous, quantitative, experimental, scientific methodology in general. Popper correctly designated positivism as pseudo science, which he termed "scientism." Quantitative, analytical, experimental methodology does not have to commit the errors that scientific positivism commits. Quantitative, analytical methodology has been usefully employed to pinpoint cultural factors that generate various physical disorders. These factors are difficult to perceive without quantitative, analytical methodology. Obesity and HIV are two illustrative examples.

In the case of obesity, there is a "social gradient of obesity" in which "the incidence of obesity is greater among the least privileged and most economically insecure in society; people with the least control over their lives and critical sources of self-worth; e.g., African-American and Mexican-American women" (Wisman & Capehart, 2010, pp. 939, 945; Raphael, 2009). Obesity prevalence was stable from 1960-1980, after which it has doubled to where 1/3 of the population is obese. The prevailing view of obesity continues to construe it as a disorder of individual behavior, rather than highly conditioned by the socioeconomic environment. Other explanations that blame obesity on sedentary activities are also faulty. Television watching, automobile driving, and household labor saving devices became far more prevalent between 1960

and 1980, yet no corresponding increase in obesity was observed until after 1980. “Calories expended have not changed significantly since 1980 when the epidemic began” (ibid., p. 943).

Wisman & Capehart explain the relation between insecurity/stress and consuming fatty and sweet foods as follows. Such foods appear to act as calming opiates to relieve stress. In animals and human infants, the ingestion of sweet and fatty foods, including milk, alleviates crying and other behavioral signs of distress. Eating high-fat and other “comfort” foods helps in reducing biological stress system activities and negative emotions resulting from stress (Wisman & Capehart, 2010, p. 947).

Quantitative, analytical methodology also reveals that poverty is the primary cause of HIV. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control studied 9,000 heterosexual men and women living in poor neighborhoods who were not at high risk for HIV (e.g., excluding gay and bisexual men). 2.1% of them were HIV positive. This figure is 20 higher than the prevalence of HIV among heterosexuals in the general U.S. population. 2.1% prevalence is also double the threshold for a generalized epidemic. Therefore, poverty alone (without personal factors such as homosexuality) is sufficient to generate an HIV epidemic. HIV is at least as much a function of where you live as who you are. The report’s author concluded that reducing HIV requires a structural approach that addresses housing, education, access to health-care, and jobs (Wall St. Journal, July 19, 2010, p. A2).

Quantitative, analytical methodology can be profitably employed without positivistic errors to ferret out cultural causes of behavior that are not immediately apparent.

### Micro Cultural Psychology

A recent development in cultural psychology has been the emphasis on individual factors which mediate culture. This approach champions individual creativity in selectively assimilating culture. Advocates of this approach reject the idea that culture has the power to organize psychological functions. Instead, culture is regarded as an external context which the individual utilizes and reconstructs as she sees fit. This approach defines culture as the outcome of a negotiated interaction between an individual, other individuals, and social institutions-conditions. In their negotiations, interpretations, selections, and modifications of institutions-conditions, each individual constructs a personal culture out of her own experience. Social life is like a tool kit which provides individuals with the means for constructing what they like.

I call this approach “micro cultural psychology” because it construes culture and psychology as primarily organized by small, informal, interpersonal relationships which are continually negotiated to express each individual's needs and interests.

Micro cultural psychology denotes the level of analysis a researcher employs to explain culture and psychology. What is key is that the micro level of interactions is used to explain the origin of culture and psychology. Micro cultural psychologists are not unique in trying to explain micro level social-psychological processes. This chapter has presented numerous attempts to explain micro processes in terms of broader, macro cultural factors such as racial honor codes and capitalist industry. Micro cultural psychologists are distinctive in regarding the micro level as the basis of the macro level and of psychology.

The emphasis on individuals constructing culture out of a social environment has been a central theme of recent psychological anthropology (cf. Ratner, 1993). For example, in her analysis of Balinese emotions, Wikan rejected trying to understand Balinese emotions as reflections of social categories. She sought instead to elucidate the personal experience of emotions. She said, "were we to make sense of Suriati's endeavor by appealing to a Balinese `culture' endorsing `grace' we would come close to reducing her to an automaton: a mere embodiment of `her culture.'" "People do not live and embody culture. That would be too much of a reification" (Wikan, 1990, pp. 13, 14). Wikan goes so far as to say, "In my account, people occupy center stage, while my concern with `culture' is incidental" (ibid., p. 19).

Wikan espouses the individualistic orientation in a later ethnography about poor people in Egypt. She explicitly disregards the socioeconomic context of her subjects, saying, "I do not attempt to analyze the macroforces that determine the economic and social inequities that create poverty. Instead, I am trying to show how the particular forms of poverty and misery are experienced, and how they are actively shaped and transformed by the people who suffer them" (Wikan, 1996, p. 3).

Wikan's statement expresses the essence of the individualistic orientation to cultural psychology - namely, that individuals create their own cultural psychology out of conditions, and that their cultural psychology can be comprehended through the self-expressions of subjects without any additional analysis of the socio-cultural system. Wikan acknowledges that external obstacles constrain people, thwart their opportunities, and corrode their social

relationships (ibid., p. 15). However, she paradoxically believes that individual actions transcend this context. She repeatedly states that her subjects are resilient, energetic, resourceful, and successful. She glorifies individual transcendence of social conditions to such an extent that she sub-titled her book "Self-Made Destinies in Cairo".

The individualistic, micro approach to cultural psychology also finds expression in the work of Jaan Valsiner. He recognizes that there is a collective culture of socially shared meanings. However, "belief systems that exist within a collective culture do not have an effect in the sense of being copied directly (or appropriated) by individuals. Instead, they constitute resources from which active persons construct their own (personal) belief structures" (Lightfoot & Valsiner, 1992, p. 395). "Individuals construct their idiosyncratic (personally meaningful) system of signs, practices and personal objects, all of which constitute the personal culture" (Valsiner, Branco, Dantas, 1997, p. 284). Valsiner's co-construction of culture combines two entirely distinct and separate processes: an impersonal, social component plus a non-social, personal component. The collective part is "alien" while the personal part is "one's own" (ibid., p. 285).

As an example of this personal construction of culture and psychology, Lightfoot & Valsiner discuss how a parent might react to an advertisement. She may comply with the message and buy the product. However, she may just as likely re-interpret portions of the advertisement and purchase other kinds of products; or she may reject the message completely and buy nothing. Her reaction is her choice, it is not shaped by external social situations. Social situations are grist for the individual's mill, they are not the mill which structures the individual's work. Lightfoot & Valsiner (1992, p. 411) state that "the particular hierarchy of beliefs constructed from media suggestions may vary from individual to individual."

In other words, individual processes determine the effect that social life has on a particular person. Social life only affects someone to the extent that he allows it to.

In contrast to cultural psychology which construes the individual as profoundly affected by culture, the new viewpoint, called co-constructionism, grants primacy to the individual's decision about how to deal with culture. Valsiner states, "The logic of the argument supporting the relevance of the social environment in human development is reversed in the co-constructionist paradigm" (Branco & Valsiner, 1997, p. 37).

According to the new paradigm, "most of human development takes place through active ignoring and neutralization of most of the social suggestions to which the person is subjected in everyday life"(Valsiner, 1998, p. 393, emphasis in original).

In this model, social influences are regarded as "collective cultural viruses" which are "affect-laden meanings [symbolic concepts] meant to infect or penetrate personal belief systems (systems of personal sense). Their success, however, depends on whether the individual's personal culture in its present state is susceptible to such influence, or whether it contains psychological 'antibodies' or conflicting beliefs (that had emerged during previous experiences), that block or neutralize the 'attack'" (Lightfoot & Valsiner, 1992, p. 396).

These comments reveal that micro cultural psychology is a statement of cultural phobia, not cultural psychology. Culture is construed as a an infectious disease that injures people. People must resist culture by bending it to their individual will which they exercise in mundane acts. Cultural phobia leads these social scientists to displace cultural influences by subjective constructions of meaning.

Micro cultural psychology is inspired by cultural phobia; it is a symptom of cultural phobia; it promulgates social phobia. Where you find an emphasis on individual, subjective construction of meaning, you will generally find a fear of culture, an animosity toward it, an aversion of it, a denigration of it (e.g., by calling it reified), an ignoring of it, a denial of it, a neutralizing and minimizing of it.

This cultural phobia is reflected in the characterization of social structures as reified. This implies that social structures are inherently dehumanized, depersonalizing, and immune to transformation. As such, the best and only way to achieve psychological fulfillment is to rebuff social structures and emphasize individual processes of social and psychological construction.

For example, in Lightfoot & Valsiner's discussion of individual interpretations, selections, negotiations, and modifications of advertisements, they fail to consider societal influences on the individuals' subjectivity activity. The authors never indicate societal factors which lead certain parents to comply with advertisements and others to resist in various ways; they are unconcerned with how many parents manage to reject the ads; they never pin point the extent to which individual acts differ from cultural norms, i.e., whether the acts are superficial,

incomplete challenges. Any parental reaction is deemed to be an individual choice.

The authors do not want to perceive social influence on behavior because they construe it as reified and implacable.

However, the social model of micro cultural psychologists is faulty. Their view of social structures and institutions as reified is wrong. And their alternative social model – of society as the sum of individual, micro level actions -- is necessarily also wrong. Creating and attacking a straw man leads to erecting another straw man in its place.

