



# The Role of Culture & Context on Character Development

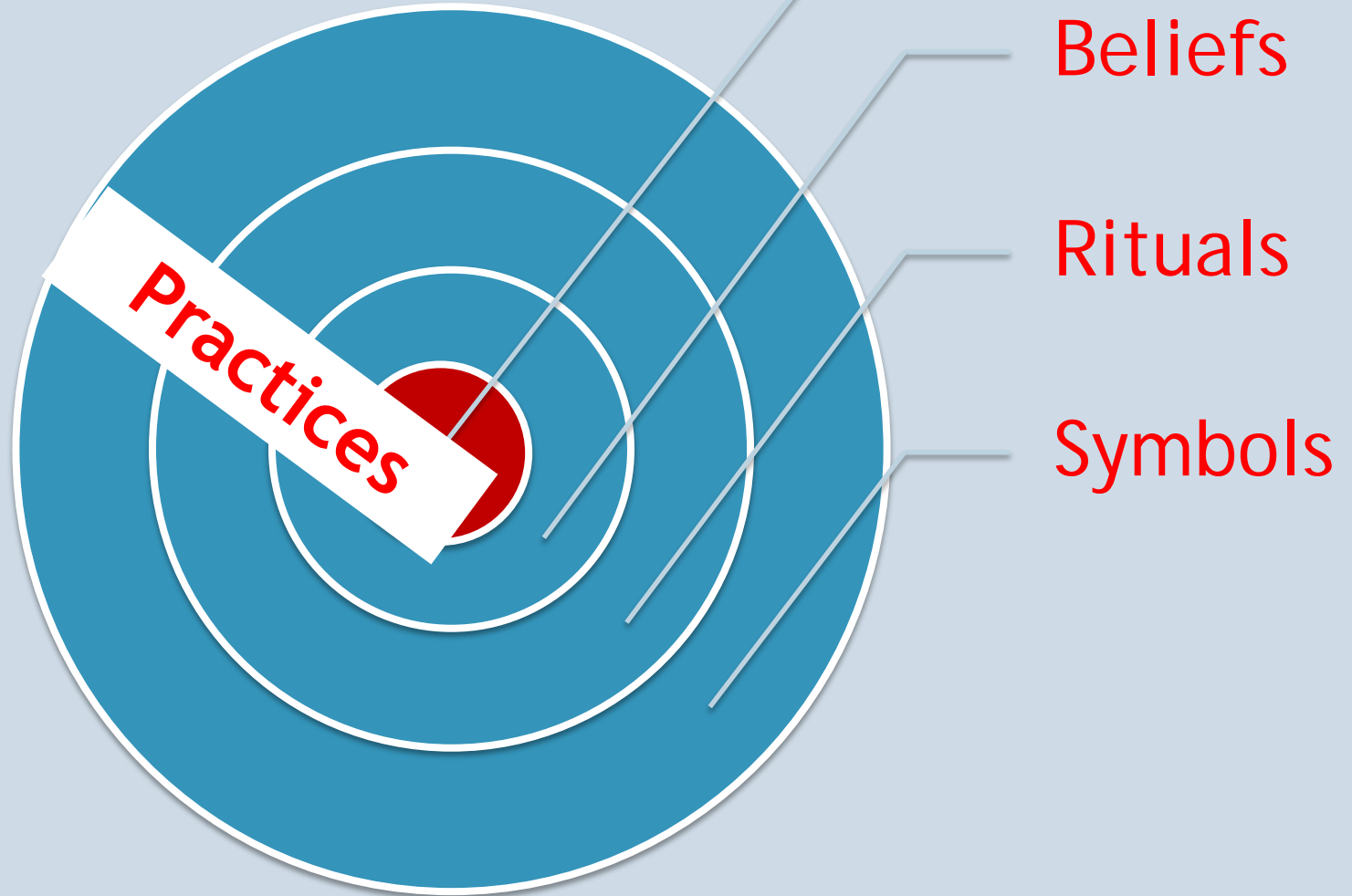
National Academies of Sciences

**Workshop on Approaches to the  
Development of Character**

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# What is Culture?



