

# Chapter 2

## Broad Definitions of Culture in the Field of Multicultural Psychology

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### 2.1 Multicultural Positive Psychology

An increasing number of scientists and theorists are devoting attention to the intersection of optimal human functioning and culture. While older theoretical models and frameworks conceptualized human behavior and functioning from a deficit viewpoint and without cultural considerations, contemporary models not only focus on a balance between deficient and optimal functioning, but also are culturally responsive. Indeed, recent work in positive psychology considers both the investigation of cultural representations of optimal human functioning, as well as the importance of the relationship between individuals and their environments (Delle Fave and Bassi 2009; Lopez et al. 2002; Pedrotti et al. 2009; Uchida et al. 2004). Other chapters in this volume will provide reviews of specific positive psychology constructs and their application to multiculturalism. In this chapter, we first provide an overview of definitions of culture and then discuss the importance of considering different ways of integrating cross-cultural thinking into our everyday work as researchers or helping professionals. We utilize the ADDRESSING framework (Hays 2008) as a guide to integrate thinking about multiculturalism, identity, and human strengths.

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### 2.1.1 Overview of Multiculturalism

The study of culture cannot be separated from our understanding of the *self*, which is not a fixed phenomenon but rather a series of complex, dynamic interactions with our environment (Huiitt 2004). This view of a dynamic self is central to the work of social scientists that recognize that multiple levels exist at which change can be initiated. In summary, how we view ourselves is the total sum of our affective, cognitive, instinctual, environmental, and behavioral experiences (Judge et al. 1997), and is influenced by the specific evidence we gather from our cultural values and norms (Harter 1999). Some researchers note that at a deeper level, culture is also an evolving process that is mutually agreed upon by a specific social group, which is transmitted through our chosen language, customs and social institutions (Wong et al. 2006). According to Wong and colleagues (2006): “In many important ways cultures are the expressions of human nature in all its complexity and duality – fears and hopes, cravings and aspirations, selfishness and generosity, cruelty and compassion.” (p. 1). Culture is a fluid phenomenon in a constant state of flux, being shaped by our environment, social and political events along with the interaction of individual and group differences.

In fact, there is a long history and multiple definitions attempting to capture the nuances of what culture includes. Culture was first defined by Cicero as a cultivation of the soul (i.e., *cultura animi*) and culture was more widely used in the eighteenth century as an agricultural term to describe improvements in cultivation (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952). In the nineteenth century, culture was used to describe the refinement, or the education of an individual. In simple terms, culture means the customs, language and practices attributable to specific group membership (Ben-Shalom and Horenczyk 2003; Snauwert et al. 2003). More recently, there have been multiple, and even controversial definitions of culture (Triandis 1996). While the definitions vary widely, there is consensus that culture is comprised of *shared* elements (Shweder and LeVine 1984), such as standards for believing and communicating “among those who share a language, a historic period, and a geographic location” (Triandis 1996, p. 408). These elements are passed through generations with modifications, including “unexamined assumptions and standard operating procedures reflecting what have worked at one point in the history of a cultural group” (Triandis 1996, p. 408). Culture can be thought of as a specific way to view the world based on a socially constructed set of beliefs, values, and norms.

It is clear there are multiple definitions of culture and a wide range of disciplines have attempted to capture the richness of this phenomenon. While there does not seem to be a unified definition, there are certain agreed upon commonalities. The most vital is its acceptance as a felt phenomenon that is best described and discussed rather than forced into a single inflexible definition (Axelson 1985). For our purposes we will combine multiple definitions to create a broad base to begin our discussion. *Culture describes the whole of an individual's learned behaviors, thoughts and perceptions that have been transmitted throughout generations from institutions, organizations, or group membership.*

### 2.1.2 *Moving from Culture-Free to Culturally Embedded Thinking*

Two approaches to the integration of culture and positive psychology have been proposed. Some scholars advocate for a culture-free approach to research. To support this view, they cite positive psychology researchers who propose to have identified strengths that are common across cultures. As an example, Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed the *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification (CSV)*. They used the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM; American Psychiatric Association 1994)* as a model, but rather than describing psychological disorders, the CSV is intended to describe and classify human strengths. In developing the CSV, the authors state that they relied on overarching strengths that “almost every culture across the world endorses” (Seligman et al. 2005, p. 411). They note that there is a similarity in the endorsement of the 24 strengths across 40 countries, with correlations from nation to nation ranging in the 1980s, which defies cultural, ethnic, and religious differences (Seligman et al. 2005). Embedded within this culture-free approach is the assumption that a researcher also is culture-free. In other words, the researcher is assumed to be objective, with the values of their own culture not entering into their professional work (Pedrotti et al. 2009).