I have demonstrated in the early part of this chapter that structures are humanly constructed and depend upon subjective processes. Neoliberalism, and social change in China, have been sweeping, coordinated, coherent, systemic, structural changes in society that were actively designed and implemented by human social agency. This is why structures are changeable. One of the greatest structuralist sociologists, Emile Durkheim, clearly recognized this: "sociology in no way imposes upon man a passively conservative attitude." On the contrary, "sociology, by discovering the laws of social reality, will permit us to direct historical evolution with greater reflection than in the past" (Durkheim, 1909/1978, p. 75).

The correct way to understand society and psychology is to recognize that social structures contain and organize behavior/psychology. This is just how role theorists included subjectivity in social roles. Bourdieu includes subjectivity in his concept of the habitus which is organized by social structures.

### The contrast between cultural psychology and micro cultural psychology

Empirical evidence demonstrates that psychology is shaped by cultural factors. Ritterhouse amply shows that individual differences in the behavior of southern whites occurred within the parameters of the cultural codes, embodied these parameters (though in certain idiosyncratic ways), and never challenged them. "Although many white parents went beyond the core curriculum of racial etiquette to encourage moderation, almost none taught racial equality" (Ritterhouse, 2006, p. 81). The basic core of behavior persisted despite marginal, ineffective efforts to transcend it.

Even when certain whites felt twinges of guilt over the way they and others treated blacks, these disruptive feelings were generated by the contradiction between the conflicting social values that all whites lived with:



democracy and Christianity vs. slavery. Clearly the former would lead sensitive people to doubt their participation in slavery. This doubt is not some personal, non-cultural construction. It is the subjective reflection of an objective social contradiction. As Leontiev (1978, sect. 4.4) said, "If the individual in given life circumstances is forced to make a choice, then that choice is not between meanings but between colliding social positions that are expressed and recognized through these meanings."

Smith (1961, p. 39) expresses the pathos of cultural contradictions for the individual: "Something was wrong with a world that tells you that love is good and people are important and then forces you to deny love and to humiliate people...What cruelly shapes and cripples the personality of the Negro is as cruelly shaping and crippling the personality of the white. Though we may, as we acquire new knowledge, live through new experiences, examine old memories, gain the strength to tear the frame from us, yet we are stunted and warped and in our lifetime cannot grow straight again any more than can a tree, put in a steel-like twisting frame when young, grow tall and straight when the frame is torn away at maturity."

Valsiner would deny and ignore this. He would facilely proclaim that people can simply ignore and neutralize social contradictions and endorse any aspect of culture one wishes to.

Micro cultural psychologists also deny social trends which can be predicted and directed. For the free choices individuals make in constructing personal culture are unconditioned, unpredictable, and uncontrollable. Valsiner says that "the actual course of development is not predictable" (Valsiner, Branco, Dantas, 1997, p. 284). This negates social science which strives to detect order, relationships, and principles of social life.

However, real life refutes Valsiner's opinion. The actual course of development is predictable from knowledge of an individual's race and class.

Research on racial demographics testify to the structural shaping of behavior and the denial of individuals to freely shape their behaviors. Blacks are many times more likely than whites to experience poverty while never achieving affluence, less likely to purchase a home at an early age and build up significant levels of home equity, and more likely to experience asset poverty across the stages of the life course. Moreover, the economic trajectories of whites and blacks across the American life course widen over an individual's life. Blacks do not catch up to whites, hard as they wish to, and should be able to if they could negotiate and

construct their behavior repertoires as micro cultural psychologists believe. The increased racial disparities are striking.

A representative, longitudinal sample of 18,000 individuals over 40 years yielded striking increasing racial disparities:

| Cumulative percentages of encountering at least 1 year of affluence for whites and blacks across adulthood |        |        |            |
|--|--------|--------|------------|
| Age  | Whites | Blacks | Difference |
| 25   | 2.2%   | 0.3%   | 1.9%       |
| 75   | 54.8%  | 13.1%  | 41.7%      |
| Cumulative percentages of encountering at least 1 year of poverty for whites and blacks across adulthood   |        |        |            |
| 25   | 3.3%   | 19.9%  | 16.6%      |
| 75   | 45.5%  | 88.2%  | 42.7%      |

| Percentage of Group Achieving at Least 1 Year of Affluence With No Poverty During Lifetime |                |
|--|----------------|
| Whites<br>33%  | Blacks<br>3.7% |

| Percentage of Group Achieving at Least 1 Year of Poverty With No Affluence During Lifetime |               |
|--|---------------|
| Whites<br>25%  | Blacks<br>80% |

For blacks, the American experience is captured by a staggering likelihood of encountering poverty during adulthood with little chance of attaining significant economic affluence. Only 3.7% of blacks will encounter one year of affluence without experiencing poverty during their entire adulthood. On the other hand, nearly 80% of black Americans will encounter poverty in their lives with no chance of ever achieving affluence (Rank, 2009, pp. 60, 62).

Since blacks obviously do not relish these trajectories, structural forces are constraining them and preventing individuals from realizing their aspirations.

These structural forces override cognitive skills. In a longitudinal study of 9,000 individuals, children who scored in the top quartile on cognitive competence when they were five, had a 65% chance of remaining at that level when then were 10, if they were from the upper socioeconomic class. Only 10% of these high SES children fell below the median at 10 years. For low SES children, on the other hand, only 27% of the top quartile at 5 years of age remained at that level at 10 years. 37% of high-scoring low-SES children fell below the mean by 10 years of age. More of these children fell below the mean than remained at their original high cognitive level.

For children who score in the bottom quartile of cognitive competence when they are 5, only 34% remain there when they are 10, if they are from high SES. However, 67% remain at the bottom if they are from the lower class. In addition, only 3% of low cognitive achievers at 5 reach the top quartile at 10 years of age, however 14% of high SES children reach the top (Ratner, 2006, pp. 125-126).

A high-ability student coming from a family of high SES is approximately 3.5 times more likely to obtain a graduate degree or professional education than a student with similar cognitive ability who comes from a family with low SES.

These facts refute the tenets of micro cultural psychology. They refute the notion that individuals stand apart from society and imperiously select from it whatever they please, and use it any way they

wish to fulfill any desire they spontaneously effervesce. The facts decisively demonstrate that individuals are bound by cultural factors in powerful and profound ways. Their cognitive levels are more affected by their class position than by their own cognitive competence.

Contrary to the wish that personal meanings are the individual's own, the reality is that "ideological themes make their way into the individual consciousness (which as we know, is ideological through and through) and there take on the semblance of individual accents, since the individual consciousness assimilates them as its own" (Volosinov, 1973, p. 22, my emphasis). Individual consciousness erroneously takes the presence of meanings in subjectivity to have been created by subjectivity, when, in fact, they are cultural phenomena. This subjectivistic illusion, to which micro cultural psychologists subscribe, is akin to regarding the moon as the origin of moonlight when it merely reflects light that originates in the sun.

Leontiev stated the opposition between the macro psychological approach and the micro psychological approach:

the individual does not simply "stand" before a certain "window" displaying meanings among which he has but to make a choice; these meanings - representations, concepts, ideas - do not passively wait for his choice but energetically dig themselves into his connections with people forming the circle of his real contacts (Leontiev, 1978, sect. 4.4).

Psychological phenomena are structured in and by cultural factors. They are not personal constructs. They have cultural origins, characteristics, and functions. Even the manner in which people regard and construct knowledge is institutionalized and administered. Different epistemologies are institutionalized in organizations which socialize and justify them, and condemn competing epistemologies. One's view of what counts as knowledge and how knowledge should be acquired is not a personal construct. Epistemology is institutionalized and objectified in organizations, and organizations have epistemological (mental, subjective) functions along with their other functions. Whooley (2010, p. 495) explains the

epistemological function of organizations, specifically the adjudication of knowledge claims and the delineation of the universe of possible knowers through organizational formation and practices, which promote or demote epistemologies through the allocation of resources. If we think of epistemic commitments in

terms of “dwelling in” an intellectual system, then organizations serve as the formal dwellings that shape the epistemological terrain for actors. Insofar as organizations validate certain epistemological standards over others, they set the parameters of intellectual debate, shaping the content of possible knowledge... Given these functions, actors attempt to harness the power of organizations to promote their epistemological agenda and to alter the epistemological terrain through organizational practices.

For example, journals in cultural psychology and cross-cultural psychology take principled stances on epistemological questions, accepting only articles that conform to their standards, and rejecting those that employ competing epistemologies and methodologies.

Other philosophical and scientific organizations promote rigorous, objective, independent epistemology that is not biased by political or economic directives. Scientific thought/research is institutionalized in socially and spatially differentiated organizations which insulate epistemological standards from economic and political interests. It is not protected through the mental fortitude of individual scientists alone.

This objectification/institutionalization of epistemology even takes the form of enshrining independent, objective scientific thought in ethical principles. It is unethical for scientists to tailor their research processes and conclusions to political and economic ends. This is regarded as corruption. This ethical dimension of scientific objectivity and independence is crucial for generating the psychological desire of scientists to remain independent of political and economic interests.

These varied, mutually reinforcing objectifications of epistemology/cognition make it a cultural phenomenon -- like most all psychological, mental phenomena are -- far beyond the realm of personal constructs.