# 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



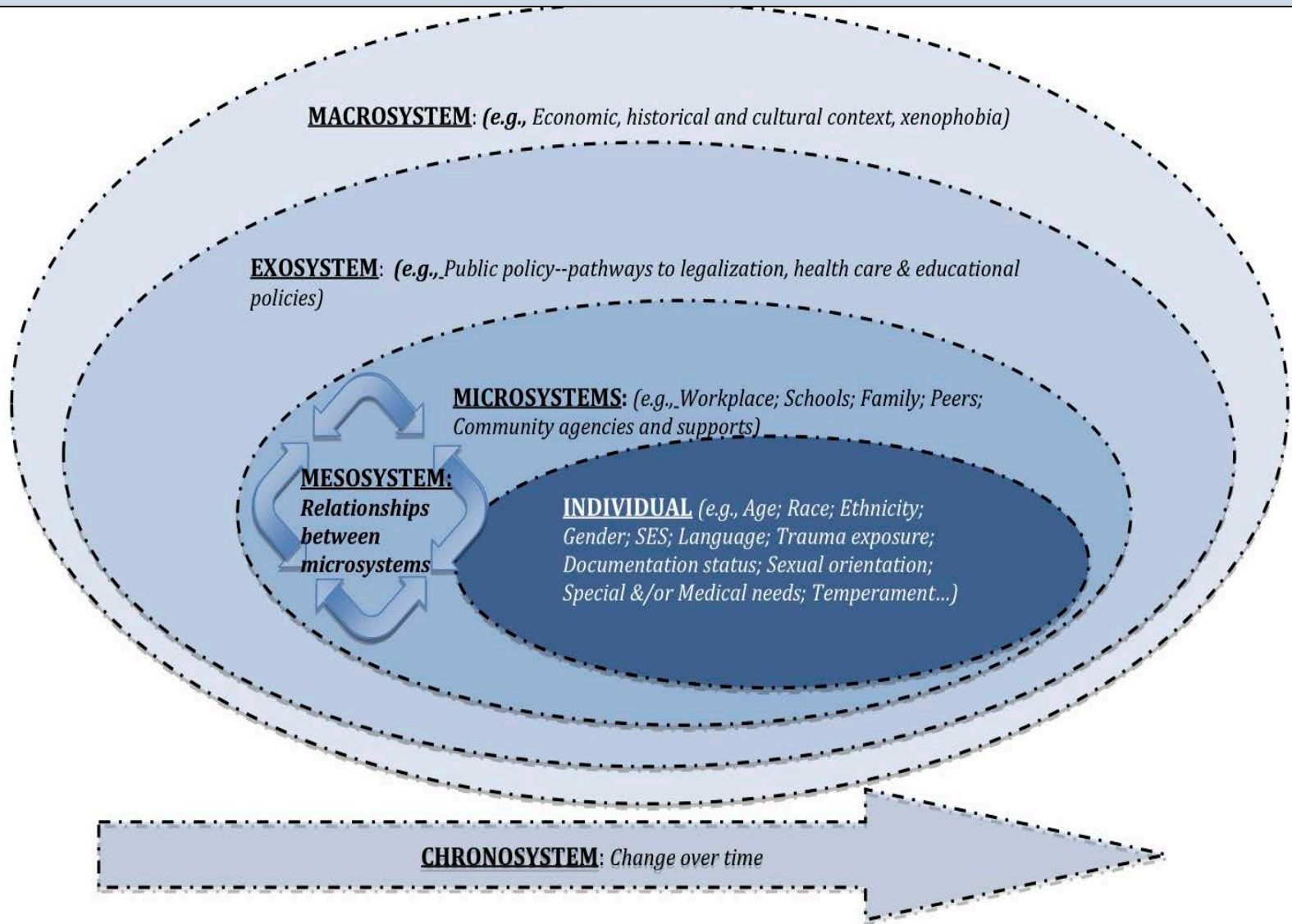
CONTEXT

MATTERS





# ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK



# Growing Inequality

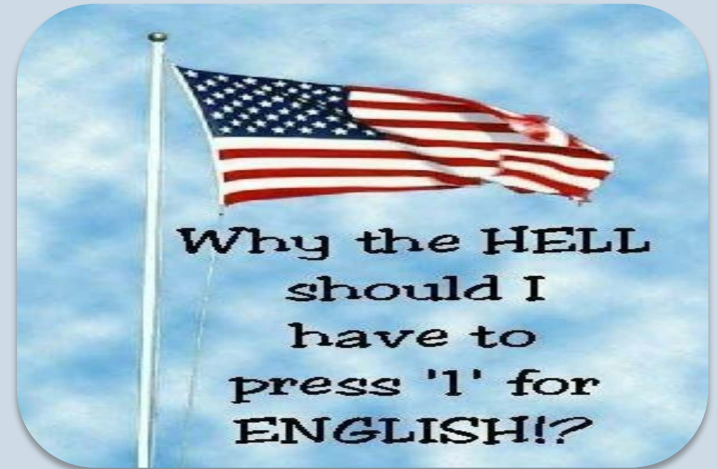


# “DEPORTATION NATION”

(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<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> 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)

\*Suárez-Orozco, Hernández, M, & Casanova, S. (2015). *Research in Human Development* 12(1), 84-99.



# 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%)
  - ~ Mexicans (27.6%)
  - ~ Guatemalans (13.7%)
  - ~ 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)

VALUE <i>(within the top 4 selected)</i>	...the United States	...your (or your parent's) country of origin	..to YOU
Independence	21%	21%	39.4%
Pursuit of Wealth	45.1%		
Freedom	46.5%		
Opportunity	49.3%		
Family Obligations		75.5%	49.3%
Religion, Faith, & Spirituality		50.7%	
Helping & Serving Others		22.5%	40.8%
Respect			36.6%



# 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's 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

