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CROSS-CULTURAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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PREFACE

This special issue of the *International Journal of Behavioral Development* is intended to introduce readers unfamiliar with it to a relatively new, active and open field of inquiry. Cross-cultural developmental psychology, as understood here, is not just comparative: essentially it is an outlook that takes culture seriously. It has been in the making for only about twenty years and may be said to have come of age around the turn of the decade with the publication of several textbooks and manuals (Serpell 1976; Segall 1979; Warren 1980; Adler 1982) in which human development features as a strong component. The books by Werner (1979), Super and Harkness (1980), Stevenson and Wagner (1982) as well as Vol. 4 of the *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology* edited by Triandis and Heron (1981) are entirely devoted to developmental research, as is also the important *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Human Development* (Munroe, Munroe and Whiting 1981).

All of these writings draw attention to the fact that human development always occurs in a specific cultural context. While many aspects of human development and functioning are no doubt universal, such universality cannot be postulated on the basis of research in a single cultural group; it must be demonstrated empirically across a variety of human populations. Similarly, any theory claiming generality must be able to account for cultural diversity.

These principles may sound too obvious to need stating, but they are widely disregarded in practice. Theories and findings in developmental psychology originating in the First World tend to be disseminated to the Third World as gospel truth. Apart from constituting an unacceptable form of ethnocentric paternalism, it is also apt to vitiate the possibility of useful applications (Dasen, Berry and Sartorius, in prep.). Findings and theories must first be shown to be valid for, and relevant to, the vital issues of the Third World (Wagner 1983; Sinha and Holtzman 1984). In other words, the cross-cultural approach helps to develop a concept of 'appropriate psychology' (Moghaddam and Taylor 1986).

The cross-cultural approach as a new field of inquiry has in the main

evolved within a relatively small circle of specialists with their association (International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology), their journal (*Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*) and their methodological worries and advances (Lonner and Berry 1986). But if it is to make its intended impact it needs to stimulate the awareness of the majority, including that of the most narrowly obsessive experimentalist, and ideally should be taught as a matter of course to first-year psychology students. This is why we have particularly welcomed the invitation to prepare a special issue for a journal catering for a wider readership.

We believe it is a timely special issue in view of recent moves within the International Society for Behavioral Development. These include the establishment of committees on training in Third World countries and relations with international organizations, an informal cross-cultural 'network' and the increasing number of events of a cross-cultural nature at the biennial meetings indicative of growing interest. If the membership of the Society is to expand further beyond the Euro-American region, we reckon that an explicit cross-cultural orientation is essential.

The present special issues is a modest step in that direction. Given the constraints of having had to assemble it in less than a year, its content is neither comprehensive nor even representative. It is perhaps best regarded as a more or less random selection from a much wider range. Nonetheless, we believe that it will help to convey a fair picture of the state of the art at the present time.

The first paper elaborates on some of the arguments touched upon in this foreword and offers a review of recent developments, especially in the key area of cognitive development. One of the glaring gaps in our knowledge is the detailed description of different aspects of behaviour in natural settings, so that we gain a better understanding of the character of variations across cultures. *Bril and Sabatier* provide such a description for a highly specific sphere, namely motor development of Bambara babies. *Kermouan and Leiderman* deal with the important topic of infant attachments from a novel angle and in a manner that is of considerable theoretical interest. The next two papers illustrate the fact that considerations of culture need not be confined to studies in the Third World. *Hold-Cavell, Atrili and Schleidf's* comparison of German and Italian pre-school children demonstrates the existence of interesting differences even within the western European culture area - a kind of new look on the old topic of 'national character'. *Goodnow, Wilkins and Dawes* go

even further in their work with Australian children, suggesting that cultural effects can be identified while remaining within a single culture. While there may be some reluctance to accept this, it is certainly a challenging notion and in any case the findings are valuable in their own right. *Hoosam* throws new light on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis by reviewing evidence indicating that Chinese language and orthography affect the modes of information processing in that culture. This is an example of one of the main approaches in cross-cultural psychology whereby the specific and sometimes (as in this case) unique features of a culture are utilized in order to discover the sources of variation in psychological processes. Similarly, the coexistence of formal schooling with informal training makes it possible to conduct comparative studies of their outcomes, as was done by *Carrater* in Brazil in connection with the strategies used in solving mathematical problems. The last article by *Super and Harkness* offers a broad analytical perspective on human development in terms of intermeshing systems, concretely illustrated from their work in Kenya. Their general message is that neither the study of the child alone (mainstream developmental psychology), nor of the separate study of the context (mainstream anthropology), can be satisfactory. The unit of analysis has to be the child within a particular cultural context (the 'developmental niche') and consequently psychologists and anthropologists should make a joint contribution (*Jahoda 1982; Jahoda and Lewis, in prep.*). Thus taken as a whole the papers provide both wide-ranging theoretical discussions and a variety of empirical approaches.

On the other hand, it should be said once again that the picture is inevitably a partial one that cannot be claimed as representative, and not merely for reasons of space. Several prominent colleagues were unable to prepare a paper at relatively short notice. We had also hoped to include more of the interesting work carried out by Third World researchers within their own cultures, and in fact had a policy of giving priority to such material. Unfortunately we were only partly successful as these colleagues encounter a variety of practical problems such as lack of resources, writing in a foreign language, inadequate information flow and others, which greatly increased their difficulty in preparing something within the period available. It is to be hoped that this special issue will encourage Third World researchers to submit their work to the *International Journal of Behavioral Development* more frequently. Perhaps some readers may be stimulated to consider embarking upon cross-

cultural research themselves, but hopefully even less adventurous ones will have gained a better appreciation of the importance of culture.

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A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY*

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The burden of the argument put forward in this paper is that in spite of a considerable expansion of cross-cultural development studies over the past two decades, developmental psychology as a whole remains unduly parochial. Since most of its theories originate in the first world, one of the main functions of cross-cultural work is to assess the range of their applicability across the globe. After briefly illustrating this theme in relation to infant behaviour, research and theories dealing with cognitive development in childhood and adolescence are reviewed in more detail. Piagetians focusing on supposedly universal processes appeared at one time sharply opposed to followers of Vygotsky concentrating on specific context-bound learning. Cross-cultural work has resulted in a convergence such that what divides them now is mainly a difference of emphasis, both sides accepting forms of 'local constructivism'.

Important contributions from workers outside these major traditions are outlined and a shift away from exclusive concern with learning to understand the physical, and towards the social world is noted. In conclusion, some evidence is mentioned indicating that cultural factors powerfully affect emotional as well as cognitive development and it is suggested that there is a need to devote more effort in that direction.

A few years ago an anthropologist (Schwartz 1981) wrote that he had come to realise 'that anthropologists had ignored children in culture while developmental psychologists had ignored culture in children' (1981: 4). Like many a *bon mot*, this is somewhat exaggerated but nonetheless contains an important truth. Schwartz went on to castigate developmental psychology in particular in the following terms:

'Developmental psychology has largely missed the opportunity to consider the child in the cultural milieu, which is the *sine qua non* of the developmental completion of a human nature ...

* Revised text of Recent Progress Lecture presented at the Eighth Biennial Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development at the University François Rabelais, Tours, France, July 6-10, 1985.

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