When neoliberal political and economic interests seek to influence scientific research for their own gain, they alter the epistemology and thinking of scientists by breaching the institutional and ethical walls that exclude these interests. Important strategies in this regard include a) engaging in political and economic work to deprive scientific institutes of public funding, so that they will become dependent upon the private resources of political and economic interests; b) promoting proprietary intellectual property rights that justify keeping scientific results and procedures private and secret c) promoting the commodification of knowledge as a commodity to sell and buy, d) altering the ethics of scientific research so that accepting political and economic direction is

no longer unethical. This massive institutional, legal, and conceptual activity is necessary for altering scientific thinking, or consciousness. It proves that epistemology is not a personal construct that is individually decided for personal reasons.

### Elucidating culture in psychological research on Chinese psychology

The different emphases between cultural psychology and micro cultural psychology appear in research. Reflecting micro cultural psychology, Goh & Kuczynski (2009), researched ways that Chinese parents are becoming more child-centered, and children are consequently becoming more demanding and assertive. They vaguely mention that there have been macro changes that have affected the family, however they do not mention one specific example except for the one-child policy that led parents to spoil their single child, in contrast to having to spread their largesse among several children as in the past. The language is revealing: “As the number of children in each household has decreased, traditional children as old age insurance, i.e. economic value, has been replaced by the emotional and psychological value of children” (ibid., p. 507). This statement implies that the number of children has an intrinsic affect on child rearing. The authors never mention consumerism, corporations, media (e.g., Western), advertising, government policies, private property ownership and the free market in labor that requires people to secure their own jobs and domiciles and be prepared to make decisions, instead of accepting assigned housing and jobs.

The authors assume that the number of children has an intrinsic, natural affect on child rearing apart from cultural institutions, concepts, and artifacts. “Children are few in number—in contrast to the larger families of previous generations—allowing the child to have one-on-one personal relationships with caregivers. Each adult caregiver has an emotional stake with the child” (p. 525). It is akin to an animal instinct that drives parents of a single child to develop strong emotional ties with her, which, in turn, naturally leads to being receptive to her demands and spoiling her, and even naturally, by itself, displaces the authority of grandparents. For instance, “Some parents were even resigned to the fact that the position of the grandparents has declined as compared to the single children, recognizing this as an inevitable consequence of the one-child policy” (p. 509). Of course, none of the parts of the sequence are naturally related. Single childhood does not necessarily generate strong emotional ties

with a child, nor does a strong emotional tie necessarily lead to spoiling a child and being permissive with her, nor does any of this necessarily lead to reducing the authority of elders in the family. Omitting any cultural factors that might contribute to parents' permissive child-rearing of single children makes it appear to be a natural impulse that would lead even hunter-gather parents to have the same psychology if they were left with only one child.

The authors' decontextualized thinking about childhood also leads to positing natural tendencies to children. The emotional ties that parents have with single children "means that the child's relationships with multiple caregivers increase the child's relational resources, which can be exploited to meet the child's goals" (p. 525, my emphasis). No reasons are given for children's desire to exploit their parents' emotional tie to them. Evidently, all children do this, even hunter-gatherer children. It is natural; akin to evolutionary psychology's notion of naturalistic expenditure of resources which govern behavior – e.g., the evolutionary account of male jealousy which is based on males conserving their resources by refusing to raise another male's child). Attributing child-centered socialization to having only one child is a naturalistic explanation, not a cultural one.

The authors obtained reports from family members about obedience, e.g., which adult the child obeyed more. From these mundane accounts, the authors conclude that "the little emperor was found to be an agentic child" (p. 504). "Agency was displayed in sometimes subtle and creative ways, in overt resistance that exploited weaknesses in each of their different relationships, in behavioral compliance accompanied by private rejection of parental messages, in creative attempts at evasion and delay, and in strategically using relationships with some adults to offset the influence of others" (p. 525).

This conclusion is taken to confirm "social relational theory" which claims: "Bidirectional influence comes about as parents and young or adult children acting as agents interpret or construct meanings from each other's behaviors and anticipate, resist, negotiate and accommodate each other's perspectives during interactions" (p. 508). This is the familiar mantra of individualistic cultural psychology. It glorifies individual, personal agency as creative, fulfilling, and self-expressive. It insists on bilateral negotiation among individuals, no matter what, as an inherent principle of human sociality.

However, this theory contradicts any cultural explanation of psychology. For if individuals freely negotiate their personal interests in a mutual give and take, how can there be any cultural organization of behavior? Free negotiation of personal interests is antithetical to cultural organization. This is clear from free market ideology – which is the basis of micro cultural psychology – that denounces social regulation of the "free market." Micro cultural psychologists

give lip service to “contextual embeddedness” of interactions, however, they never explain how this is compatible with free, bilateral negotiation among agents. Nor do they include cultural issues within the negotiation process. Cultural issues remain extraneous and indefinite, as in the authors’ conclusion that children are agentic and creative. The authors vacillate between claiming some indefinite cultural influence that generates agency, and natural subjectivist individualistic agency which exists regardless of culture and in opposition to culture. Because micro cultural psychologists seek to promote absolute, universal free agency, they rarely mention cultural factors in relation to agency, and when they do, they construe culture in vague, superficial ways which cannot interfere with free agency. Goh & Kuczinsky manifest both of these errors.

Social relational theory, like all micro cultural psychology, is an absolute, ahistorical universal of human nature. This makes all people the same everywhere. All children are agentic in the sense of constructing meanings, negotiating, and resisting. It doesn’t matter what social system they live in; they will always be this way. This eliminates, marginalizes, or trivializes cultural features and variations in agency and psychology. Micro cultural psychology presumes that agency already exists in people, it requires no particular social organization. This is the whole point of micro cultural psychology – to emphasize individual freedom from culture.

When cultural issues are mentioned, they contradict the notion of agentic negotiation. For instance, when the authors mention that the traditional Chinese family exercised authority over children, this countervenes the absolute insistence that children and parents engage in bilateral negotiation, and children resist parental authority. Social relational theory even contradicts the authors’ claim that the one-child policy allowed for more childhood agency than previous customs had allowed. According to the theory, children have always been agents; consequently, no policies affect this.

The thrust of micro cultural psychology is to reject and marginalize substantive culture in an effort to free the individual as an independent agent. Notice that the description of agency by Goh & Kuczinsky uses terms such as resist, avoid, and offset social influence. They never construe agency as embracing, benefitting from, and contributing to culture. This echoes Valsiner’s characterization of culture as a set of viruses which must be resisted.

The increased individualism in China, as in the United States, is rooted in and promoted by top-down decisions by leaders of social institutions such as the government. (This does not deny that sentiments and struggles for these changes were present among the populace. It argues that the changes were only realized through coordinated, concerted leadership of social organizations.



In this historical period, that leadership is undemocratic and coercive. In future periods, social leadership will hopefully be democratically controlled by and representative of the populace who can realize their sentiments through their own institutions. Footnote 13 discusses this point.) Yan's research documents the decline of organized sociality such as mass rallies, collective parties, and volunteer work for the public good; and the dissolution of the social safety net that guaranteed jobs and housing for all. This individualization of social policy fostered a popular sense of individualism in a wide range of social activities – from finding a job to a house to a spouse.

For instance, the Chinese Sports Federation used to pay for athletes' training and therefore set the rules for training, arranged their travel, and also kept most of athletes' monetary winnings. The Federation recently changed its official policy and now allows athletes such as tennis players to keep 88% of their earnings, hire their own coaches, train on their own, and plan their own trips to international competitions. This official policy changes the collective sense of personhood into an individualistic sense.

Far from individualized sense of self being a personal construct, Yan (2010, p. 489) demonstrates that “the rise of the individual and the consequential individualization of society should be viewed as a reflexive part of China's state-sponsored quest for modernity.” “China and Western Europe were both forced into the current round of individualization through the impact of globalization, especially due to the global triumph of neoliberalism and the capitalist mode of production.” (p. 507).

whenever individualization and privatization became necessary, the party-state did not hesitate to use its power to launch institutional changes...the three major reform projects since the late 1990s, namely, the privatization of housing, the marketization of education, and the marketization of medical care, are all institutional changes launched by the state to force individuals to shoulder more responsibility, to more actively engage in market-based competition, and to assume more risks and to become more reflexive. [One blunt way that the State forced individualization was to fire millions of State employees and force them to fend for themselves in market activities.] Chinese official data recognize that between 1998 and 2003 more than 30 million workers were laid off from the SOEs, representing a 40 per cent cut in the state owned enterprise workforce. [Foreign data double this figure.] The lifestyle of the laid-off workers changed immediately once they lost both their jobs and their sense of security. (Yan, 2010, pp. 498,

499).

In keeping with Bourdieu and macro cultural psychology, Yan illustrates Vygotsky's statement that psychology is a product of historical forces:

While experiencing the radical changes in her/his life situation and biographic pattern over the last three decades, the Chinese individual has also gone through an equally radical breakthrough in the subjective domain, that is, a re-formation of the self and a search for individual identity. The institutionalized changes in the labour market, education, and career development, for example, have led to the rise of what Nicolas Rose calls the 'enterprising self', meaning the calculating, proactive, and self-disciplined self that is commonly found among the younger generations of Chinese labourers. (p. 504).

