The Role of Culture & Context on Character Development
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What is Culture?

- Values
- Beliefs
- Rituals
- Symbols

Practices
Cultural Practices

• Made up of basic observable routines, activities, & cultural practices
  (Bourdieu, 1990; Weisner, 2002)

• What people DO
  – Language use
  – Kinship systems
  – Religious & ritual practices
  – Economic models
  – Power structures & hierarchies
  – Gendered expectations
  – Cultural socialization--how they raise their children
  – How they dress
  – The food they eat
  – Etc.
Cultural Models

• **Belief systems** about the world
  (D’Andrade, 1981)

• Ways in which members of a culture generally specify **critical knowledge & skills that are essential**

• To NOT acquire them, “**rules one out as a competent member of the group**”
  (Goodnow, 2009, p.8)
Values, Norms, & Ideologies

- Cultures share distributed knowledge (Rogoff, 2003)

- Often aligned with religious belief systems (Holden & Vittrup, 2009)

- Which are historically derived, patterned, & perpetuated across generation (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952)
Operationalizing Culture in Developmental Science Research

• Culture requires “thick” descriptions of symbolic systems of meanings (Geertz, 1973)

• Too often reduced to simplistic categories
  – Collectivistic vs. individualistic societies
  – Nationality
  – Ethnicity
  – Language
  – Language + ethnicity (OR) Language + ethnicity + nationality (Chirkov, 2009)

• “There is no contemporary society in which one culture, one language, one religion, one single identity characterizes the whole population.” (Berry, 1997, p. 27)
Complicating Culture Through Acculturation

- **Country of Origin** ➔ **Host Country**
  - Along a continuum in juxtaposition
- Should be assessing:
  - Language
  - Values
  - Behaviors
  - Identity
- Of BOTH:
  - Country of Origin: A little ➔ A lot
  - Host Country: A little ➔ A lot
CONTEXT MATTERS
ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

MACROSYSTEM: (e.g., Economic, historical and cultural context, xenophobia)

EXOSYSTEM: (e.g., Public policy--pathways to legalization, health care & educational policies)

MICROSYSTEMS: (e.g., Workplace; Schools; Family; Peers; Community agencies and supports)

MESOSYSTEM: Relationships between microsystems

INDIVIDUAL: (e.g., Age; Race; Ethnicity; Gender; SES; Language; Trauma exposure; Documentation status; Sexual orientation; Special &/or Medical needs; Temperament...)

CHRONOSYSTEM: Change over time
Growing Inequality

INCOME INEQUALITY IN THE UNITED STATES, 1910-2010

SHARE OF TOP DECILE IN NATIONAL INCOME

"DEPORTATION NATION"
(Kanstrom, 2007)
Xenophobic Stereotypes
EXOSYSTEMS

• Parental underutilization of programs (e.g. health, social services, preschool)

• Family Distrust of civic institutions (e.g. police & social service agencies)
“It’s Sort of My Calling:” The Civic Participation & Social Responsibility of Latino Immigrant Origin Young Adults*

- Latino 1\textsuperscript{st} & 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation young adults are the fastest growing group of young adults in the U.S. (Rumbaut & Komaie, 2010)

- Whether young adults engage civically has implications for type of people they will become (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003)

- ...and the type of society we will become (Stepick, Stepick, & Labisesiere, 2008)

Culturally Congruent Civic Involvement

- Individuals contribute in **culturally congruent ways** in keeping with “idealized personhood” (Csikzentimihali & Rathunde, 1998)

- Research with **mainstream** populations suggest:
  - Older adults tend to contribute in generative ways while younger adults tend to contribute in as “an instrumental means to a personal end” as they engage in resume building (Hirshon & Setterson, 2013)
  - Younger adults of middle class origins have “relatively few social obligations” (Arnett, 2000)
  - Growing inequality also contributes to differential culturally normative opportunities and expectations

- **Research Questions:**
  - How does this U.S. mainstream model of civic involvement resonate for Latino young adults?
  - What values & motivations may be driving their civic involvement?
Participants

- 58 Latino/a young adults (ages 18-25)
- 58.6% female
- First Generation (46.5%) & Second Generation (53.5%)

Diverse
- Dominicans (48.3%)
- Guatemalans (13.7%)
- Mexicans (27.6%)
- Salvadorians (10.3%)

Education:
- GED/high school (46.5%)
- 2 year college (19%)
- 4 year college (12.1%)
- Graduate school (3.4%)

Recruited in 2 large North Eastern cities [through 2 & 4 year colleges, churches, & community centers]

In-depth interviews of participants & Q-sort
# Q-Sort Task

Please pick the 4 values you most associate with...

*(from a list of 20)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VALUE</th>
<th>...the United States</th>
<th>...your (or your parent’s) country of origin</th>
<th>..to YOU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pursuit of Wealth</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Obligations</td>
<td></td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion, Faith, &amp; Spirituality</td>
<td></td>
<td>50.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping &amp; Serving Others</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Forms of Civic Involvement

• Beyond voting or political involvement
• Traditional volunteering within organizations
• Mentoring
• Translating (formally & informally)
• Leadership (especially in) Dreamer Reform
• Civic Minded Professions
Selecting Civic Minded Occupations

• Education, Medical, or Legal fields with explicit motivation of giving back to community or those in need
  – “I want to pursue my career for those who don’t have.”
  – My main goal is to be able to start working as a health professional to treat people who need it most.”
  – “I can only change what is in my classroom but I can change that.”
Civic Involvement Motivations

- **Two-thirds** demonstrated *active* levels of civic engagement

- **Primary Motivators**
  - **Social Responsibility** (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011)
  - **Rectifying Social Injustice**
    - **Undocumented Issues**
      - Self
      - Others
In Sum

• Culture matters
  • Values are at heart of cultural driver of character
  • But is difficult to operationalize a "thick" concept with "thin" strategies
  • Requires deep understanding of the population under-consideration with bicultural partners
  • Requires multi-method approaches

• Context matters
  • Proximal levels of influence are important BUT
  • Should consider distal as well as proximal levels of influence