

From Diversity to Systematic Patterns and Integrative Syntheses: A Journey in Cross-Cultural Psychology

Cigdem Kagitcibasi

Koc University
(CKAGIT@ku.edu.tr)

Prefatory Comments

The evolution of cross-cultural psychology started with studies of differences, advanced to examining systematic patterns and currently is involved with possible Integrative syntheses. The beginnings of cross-cultural psychology, closely allied with anthropology, involved European and North American scientists' search for human differences in "exotic" places. With the internationalization of the field, research is now carried out mostly in contemporary societies. With large comparative data sets systematic patterns are revealed, for example in values. The next step, which may have already started, is likely to integrate cultural differences with similarities adaptive to increasingly similar urban life styles. Such syntheses promise to contribute to human wellbeing.

"Some findings of social psychology may refer to general panhuman relationships, others to relationships that hold only within specific socio-cultural settings. Only systematic cross-cultural comparison can separate these or identify the limits within which particular generalizations hold. An example of findings that seem likely to be culturally specific are those in support of a general syndrome of 'authoritarianism.' In cultures in which social norms bear differentially on the components of this syndrome, one should expect different patterns of relationship to obtain. Such contrasts were anticipated between the United States and Turkey".

The above quote was the beginning paragraph of an early publication (Kagitcibasi, 1970) that was based on my doctoral dissertation which involved cross-cultural comparative research, before cross-cultural psychology as a discipline appeared on the scene. It reveals my basic thinking that a cultural and cross-cultural stance is needed to demonstrate the universal validity of psychological theory. This perspective is still valid and still in need of general acknowledgement in psychology, notwithstanding advances accomplished.

Differences and Similarities

At the start, I was impressed by diversity across cultures. Going to an American school in Istanbul and then studying in the United States as a foreign student helped me "see" culture, both my own and "the other". My early writing reflects this fascination with diversity. However, through the years, getting more involved in cross-cultural psychology, I came to the realization that merely noting the diversity of human behavior may be limited in understanding the processes and mechanisms underlying this diversity. Such understanding would help us address questions of "why" and "how" such diver-

sity comes about.

This line of thinking led me toward attending to contextual factors more than commonly done in psychology, especially at that time. Then I came to understand and appreciate the significance of similarities together with differences across cultures and faced the challenge of confronting their dynamics. In this endeavor I tried to avoid "False Universality"- Assuming that a finding/behavior is universal though it may not be, and "False Uniformity" - Assuming that a finding/behavior is unique to a culture though it may not be. My involvement in the 9-country Value of Children Study helped me a great deal in this process.

Integrative Syntheses

I have attempted to construe such integrative syntheses. In this process, studying social change and its concomitant psychological aspects has been important. Some "Integrative Syntheses" I have used in theory and research are the following: "Family Model of Psychological Interdependence" (of Family Change Theory); "Autonomous-Related Self"; and "Social--Cognitive Competence" (e.g. Kagitcibasi, 2011, 2013). In constructing them, I used concepts from both mainstream psychology and also from behavioral patterns emerging in cross-cultural and cultural psychology. A brief account of these integrative syntheses may help demonstrate how culture can inform psychological inquiry.



Video clip from Cigdem Kagitcibasi's talk

Family Model of Psychological Interdependence

My first integrative synthesis was the "family model of psychological (emotional) interdependence". In contrast to the modernization theory assumption of diminishing family interdependencies and a convergence toward the Western family pattern in the world, I proposed a synthesis of the traditional prototypical family model of (total) interdependence and the Western model of independence resulting in a third model of psychological interdependence. This was based on a conceptual differentiation of two types of inter-generational interdependencies in the family - - psychological (emotional) and material (Kagitcibasi, 1990). Research, both mine and others', has provided support for this theory of family change (e.g. Mayer, Tromsdorff, Kagitcibasi & Mish-

ra, 2012). The emerging evidence from the “Majority World” and migration research pointed to the maintenance of close-knit family ties together with increased material independence through social change and development. In this type of synthetic family model childrearing involves both relatedness and autonomy, resulting in the “autonomous-related self”, my second integrative synthesis.

Autonomous-Related Self

In psychological thinking autonomy and relatedness have long been considered basic human needs. However, often they have also been considered as conflicting. From a cross-cultural perspective this outlook has led to claims that autonomy is lacking in collectivistic contexts (see Kagıtcıbası, 2007 for a review). Underlying this assumption is an individualistic world view which sees separation (and individuation) as necessary for the development of autonomy. Even in cross-cultural psychology autonomy and relatedness are seen as opposites. Thus, individualism (independence) is construed as a state of being autonomous but not related, and collectivism (interdependence) as one of being related but not autonomous.

Defining autonomy as willful agency and self rule, I differentiated “agency” and “interpersonal distance” dimensions. The former concerns autonomy-heteronomy and the latter interpersonal relatedness-separateness. Given the psychological and logical distinctness of these two dimensions, varying degrees of autonomy and relatedness can co-exist. Thus, autonomous-relatedness is possible, just as autonomous-separateness is. Furthermore, autonomous-related self involves a more healthy combination, since both autonomy and relatedness are basic needs (see Kagıtcıbası, 2005, 2007 for thorough discussions of this theoretical position and supportive evidence).