This culturally induced change in self concept brings the same psychological pressures as in the West.:

The pressure to remake the self in one way or another created not only an additional responsibility but also a new psychological burden for the Chinese individual. Squeezed between the increasing market competition on the one hand and the decreasing support from family, kinship, and state institutions on the other, many Chinese individuals suffer from various degrees of mental illness. According to a recent report, doctors at the National Center for Mental Health quote the startling figure of 100 million Chinese suffering from mental illness (see Moore 2009). Another noteworthy trend is that many individuals have turned to telephone hotlines, talk therapies, and psychological counseling for professional help instead of seeking support from relatives, friends, and family members as most people did in the past (505-506).

In addition, consumerism has fostered a strong sense of individualism. Individuals were encouraged to consume by government policy as a way of stimulating the economy, fostering social content, and distracting people from social injustice and autocracy. Government policy encouraged banks to make consumer loans at low interests with low down payments. The media praised consumerism. "Chinese consumers' enthusiastic embrace of commercial opportunities and products has accentuated the role of individual

choice and diversified the venues in which individuals from a broad spectrum of urban society socialize.” “The ideology of consumerism, which simply encourages people to indulge themselves in the pursuit of personal happiness, effectively dilutes the influence of communist ideology.” (Yan, 2000, p. 185).

Individualism did not spring out of spontaneous personal wishes, which magically coincided throughout the urban areas of China. Nor did it spring out of one child in the family. It was rooted in concrete cultural institutions (banking, media, ideology, advertising, employment practices) and normative activities which were encouraged by social leaders for political and economic purposes. It is these concrete cultural institutions and norms that are the crucible for particular psychological phenomena: “Mundane and commercialized activities of consumption provide the concrete content, the specific form, and the particular space that make this new kind of [individuality] possible” (ibid., p. 185). All of this was deliberately cultivated by the government to regain social stability after the Tienanmen uprising in 1989: “The triumph of consumerism has drawn the public’s attention away from the political and ideological issues, overshadowed the increased social inequality and widespread corruption, and eased the legitimacy crisis of the CCP after 1989” (ibid., p. 188).

Ng (2009, pp. 424-425, my emphasis) amplifies the macro cultural-political changes that replaced Chinese style collectivism with modern individualism.

In Maoist China, personal problems were moralized and politicized rather than medicalized and psychologized as in the West. Time outside of work became highly regulated. Leisure took place in group settings, and failure to participate in state-sanctioned leisure activities provided grounds to criticize individuals for “cutting themselves off from the masses” and “lacking collective spirit”

In the 1980s, the new leadership under Deng loosened state control over most domains of social, cultural and personal life. New urban sites including billiard parlors, bars and beauty shops have shaped patterns of consumption and city culture. Economic and sociopolitical decentralization have opened new physical and social spaces for personal autonomy and subjective experience. Parallel changes in the socioemotional landscape have also been documented in rural areas in China...Broadly speaking, social life in both urban and rural areas has become increasingly

depoliticized, and public discourse on mood and emotion has become less dangerous and more commonplace. Ordinary citizens could now openly express opinions, hopes and fears on an individual level. Popular media and professional literature have begun to utilize terms such as psychological (xinli), stress (yali), mood (xingqing) and depression (youyu) more regularly.

An important macro cultural factor in the individualizing of Chinese psychology has been the psychobiologizing of experience such as depression under the direction of capitalist pharmaceutical corporations: “With the influence of foreign pharmaceutical companies, availability of glossy psychology magazines at newsstands, popularization of psychology talk shows on television and radio, increased mental health education campaigns by the government and easy access to pirated foreign films and soap operas, many Chinese in Shenzhen are well aware of the concept of depression” (ibid., p. 426).

Goh & Kuczynski know about some of these cultural developments (historical forces), yet they refrain from mentioning these in their study of family relations. Rather than explaining how economic and sociopolitical decentralization and depoliticization, and corporatization (supported by the media) have organized new physical and social spaces for personal autonomy and subjective experience – which cultural psychologists should do – the authors extirpate them from analysis and zoom in on the family unto itself in order to create the impression that Chinese parents and children are active agents. The notion of free agency drives the authors – and the journal’s editor and reviewers – to decontextualize, deculture, and depoliticize family and personal relations (see Kurki & Sinclair, 2010 for a similar critique of constructivism in international politics).

Contextualizing family changes within broader, political macro factors would reveal that Chinese individuals are conforming to imposed cultural parameters which they do not create through negotiation with the powers that be, and rarely resist, ignore, or prune effectively. Ng (2009, pp. 438-439) refers to this macro cultural forming of psychology, as a way of comprehending the psychology expressed in psychiatric narratives. Her macro cultural psychological discourse analysis is as follows:

To better understand the four interviewees’ narratives of distress, it might be helpful to note the changing relationships between individuals and work in China across the decades. Major structural changes to the workplace in the reform era have led to increased flexibility and mobility for both employers and employees, in

contrast with the stability and rigidity of Maoist-era work units (danwei). For workers of the Maoist era, one's work unit was not individually chosen, and it defined one's identity for all legal and bureaucratic purposes, as well as many aspects of one's social life. Although some may not have been too satisfied with their allocations, the posts were seen as "iron rice bowls" one could count on, usually for life. Thus, the relationship to the workplace was one of restraint, yet also one of reliability and support. The obligation was mutual.

The transition toward a market economy in the reform era has seen the dismantling of this model.

While the work unit still exists, its influence has been diminished due to the increasing influence of privatization. Workers and employers can now "negotiate" employment, particularly in the private sector. Fewer promises are made from both ends. "This has led to a related shift of attitude in younger workers, who prioritize the well-being of their personal and (often nuclear) family lives over that of the greater community and workplace. In this context, Mr. Tian's narrative of frustration toward national policies and younger employees can be seen as a response to the changes in both workplace structure and worker psychology in the post-Mao era." (ibid)

Shifts since the 1990s toward a neoliberal model of funding have led to many reductions or outright termination of pension benefits, leaving some older workers and retirees nostalgic and bitter about promises made in the Maoist past. Across the country, workers and retirees have organized public protests over the depletion or denial of benefits. "Lacking reliable safety nets in the socioeconomic domain, many younger workers and students such as Mr. Zhong and Mr. Lu feel that they must indeed 'rely on themselves' for their own welfare and livelihood, as the availability of employment and benefits remains in constant flux, particularly for migrant laborers like Mr. Zhong. Thus, in experience of bipolar disorder, "the contents of complaints are very much in step with the socioeconomic atmosphere of their times." (ibid).

Ng's anthropological perspective and Yan's sociological perspective explore cultural influences on psychology that Goh & Kuczynski overlook. This research flatly contradicts the insistence of micro cultural psychologists that culture and psychology are individual constructs. Zhang's (2010) superb ethnography of middle class life in China adds more evidence that "The emergence of the new middle class in China is

fundamentally linked to the post-Mao market reforms and economic liberalization that set the conditions for the growth of private businesses and the accumulation of private wealth” (ibid., pp. 5-6). “Privatization was a deliberate shift in China’s governing strategy to set citizens free to be entrepreneurs of the self” (Zhang & Ong, 2008, p. 2; see also Hansen & Svarverud, 2009). The emergence of the middle class was clearly not a product of interpersonal negotiations among individual agents as micro cultural psychologists insist.

Zhang brilliantly demonstrates that psychology (of the Chinese middle class, in this case) is objectified in, structured by, and functional for public, objective, cultural factors such as housing. “Privatization is a set of techniques that optimize economic gains by priming the powers of the private self...This subjectivizing aspect of privatization as a mode of thinking, managing, and actualizing the self is a central element of the neoliberal doctrine” (Zhang & Ong, 2008, p. 3). Newly formed private housing, that was promoted by and institutionalized in governmental laws, was a new spatial artifact that “provides the physical and social ground on which the making of the new middle classes becomes possible...Such emerging places offer a tangible location for a new class to materialize itself through spatial exclusion, cultural differentiation, and lifestyle practices” (Zhang, 2010, p. 3). Such objective, public cultural factors are indispensable for the formation of middle class social identity and psychology.

This key cultural artifact of private housing was not interpersonally negotiated by individuals, it was an element of the new Chinese social system. It embodied the autocratic politics of the system: “The rapid expansion of the real estate industry and the rise of the new middle classes is not simply a matter of successful entrepreneurial endeavors or innocent [individual] consumption practices. It is also a matter of remaking urban spatial order and cultural distinctions between the relatively affluent and the less affluent through massive displacement. The glamorous new central financial district and private residential paradise for the new middle classes is built on the ruins of millions of demolished homes of long-term ordinary residents who have been forced out of the urban core [through forced evictions].” In Kunming in the 1990s, “In the three years before the Horticultural Expo, over 90% of the old neighborhoods were destroyed; tens of thousands of residents were forced out of the city. This was a major government-orchestrated event and individual families had little chance to resist” (p. 138, 139-140). Thus, the cultural artifact – housing – that was the locus and

support system of middle class identity and psychology, was instituted by other cultural factors, namely political-economic institutions. Middle class identity and psychology rest upon this complex, massive, administered social system.

Zhang (2010, chap. 6) explains that among urban dwellers, self-concept now hinges on owning one's own house, in contrast to the previous period (pre-1980s) when the men's and women's identities hinged on living in the husband's parents' abode. Social pressure falls heavily on men to define themselves as adequate males in terms of acquiring wealth and owning a house. Failing in these material aspects directly causes men to feel insecure about themselves. It affects their virility as well. Most men feel threatened by women who are wealthy and own houses.

For women, self-worth is intertwined with conforming to social ideals of physical beauty and demeanor. There is a proliferation of clinics devoted to breast enlargement, eye lifts, face lifts, and other procedures. Women feel inadequate when they do not measure up to cultural standards of feminine beauty. They spend time, money, and psychological energy to measure up. Self-concept and sexuality are clearly organized by cultural values and practices.

Zhang & Ong (2008, pp. 1-19) construct a detailed, complex, nuanced, rich understanding of contemporary Chinese social structure and politics and they explain how this concrete culture fosters a culturally concrete self-concept. They first point out that neoliberal economic reforms are limited to certain social domains of personal lifestyle and consumption which co-exist with state control of the political economy. This makes Chinese neoliberalism distinctive from Western forms which are not dominated by state control of enterprises. The individualism associated with neoliberalism is thus more limited and personal than the individualism of Western market economies. And this means that the individualistic self that is associated with socio-economic-political individualism is more limited and has a distinctive character in China compared with the West. The individualistic self in China is contradictory to the state-controlled cultural practices, whereas it is more congruent with unrestricted market cultural practices in the West. There is consequently more tension built into Chinese individualism than in Western individualism because it is relegated to a pocket within State control of the political economy. The authors call this "an uneasy marriage" (p. 17).

Zhang & Ong concretize neoliberalism, individualism, and the

individualistic self by observing their cultural formation. The authors dispel universalistic, generic notions of these constructs. These are not the same in all countries: “Privatizing needs, desires, and practices can be enhanced, deflected, or subverted by whatever else is going on under or around them” (ibid., p. 10).

This thorough, detailed analysis of culture and psychology contrasts with Goh and Kuczynski who only mention the one-child policy in relation to culture, and only mention children’s “assertiveness,” and “agency” (with no cultural or psychological detail) with regard to psychology.

The detailed social science research on China additionally corrects the misunderstanding of Chinese culture and psychology by cross-cultural psychologists. They misconstrue these in abstract notions such as collectivist or individualistic. And cross-cultural psychologists render China as collectivistic, oblivious to the rising individualism since the 1980s. &&This line of research that reduces culture to simplistic variables such as individualism/collectivism has been roundly criticized in numerous journals: Asian Journal of Social Psychology, vo..2, issue 3,1999; Psychological Bulletin, Jan. 2002.&&

As I observed in footnote #1, non-psychologists, such as Ng, Yan, Zhang, Pred, Thompson, Foucault, and Ritterhouse, have keener insights into cultural psychology than psychologists do.<sup>12</sup>

## Agency

Agency is a micro cultural psychological construct. Agency is regarded as a personal ability to initiate action that expresses the individual. This conception of agency is supposed to protect the individual from social determinism. Agency is what enables us to keep our bearings in the world, to make sense of the world, to resist undue social pressure and negotiate with the world to express ourselves in the world. Agency is construed as an intrinsically liberatory force within each of us. This kind of agency has nothing to do with culture, except to counterpoise the self to culture. But it is not a cultural phenomenon in the sense of originating in culture, embodying culture, or having a cultural function. It is an individual attribute that counterbalances culture.

However, such a conception of agency is abstract, asocial, naïve, and false. It contradicts the principles of cultural psychology. Cultural psychology emphasizes that agency is a cultural phenomenon that derives its character from the kind of society in which it functions. Agency has no intrinsic, personal, liberatory character. In oppressive society, agency is stunted. It is an obstacle



to liberation. It must be overcome through a social analysis of self and society. I have discussed this under the rubric of the psychology of oppression (Ratner, 2011, a, b). Volosinov states the point accurately: “The content of the individual psyche is by its very nature just as social as is ideology, and the very degree of consciousness of one’s individuality and its inner rights and privileges is ideological, historical, and wholly conditioned by sociological factors” (ibid., p. 34).

Consequently, agency has no intrinsic capacity to liberate us from oppression. Liberation requires looking outward toward society to understand its workings, the reasons for social problems, and how to construct viable transformations in the social organization of cultural factors. Agency is nothing more than the subjective activity that must carry out this social praxis. Agency does not have a built-in character that guides our praxis. We cannot find our way out of social problems by looking inward toward properties of agency. For our inner agency has been shaped by our social milieu such as racial honor codes, neoliberal political economy, and industrial concepts of time. Given this cultural form of agency, liberatory subjective activity must be developed. Agency must take on the content of a specific kind of social praxis. We must train our agency to understand cultural factors and to transform them.

Liberation cannot be predicated on agency. On the contrary, achieving true agency (that initiates fulfilling behavior) depends on living in humanized cultural factors that are conducive to fulfilling behavior and authentic agency. Agency must develop its capacity to bring about more democratic and cooperative social institutions in order to realize itself as authentic agency. Agency must construct the material basis necessary to realize itself. It must construct a social environment that will stimulate and support authentic agency. Agency must “get beyond itself” in order to create the conditions for itself. (If agency wishes to become educated, it must construct an educational institution in which it can become educated; an educational institution that will provide the resources for its education.) This is the dialectical spiral of culture and consciousness enriching each other that is the cornerstone of cultural psychology.

Individualistic agency was itself developed through conducive cultural factors; it was not a natural, universal tendency. Our previous discussion of individualism in China testifies to this point. Yan and Ng demonstrate that dramatic changes in state policy led to the blossoming of individualistic agency throughout China in the 1990s onward. “Villagers, after they were untied from the collective regime [by the government’s privatizing land and housing in the

1980s], began to make independent decisions and to engage in various self-chosen activities...These traits of individual agency continued to develop in the subsequent 20 years” under pressure from social policy. “Modern social structures compel people to become proactive and self-determining individuals who must take full responsibility for their own problems and who develop a reflexive self.” This is “compulsive and obligatory self-determinism,” not the natural eruption of endogenous self-determining agency (Yan, 2009, pp. xxi, p. 275).

An interesting and important way that individualistic identity was fashioned at the cultural level was through the issuance of personal identity cards by order of the National People’s Congress in 1985. Prior to this, only families received identity cards which identified people as members of families or work units. There were no cards identifying people as individuals (ibid., p. 277-278). The personal identity cards bestowed an official, public, objective, objectified individual identity on people. This is a telling example of a public creation of a psychological phenomenon. The society defined people in new terms. This was reflected in the way people referred to themselves linguistically. For four decades,

self-identity did not exist in public life, and therefore the individual could never be an unit in public discourse. Consequently, people tended to use the plural term to substitute for the singular “I”, such as “we,” “our work unit,” etc., instead of saying “I,” “my work unit,” or “my family.” This customary usage of the plural “we” gradually disappeared in the 1990s and, by the late 1990s, a new Chinese phrase, “wo yi dai” (the I-generation or the me-generation), was coined to describe those were born in the 1970s and who had grown up during the reform era because of their proud usage of the first person” (ibid., p. 280).

This generation expresses its culturally formed individualistic agency in culturally appropriate individualistic behavior. Not only do young adults take to the free market in labor and business opportunities, they also live in their own dwellings after marriage, instead of living with in-laws as in former times. Filial piety in the family is being replaced by individualism.

If individualistic agency is the product of macro cultural factors (rather than the product of human nature or spontaneous choice), then other forms of agency can be achieved through constructing other cultural factors to elicit and

support them. This requires exposing the individualistic politics that are implied by the popular use of “agency,” and emphasizing that agency can take other forms. We must do the same with related terms such as self-actualization. This term implies that humans actualize themselves as individuals, on their own. It assumes that social support, social concern, and social transformation are irrelevant to actualizing a person. This is a definite politics that legitimates the capitalist status quo. However, actualizing human potential requires social support, social concern, and social transformation. Thus, the individualistic politics inherent in “self-actualization” must be exposed and replaced by social politics.

### Politics and Cultural Psychology: Psychological and Social Change

All social science is political because it carries assumptions about behavior, psychology, and society that either support or challenge the political interests which govern the status quo. The psychological theory that territoriality, violence, patriarchy, monogamy, racial inferiority, gender inferiority, jealousy, and exchange are innate psychological tendencies, supports the politics of the status quo. Conversely, a psychological assumption (and finding) that cooperation, collaboration, gender equality in psychological capacities, and racial equality in psychological capacities are psychological attributes necessary for mental health and development, challenges the competitive, privatized politics of the status quo, as well as gender and racial hierarchy. A conception of human nature as a general potential for all kinds of behavior is political insofar as it allows for the social possibility of erecting a social system based on equality and cooperation and altruism. No innate psychobiological forces are working to preclude these.

In this chapter we have seen that time sense is political in the sense of embodying a social system of work relations, exploitation, profit, etc. We have seen that emotional tones expressed by whites toward blacks during Jim Crow were political in the sense of representing the Jim Crow system. Self-concept also reflects and supports particular political-cultural systems. Fairclough (2001) explains how sociolinguistic conventions incorporate and reinforce particular relations of power in society. For instance, “The social dialectic which developed into standard English was the East Midland dialect associated with the merchant class in London at the end of the medieval period” (p. 47). Other

dialectics spoken by the working class were designated as vulgar, and were marginalized. (Fairclough appropriately criticizes conversation analysis that “has been resistant to making connections between ‘micro’ structures of conversation and ‘macro’ structures of social institutions and societies.” p. 9). Indigenous psychology and skepticism toward science are political in validating bourgeois individualism.