Autonomous-related self construct is an integrative synthesis because it integrates two constructs assumed to be conflicting, and it is based on cross-cultural diversity. In Western contexts autonomy may indeed be associated with separation from others, with being unique and different. This is because of the pervasive individualistic values. However, in the Majority World where more collectivistic values prevail, autonomy tends to exist together with connectedness with others. A growing body of research conducted with diverse national and ethnic groups such as Brazil, Estonia, Turkey, China, the Canadian Inuit, immigrants in the U.S. and Europe provides evidence for autonomous-related self. Furthermore, research informed by Self Determination Theory also points to this combination in Western contexts (e.g. Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Cognitive - Social Competence

Since 1970s a great deal of cognitive anthropological research in the Majority World has pointed to “social intelligence” involving sensitivity to others’ needs, being responsible and dependable (e.g. Serpell, 1977, 2011; Super & Harkness, 1997). Similar findings are reported for ethnic minorities in Europe and the U.S. (e.g. Dekovic, et al., 2006; Nunes, 2005). Thus, in line with closely knit human ties and collectivistic rela-

tions, social intelligence is valued in the Majority World.

With rural to urban and international migration involving advanced schooling, new life styles emerge with increased demands on the growing child for school-like cognitive competence. Social intelligence, alone, is not sufficient. In fact, mismatches can occur; for example Nunes (2005) shows that teachers’ and immigrant parents’ expectations can conflict. However, social intelligence is a valuable asset and needs to be maintained while cognitive competence is promoted. The former should not be replaced by the latter. Thus, ‘social-cognitive competence’, an integrative synthesis, is called for.

Conclusion and Implications for Applications

Beyond understanding human behavior across cultures, Cross-Cultural Psychology also aspires to contribute to human well-being. Indeed this has to do with the responsibility of science, and certainly of social-behavioral science, to society. This responsibility may not always be explicit (see for example, Ward & Kagıtcıbası, 2010) but it is always there.

The above integrative syntheses are theoretically driven and empirically supported. They tend to contribute to better human adaptation and well-being, especially in the context of social change. However, not only in the changing Majority World, but also in Western culture they emerge as more optimal patterns because they involve the satisfaction of some basic human needs. Their implications for applications are wide ranging.

These constructs have figured strongly in my applied work. The main applied research I have been involved in was a 22-year study of early childhood education and support through both center-based and home-based intervention focusing on the mother (Kagıtcıbası, Sunar & Bekman, 2001; Kagıtcıbası, Sunar, Bekman, Baydar & Cemalcilar, 2009). These constructs were basic to the culturally appropriate but also universally valid support provided in the intervention. Long-term benefits for both children and also their mothers and families were notable. Extensive implementations and institutional developments followed, with up to now some 800,000 women, children and fathers in 10 countries benefiting from the programs of “Mother-Child Education Foundation”, based on the original study. A second ongoing applied research I am conducting focuses on early adolescents in school contexts, again informed by these contextual, functional, and both culturally and universally valid integrative syntheses. Preliminary findings point to benefits of this approach with far reaching implications for large scale applications.

References

- Deković, M., Pels, T., & Model, S. (Eds.) (2006) *Unity and diversity in child rearing: Family life in a multicultural society*. Lewiston, USA: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Kagıtcıbası, C. (1970). Social norms and authoritarianism: A Turkish-American Comparison”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 16, 444-451.
- Kagıtcıbası, C. (1990). Family and socialization in cross-cultural perspective: A model of change. In J. Berman

(Ed) Cross-Cultural Perspectives: *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, 1989, 37, Nebraska University Press, 135-200.

Kagitcibasi, C. (2007). *Family, self and human development across cultures: Theory and applications*. (Revised Second Edition). Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum (Taylor & Francis).

Kagitcibasi, C. (2011). Socio-cultural change and integrative syntheses in Human development: Autonomous-related self and socio-cognitive competence. *Child Development Perspectives*, 5(3), 1-7.

Kagitcibasi, C. (2013). The Family and Child Well-Being, In A. Ben-Arieh, I. Frones, F. Casas &.E. Korbin (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Well-Being*, 1229-1251. Springer.

Kagitcibasi, C., Sunar, D., & Bekman, S. (2001). Long-term effects of early intervention: Turkish low-income mothers and children. *Journal of Applied Development Psychology*, 22, 333-361.

Kagitçibasi, Ç., Sunar, D., Bekman, S., Baydar, N. & Cemalcilar, Z. (2009). Continuing effects of early intervention in adult life: The Turkish Early Enrichment Project 22 years later. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*

Mayer,B., Tromsdorff,G., Kagitcibasi, C. & Mishra, R. (2012) Family models of independence/interdependence and their Intergenerational similarity in Germany, Turkey, and India. *Family Science*, 1-11.

Nunes, T. (2005). What we learn in School: The Socialization of Cognition. *International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development Bulletin*, 1, 47.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78.

Serpell, R. (1977). Strategies for investigating intelligence in its cultural context. Quarterly Newsletter, Institute for Comparative *Human Development*, 3, 11-15.

Serpell, R. (2011). Social responsibility as a dimension of intelligence, and as an educational goal: insights from programmatic research in an African society. *Child Development Perspectives*, 5 (2),126–133.

Ward, C. & Kagitcibasi, C. (2010). Acculturation Theory, Research and Application: Special Issue, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34, 2.