Psychological questions are political. The typical psychological question is “which individual will manifest a particular psychological phenomenon?” E.g., who will become violent, suicidal, hyperactive, genius in math? The focus is on individuals and individual explanatory factors: genes, hormones, neurotransmitters. The environment is construed as generally homogenous, with individual processes determining different individual responses to it. For instance, modernity is considered to be generally stressful, yet some people break down while others excel, depending upon constitutional factors. Constitutional factors determine the specific response that individuals make to the general environment. The questions which typical psychologists ask lead to addressing individual factors and circumventing cultural factors. Looking for individual causes and variations of psychological phenomena leads to redressing them through individual factors, not cultural ones.

In contrast, the cultural psychological question is “what are the cultural reasons this particular kind of psychological phenomenon exists in this culture/subculture?” “what is the social demographic of a particular psychological phenomenon? What groups manifest these phenomena in highest frequency?” “Why do so many people commit suicide, crime, violence in this society? Why are so many people in this subculture good students?” We look for social explanatory factors, not individual ones. The cultural environment is specific and it constitutes the specificity of peoples’ behavior. Understanding and altering the specificity of behavior requires changing its formative culture, not constitutional factors.

For cultural psychologists, It doesn’t matter which particular individuals (John Doe or Mary Jones) manifest deleterious psychology. We do not try to predict this. That is the task of clinical psychologists. We try to predict the prevalence and the social distribution of the phenomenon. We try to improve cultural factors so as to enhance the prevalence of beneficial psychological phenomena, and reduce the prevalence of deleterious psychological phenomena. These cultural efforts will have the greatest impact on the most people. In contrast, identifying and treating individuals impacts small numbers of people. Indeed, the individualistic approach assumes that few people need treatment. If issues were regarded as widespread/social it would make no sense to treat them on the individual level.

We can see that politics is built into the questions psychologists ask about the nature of psychological phenomena. In fact, these political issues are what drive psychological science. The reason that psychologists look for individual causes of psychological phenomena is that solving psychological problems can justifiably be directed at individual factors, not cultural ones. Psychological science justifies political practice, it is not the primary instigator of political practice. It seems to academic psychologists that their theories are intellectual products which precede and generate practical solutions to psychological problems. It seems that scientific theory occurs in a rarefied realm of intellectual activity and that practitioners utilize this theory for practical means. However, the reality is opposite this appearance. It is practical approaches to solving problems that generate the development of psychological theory and methodology. It is the political need to find individual solutions to problems, which do not challenge the social system, that generates individualistic approaches to psychological science and theory.

Cultural psychology is equally animated by political considerations. In this case, the need to improve the broad culture leads to considering cultural aspects of psychological phenomena in the science of psychology. We would argue that this approach to psychological science is valid on scientific grounds. Empirical evidence verifies cultural psychology as a science. The humane politics of striving to improve our culture and civilization generates a valid science of psychology. Psychological science is political, but it is not merely political ideology. It is valid science as well as being progressive politics.

Micro cultural psychologists are driven to their view of society and psychology for social-political reasons. They seek to protect the individual from oppressive social conditions. They do this by adopting the concept of political freedom as rooted in inviolable individual autonomy and choice. This ideal leads to viewing culture as determined by individuals at the micro cultural level, through negotiation as free agents with other agentive individuals. Valsiner & Litvinovic (1996, p. 61) claim that individuals continuously change culture in the simple act of dialoguing with it. Wikan (1996) similarly insists that individuals resist and transform culture in their everyday actions.

The political ideal of personal freedom also leads to endowing the individual the freedom to decide how he will react to culture and how he will construct his personal world of psychological meanings. The political ideal of personal freedom also leads micro cultural psychologists to characterize social structure, social regulation, and social influence as toxic and reified.

The individualistic political ideal and ensuing conception of culture and psychology conform to the free market concept of neoliberalism, which we have described above.

Micro cultural psychology is politically supportive of the free market/neoliberal status quo in glorifying individual action, individual agency, and renouncing the need for structural, political change in social institutions. Micro cultural psychology postulates that people are already authentic agents who can express themselves through fulfilling acts. There is thus no reason to consider or transform social institutions in order to improve life. All we need do is exercise our existing agency within existing society. (Of course, micro cultural psychologists may contradict their psychological theory in real life, and may work for political change outside their professional activity. I am describing the political ramifications of their psychological theory, whether they follow these themselves or not. Inconsistency does not invalidate the real implications of academic work.)

For instance, Valsiner, Branco, & Dantas (1997, pp. 287-292) complain that the asymmetry of parents directing children's behavior gives too much authority to parents and limits the child's self-actualization. However a facile solution is at hand - children can mentally distance themselves from parental guidance, they can co-construct their culture by imagining their own goals which they may implement at a later time. Social asymmetry, and associated social problems, is dissolved by individual imaginary thought!

This formulation appears to be apolitical in disregarding politics and cultural factors. However, this very oversight is political on a deeper level. It exempts macro cultural factors from confrontation and therefore enables them to persist with impunity and immunity.

Although it presents itself as a radical alternative to social determinism, micro cultural psychology is a counterrevolution against substantive social reform.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to being politically conservative, micro cultural psychology is scientifically erroneous about the nature of society and the nature of psychology. Social systems are not reified as micro cultural psychologists claim. Nor are they created bottom-up by individuals in interpersonal negotiations. We have seen that neoliberalism is an organized, coherent political-economic-ideological system that structures virtually all areas of individual people's social life (Braedley & Luxton, 2010). Yet neoliberalism is not reified because it is a movement initiated and implemented by active individuals. Neoliberalism was "a

counter revolution from above” (Schulman & Zelizer, 2008, p. 154; Pierson & Hacker, 2010), instituted by people who transformed the structure of macro cultural factors. All systemic, structural changes are human (and all substantive, extensive, enduring human changes require transformations in social structure); they are neither reified nor reducible to personal interactions and reconstructions of meaning.

The individualistic political ideal of freedom, society, and psychology, eliminate the advantage of culture. Culture is a superorganic, emergent, collective entity that unifies individuals in supra-individual enduring, objectified, stable, predictable, dependable, historically sedimented, administered, institutionalized structures of joint intentionality and cooperation, objectified in artifacts,. These cultural factors are organized into differentiated systems which support and strengthen individuals materially, socially, and psychologically. Culture is not simply shared behaviors among individuals. It is massive, weighty structures. Indeed, the more massive and weighty, the more supportive they are. A factory exemplifies a beneficial, massive, weighty character of a cultural factor. It is productive of goods far beyond what casual, “light,” easily undone/renegeotiated, “shared practices” can provide. Destroying such cultural structures by reducing them to casual, personal, subjective (unobjectified), renegotiable interactions deprives us of culture’s benefits.

Micro cultural psychologists seek to circumvent alienation and exploitation, for example, by eviscerating the substance of cultural factors – their coherence, extensiveness, weight, strength, and supportiveness. They seek to solve concrete social problems on the abstract level, by destroying culture in general. They destroy culture in order to protect us from it. They cannot see the way to transform culture into a humane social system that preserves the advantages of culture.

Micro cultural psychology misconstrues the individual, psychology, and freedom in anti-cultural terms, and it misconstrues cultural factors and systems in anti-human, anti-subjective terms. This undialectical thinking results in bad social science and bad politics.

The political weaknesses of micro cultural dovetail its scientific errors. Both stem from denying cultural structures as influences on psychology. The science and politics of the discipline of psychology go hand in hand. Good science and good politics require addressing the cultural basis, character, and function of psychology. Denying this, results in bad science and bad politics.

Cultural psychology is scientifically correct about society and psychology, and it provides effective avenues to improve social and psychological life.

Since psychology is fostered by cultural factors, occurs as part of them, is objectified in them, objectifies them in subjective processes, and reinforces cultural factors via galvanizing specific cultural behavior, it follows that new forms of psychology require a new cultural structure. Cultural psychology thus utilizes psychological phenomena to challenge the system, whereas micro cultural psychology uses psychological phenomena to engage in illusory escapes from the system which never threaten it.

Cultural psychology (at its best) identifies concrete cultural factors that are alterable; it does not get lost in abstractions about culture and psychology which are not amenable to change. To improve educational psychology, we could identify ways that educational administration, pedagogy, and educational psychology reflect deleterious neoliberal and consumerist characteristics, and we would work to transform these within and also outside the field of education. We would not speak abstractly about helping students to become interested in their studies, nor would we speak abstractly about honoring students' human rights.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, cultural psychology's detailed conception of culture leads to the broadest and deepest social change, and therefore the fullest liberation from problems of the status quo. Cultural psychology appreciates culture as a system in which all the factors/elements are interdependent. From this structural notion of culture, it follows that changing one factor requires changing the network of related factors on which the one depends. A powerful example is that non-school factors such as family income determine 60% of students' success in primary and secondary school. In-school factors such as teaching pedagogy accounts for about 10%. Having a good teacher or a bad one only accounts for 3 percentage points of a student's standardized test score. Thus, improving educational success requires changing the system in which school is embedded, more than it does changing school-specific conditions (Ravitch, 2010, p. 23; New York Times, Dec. 27, 2010, p. A1). The fact that any cultural factor is deeply ingrained in other factors makes it weighty, entrenched, and obdurate. It is not a simple, single, free-standing element that is easily changed. The dialectical opposite of this obdurateness is that it draws us to transform many factors simultaneously in order to change any one. Thompson (1967, p. 80) expressed this with regard to the changing sense of time in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: "The stress of the transition falls upon the whole culture: resistance to change and assent to change arise from the whole culture. And this culture includes the systems of power, property-relations, religious institutions, etc., inattention to which merely flattens phenomena and trivializes analysis."<sup>15</sup>



Solidity, coherence, systematicity, and obdurateness of culture dialectically lead to broader and deeper social change. And structural change retains the advantages of culture such as support and stimulation from large numbers of individuals. Of course, structural change is difficult, but as with all difficult work, its payoff is great. Studying a difficult subject matter in school is difficult to master; however, it pays greater dividends (in the knowledge you acquire) than superficially studying a simple subject does. Approaches to culture, politics, and psychology which overlook macro cultural factors as the cause of problems and the solution to problems propose superficial, incomplete, or false causes and solutions. These include scapegoating, fear mongering, militarism, speculation, superstition, supernaturalism, myth-making, fundamentalism, suppression of dissent, and heightened security – all of which are abetted by the social elite to protect the status quo (Schulman & Zelizer, 2008). These can only be avoided by identifying macro cultural factors as the source of problems and working collectively to humanize our culture.

Anti-structural approaches to culture pride themselves on circumventing the obdurateness of culture and making change viable. One gambit is to escape into subjectivity. Micro cultural psychology does this, as does postmodernism. They claim that subjectivity defines culture so we can easily change culture by simply changing a thought or behavior. Another way to circumvent social structure is to reduce it to single, discrete factors. Each one is addressed separately in an effort to improve it. Proposals are offered for improving education, or health care, or family interactions separately.

While both these anti-structural approaches appear to make social change manageable, they actually limit it. For they are based on myths. They simply ignore and deny the structured reality of society and psychology. This reality acts behind the backs of those who refuse to perceive it. The only real way to improve society and psychology is to address their reality. (Realism is the only path toward liberation.) Realism in social science and politics means comprehending and challenging the structured social system of cultural factors, including their subjective which is psychology. Vygotsky stated this with his characteristic aplomb: “Life becomes creation only when it is finally freed of all the social forms that distort and disfigure it...Not in the narrow confines of his own personal life and his own personal affairs will one become a true creator in the future” (Vygotsky, 1997a, p. 350).

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#### SEE ALSO

Cultural psychology of the motion pictures

Cross-cultural psychology

Indigenous psychology

Methodology

Agency

Neoliberalism

Time

Emotions

Liberation

Social change

Dialectic

Structuralism  
Chinese psychology  
Positivism  
Vygotsky

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<sup>1</sup> Pred's insights into culture, psychology/subjectivity, and their interrelationship are complemented by research from geographers, anthropologists, historians, and sociologists. Historian Lucien Febvre (1933) called for a historical psychology that emphasized "mentalities." (See Plamper, 2010 for interesting interviews with historians about their work in cultural psychology of emotion.) This research into cultural psychology by non-psychologists is deeper than cultural psychological research by psychologists – as we shall demonstrate with additional examples. Evidently, training in social science attunes scholars to the richness of culture that is absent from training in psychology. Perhaps this explains the general failure of psychologists to engage with social science research in cultural psychology.

<sup>2</sup> The point of neoliberalism is to free natural resources and labor to be exploited by capitalists to maximize their private profit. Natural resources and labor are to be freed from protective social policies and organizations – e.g., regulation, unions – and humane concerns that counter their exploitation by capital. Freedom is a devious term that really connotes freeing natural resources and labor from community regulation so they can be exploited by the free, unrestricted activity of capitalists. Freedom for neoliberalism does not connote autonomy, self-fulfillment, and freedom from exploitation, but rather freedom to be exploited.

Neoliberalist freedom is an Orwellian term that means the opposite of what it claims for the populace. It is the freedom for the capitalist class to exercise and extend its hegemony over society. Neoliberalism is not freedom for the populace to develop itself. This is proven by the vast enrichment and empowerment of the capitalist class in the societies where neoliberalism is dominant. It is well known that the American superrich has greatly increased its wealth and power while the subaltern classes have lost wealth and power since the 1970s when neoliberalism was unleashed. In addition, social mobility has stagnated as public programs to enhance the educational and occupational opportunities of the underprivileged have been decimated (by Democrats and Republicans alike) and individuals rely more on private, family assets. Privatization makes people more dependent upon the resources at their disposal, which keeps the wealthy rich and the disadvantaged poor. This is

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proven by the fact that Intergenerational income mobility – the difference between the wealth of parents and their children – has decreased in the dominant neoliberal economies. England has the lowest level of intergenerational income mobility in the world, with the United States the second lowest in the entire world (New York Times, Oct. 16, 2010, p. B6). This means that American and British children are less free (have less opportunity) to deviate from the conditions of their birth, whether rich or poor. In contrast, children have more freedom to rise out of poverty and to fall from privilege in other countries with less neoliberal freedom.

Neoliberalism restricts personal freedom to be independent of socioeconomic conditions! That is its raison d'être: to maintain the class structure of society with all of its exploitation, inequality, and insecurity for the masses. This is why neoliberalism is endorsed and funded by the capitalists. They would never fund a movement that could reduce their class power by granting empowerment and freedom to the populace.

Neoliberal freedom is class-based. It is freedom for the ruling class but not for the subaltern classes. However, it is used as a general term devoid of class, and applicable to all individuals. Neoliberal ideology semiotically obscures the class basis and class limits to freedom. It overgeneralizes freedom to subaltern classes that are unfree. Neoliberal ideology thus semiotically inverts the unfreedom of lower classes into freedom. Whenever we hear the word freedom applied abstractly to all individuals, we must remember its concrete class character and class limits. We must remember that these do not extend to subaltern classes. When referring to the populace, we must reinvert the meaning of freedom into unfreedom to correct the rhetorical inversion of unfreedom into freedom. Semiotic terms cannot be accepted at face value. They must be compared to social reality to determine how accurate, or objective, they are.

Abstract terms such as freedom, people, agency, opportunity, individual are misleading in class society. Abstract terms strip away concrete distinctions among exemplars and promote the appearance of equality or identify. However, class society rests upon inequality. In class society, freedom, people, agency, opportunity, and individual exist in grossly different conditions with grossly different features. Rhetorically equalizing them through abstract terminology obfuscates their concrete inequality. Abstract terminology serves the political function of smoothing over inequality, injustice, exploitation, and social class, without explicitly denying them. Denial would entail acknowledging their possible existence; it would also risk counterargument. It is safer to erase these features through utilizing the abstractness of language which simply has no place for

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them, and renders them inconceivable. The reality of social class is symbolically eradicated through the silence of abstraction, not through the vocalization of argument about class, or noisy political struggle to eradicate it.

<sup>3</sup> Modern capitalism has brought about new forms of work which are brought within the orbit of neoliberal practices and policies. Capitalism now depends largely upon immaterial labor power such as affective labor of care providers, personal relations, and information networks. The relations, networks, affect, and technology that bring labor together are central to surplus value generation and they are infused with capitalist social relations such as commodification. The networking, communication, and psychological output of capitalist work is recapitulated in social networking technology such as internet sites. The new commodified forms of networking, communication, and psychological expression must be researched by cultural psychologists to discover the ways they are embedded in psychological phenomena. Cultural psychologists would do well to follow Arlie Hochschild's research into the emotional commodification of service workers who "employ" emotions as they are employed at work.

<sup>4</sup> These "security" measures are really designed to surveil and suppress people from challenging the insecurity of the market political economy (Wacquant, 2009; Melossi, 2008). Security measures thus actually reinforce their opposite – insecurity.

<sup>5</sup> To wit: one out of every seven applicants for private health insurance was refused coverage by American insurance companies in 2009 because the applicants had a prior medical condition that made them liable for expensive care which the insurance companies did not want to pay. One of the medical conditions that disqualified an applicant from health insurance was pregnancy, or attempting to adopt a child! (Wall Street Journal, Oct. 13, 2010, p. A2).

<sup>6</sup> Lave, Mirowski, Randalls (2010) describe how neoliberalism also affects science. This is an important aspect of cultural psychology. For cultural psychology analyzes the cultural origins and nature of psychological science as well as psychological phenomena.

Understanding the politics of social science approaches is explored in the academic discipline known as science, and technology studies (STS). It studies how social, political, and cultural values affect scientific research and how the

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latter affect society, politics, and culture. A leading journal in the field is Social Studies of Science.

<sup>7</sup> Using time as the parameter of work increases productivity and profitability by cramming more work within the fixed parameters of time and wages. In the old task orientation, increasing production output would lead to expanding the time required, and this would maintain productivity (work per unit of time) and profitability at constant levels.

<sup>8</sup> In England,

the preliminaries to the industrial revolution were so long that, in the manufacturing districts in the early eighteenth century, a vigorous and licensed popular culture had evolved, which the propagandists of discipline regarded with dismay. Josiah Tucker, the dean of Gloucester, declared in 1745 that "the lower class of people" were utterly degenerated. Foreigners (he sermonized) found "the common people of our populous cities to be the most abandoned, and licentious wretches on earth." "Such brutality and insolence, such debauchery and extravagance, such idleness, irreligion, cursing and swearing, and contempt of all rule and authority ... Our people are drunk with the cup of liberty." The irregular labour rhythms [of this socioeconomic activity] help us to understand the severity of mercantilist doctrines as to the necessity for holding down wages as a preventative against idleness... (Thompson, 1967, pp. 80-81).

Time orientation and time discipline thus served to carry out broad social change in the life activity of the lower classes so as to subjugate them to industrial labor and capitalist class rule. This was reinforced by a corresponding new sense of character that was elevated by punctual, consistent work, and was compromised by idleness and indolence. Being a good person was defined in capitalist terms just as time was. Former pleasurable, social activities such as wakes and holidays and the annual feasts of friendly societies, and "the slothful spending the morning in bed" were denounced as "shameful devourers of time and money."

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<sup>9</sup> It demonstrates that religion's role is not to enlighten people about unfathomable mysteries. Religion only provides a subjective comfort of feeling protected by a higher being, feeling a higher purpose or order to life, feeling connected with people, nature, and the universe, or a sense of justice – reincarnation contains this sense since the soul is connected to individual bodies and even species, and rebirth justly rewards or punishes one depending upon previous actions. But this sense of purpose, order, connectedness, justice, and protection are wishful metaphors. Real life is divisive, disconnected, unfair, exploitive, chaotic. Most religion posits a spirituality that is opposite to these and which exists alongside material life. Most religion does not improve material life, and this is why it never deals with material issues. It abandons them and retreats to a metaphorical, metaphysical realm of spirituality that supposedly exists outside (alongside) real, material, social life. It allows people to suffer all the slings and arrows of real social life, but then believe in a better spiritual world apart from this. But this gambit accepts the evils of material, social life. (Of course, people are expected to be kind in their interpersonal interactions, but without any alteration in the social institutions and artifacts in which they conduct their lives.) This is why exploitive societies endorse religion: it allows them to exploit people with impunity and to look to nonsocial spiritual solutions to social problems. The most conservative, exploitive rulers embrace religion because it allows them to claim to be sympathetic to justice, order, connectedness, and protection on a spiritual level; while they simultaneously exploit people in the real, material, social realm. Exploiters know that most religion will not challenge their material, social practices because it has accepted social life as it is, and escapes into an unreal, metaphorical, metaphysical realm to explain and solve problems. This explains why the Catholic Church never officially condemned fascism, and actually condoned it in many instances.

Religion's disengagement from understanding and reforming social reality leads it to adopt a spiritual, metaphysical outlook that is similarly disengaged from physical, scientific reality. Abandoning social reality (to the exploiters and the sufferers) and retreating to an unreal realm, the constructs that are relied on to provide social protection, purpose, justice, and connectedness are devoid of any intelligible, specific, or empirical properties. There is no specification of what god is, how "he" created the earth. Nor is there any specification of how a soul becomes reborn in another body and even species. Nor is there any interest in such real questions. By definition, religion cannot posit real, intelligible, empirical phenomena because it has abdicated real, material, social life and retreated to a metaphorical, metaphysical realm. It is fruitless to challenge

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religious devotees to explain their constructs in terms of real mechanisms (e.g., in relation to scientific knowledge) because they are not designed to deal with real things. They are designed to simply give people a metaphorical sense of order, connection, protection, and justice without any reality to these. Irreality is accepted as part of the metaphysical, metaphorical, spiritual realm. It can never lead devotees to renounce their constructs.

Religion does not enlighten people about the mystery of things; on the contrary it compounds the mystery by introducing explanatory constructs – e.g., a higher being, or reincarnation – that is unintelligible. Not only is the origin of the earth difficult to fathom, but the god that is supposed to explain it is unintelligible. We now have two mysteries instead of one. (See Belzen, 2010 for a cultural psychological analysis of religion.)

<sup>10</sup> An objective analysis of psychology not only enables us to identify and refute fallacious concepts about psychology, it also enables us to trace them to their cultural roots. We can explain the features of society that generate false concepts about psychology. We can critique capitalism for organizing an oppressive content to our psychology – e.g., egocentric, consumerist – and also for obscuring the full character and origins of our psychology, thus making it difficult to alter.

<sup>11</sup> The politics of the external, critical perspective and the indigenous, multicultural perspective that validates diverse cultures “for who they are,” is revealed in the dispute over the Nobel Peace Prize that was awarded to a Chinese dissident, in prison, on Oct. 8, 2010. The dissident, Liu Xiao Bo, was serving an 11 year prison sentence for his writings urging democracy, an independent judiciary, and multi-party elections in China. The Nobel Commission awarded him the Peace Prize as a way of supporting the cause of democracy, despite the fact that Liu’s activities were judged to be illegal by the Chinese system. The Commission challenged indigenous Chinese practice on the basis of a higher standard of human rights. The Chinese denounced this external social critique as not respecting Chinese law and culture. They accused the Nobel Committee of imposing “Western” values on China and showing contempt for its legal system. They used the indigenous cultural argument that a culture’s practices are immune from external critique.

The Chinese government threatened to punish Norway economically and diplomatically for granting the award to a dissident criminal. The government also blocked announcement of the Peace prize from its news media and from internet sites that carried it. Anyone typing the words “Nobel Peace Prize” or

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“Liu Xiaobo” into Google found themselves facing a blank screen. And the police raided a private party in a Peking restaurant where a few Chinese who learned of the Prize were celebrating. The police imprisoned several of the group on charges of disturbing the peace. The police did not even know who Liu was. The government also placed Liu’s wife under house arrest and cut off her cell phone – because her husband had received the Nobel prize!

This case illustrates the politics of the two positions we have been discussing. If you support the indigenous, multicultural viewpoint, you would endorse China’s defensiveness and nationalistic pride. If you support the external social critique argument, you would endorse the Nobel Commission’s actions. That is, if you were consistent in your thinking. Of course, many multiculturalists in the domain of social science would be aghast at the Chinese’s actions, even though their dismay contradicts their indigenous, multicultural position in social science.

<sup>12</sup> A related example of cultural psychological research that minimizes real culture is Gladkova’s (2010) comparison of linguistic connotations in Russian and English. She concluded that words such as “sympathy” are used differentially toward in-groups but not toward members of out-groups in Russian, however, these words are used equally toward both groups in English. A cultural explanation was proposed: “These differences in meanings can be attributed to the prevalence of different models of social interaction in these two cultures” (p. 280). Specifically, Americans do not distinguish in-group and out-group as dramatically as Russians do. This cultural explanation is faulty in several ways.

First, it is dubious. Americans segregate in-group from out-group quite strongly. Every American child is taught “do not talk to strangers;” cliques are rampant in



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school, and the cause of considerable anxiety among outsiders who cannot break into an in-group; American residences are protected against outsiders by gates and guards; employees treat supervisors at work completely differently from a friend or spouse.

Secondly, Gladkova offers not a single example of these purported cultural models. She particularly fails to mention examples in public, objectified laws, moral precepts, historical records, philosophical concepts, entertainment programs, and child-rearing literature, where they would be true cultural factors, subject to politics and other features of cultural factors I have enumerated throughout this book . These features are necessary for models to be shared, intelligible across a society, and useful for achieving cultural purposes. To casually mention some vague “cultural model” as the cultural explanatory construct of semantic meaning, without any specification or documentation is alarming – especially for an article which is entitled “A Cultural Analysis” and which is published in a journal named Culture & Psychology.

A third weakness in the author’s treatment of the social model as cultural explanation, is that it is isolated from any other cultural factors. The model of social interaction is ungrounded in cultural factors, structures, conditions, ideology, politics. It ignores the horizontal and vertical “hermeneutic circles” that comprise the

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social structure. Gladkova's "social model" is suspended in time and space, it is deculturated and depoliticized. (This abstractness is what makes it vague.) This is again alarming for a "cultural analysis." In fact, it is insidious. For it pretends to be a cultural analysis when it is not. The unwary reader will be led to believe that casual, abbreviated mention of some vague, undocumented, ungrounded – and dubious – cultural phenomenon suffices as a cultural analysis. This is a dangerous model of cultural analysis which impedes serious interest in culture as a substantial, organized, administered, meaningful, concrete, consequential influence on psychology.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph de Maistre described counter-revolution in the following poetic terms: "La Contre-Révolution ne sera pas une révolution contraire, mais le contraire de la Révolution."

<sup>14</sup> The concrete struggle to identify and humanize cultural factors is a topic in its own right. That struggle certainly begins among individuals. However, even at this stage, it is always a struggle that is directed at macro cultural factors. It is not a discussion in which individuals negotiate their personal desires for self-expression, which micro cultural psychologists focus on. Furthermore, struggles for social and psychological change always expand beyond the initial small group of individuals who foment them. They are realized in organized campaigns that strive to alter macro cultural factors via broad dissemination of social propaganda through social media outlets that reach masses of people simultaneously. Social change is not a sequential movement of interpersonal interactions.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, the development of the individualistic self/agency in China required state policies regarding employment, land ownership, and allocating housing, along with corresponding changes in family relations, dowries,

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sexuality, youth culture. Similar grand societal changes are necessary to construct or transform any cultural factor (e.g., education) and its psychology (educational psychology, time sense, prejudice).