Another approach is the culturally-embedded perspective, which is the approach taken by the editors of this volume and the authors of the chapters herein. A culturally-embedded perspective suggests that strengths should be viewed within a cultural context and that our cultures and worldviews do indeed affect our work (Pedrotti et al. 2009). In addition, the question must be asked, does mere presence of a behavior/attitude in a variety of cultures tell us enough about how that strength behaves, if it has the same definition as the one we are providing, or if it is valued as a strength at all (see Pedrotti 2013 for an expanded discussion of the different manifestations of positive characteristics)? We too, believe that a key to understanding strengths and cultural influences is to start by examining one’s personal views on specific cultural dimensions. It is also important to understand where those with whom we work and interact fall on these dimensions. For example we might want to ask ourselves and others about: our beliefs about the concept of “self;” how do we feel most comfortable communicating and relating to others; what value do we place on appearance and things like meal time; what does time mean to us; which do we value more, the individual or the group; how do we feel about handling disagreements; what are our beliefs about the meaning of existence; and finally how do we view such things as work and play. It is important for both clinicians and scholars to not only see the similarities between ourselves and those with whom we work, but to take the time to notice the differences that may be due to cultural influences coming from multiple sources.

As Pedrotti and colleagues (2009) noted, the field of psychology has often used deficit models in the past that explain pathology as a function of non-White racial and ethnic differences. Deficit models were formed to support the White or dominant

cultures source of privilege (McIntosh 1998). These entitlements and privileges are unearned, unacknowledged, or some would argue unconscious standards and norms, which have been created from what is considered acceptable by the group with the majority of the power (McIntosh 1998). When other cultures are measured by these dominant cultural standards and norms, they are often found to be deficient at best and abnormal by those with an extreme view. While there has been a great deal of research conducted on positive psychological constructs, it is imperative that the shift from fixing what is unhealthy to fostering strengths also focuses on the contextual influences of the individual. Instead of viewing a person through the lens of diagnosis or to viewing behaviors or rituals of an entire group as aberrant or deficient because they are viewed as such within our own personal cultural context, we must first consider the information provided by the individual's cultural context from which the behavior/action originated and then note whether the behavior/action contributes to healthy functioning. Our goal, within this shift is to move toward explanatory models that acknowledge cultural factors and then recognize that they also can contribute to healthy functioning.

### ***2.1.3 Making Meaning out of Cultural Context***

Indeed, it seems clear that people are influenced by multiple contextual factors and it is important to consider how context affects our daily decision-making, as well as those with whom we work. In addition, it is important to remember that individuals not only have multiple personal identities and strengths, but environments also provide strengths and resources upon which individuals can draw from. Professionals are compelled to integrate their thinking to consider how a person's values, worldview, culture, and environment contribute to optimal functioning. When we begin to integrate our thinking in such a way, we gain a richer, broader, and more complex understanding of ourselves and the individuals with whom we interact, as well as a deeper field of study with regard to research possibilities.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1977, 1992) has been a widely applied framework to understand the complex interactions between an individual and sociocultural systems. Briefly, ecological systems theory explains that individuals are influenced by five environmental systems: (1) the microsystem, which includes the individual's family, peers, school, and neighborhood; (2) the mesosystem, which is the quality of the relationships among the different contexts, such as between the family and the school; (3) the exosystem, which is the environmental systems and contexts for which the individual is not directly a part of, but which affect the individual; (4) the macrosystem, which is the culture in which the individual lives. The latter system includes societal values, socioeconomic status, poverty, and ethnicity; and (5) the chronosystem, which includes the transitions over the life course, such as divorce. It is important to note that the influences between these systems are bidirectional (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1992). Each experience and developmental process affects an individual's functioning across various contexts

(Yakushko et al. 2009). Thus, individuals are influenced and shaped by multiple interacting contexts (Yakushko et al. 2009). Keeping the influence of these contexts in mind, multicultural researchers suggest that when attempting to understand an individual we must examine the context in which psychological traits and behaviors occur (Constantine and Sue 2006; Pedrotti and Edwards 2009). Therefore, it is imperative that we consider every individual's experience as a series of fluctuating contexts and connections to multiple cultural identities. Theorists have assumed that an individual can have varying levels of identification and involvement with multiple cultures (Kvernmo and Heyerdahl 2003). It could be said that our cultural identity is inherently *multicultural* (Gamst et al. 2002; Kvernmo and Heyerdahl 2003; Lopez-Class et al. 2011; Phinney et al. 1997; Ward and Kus 2012). Shifts in culture occur when individuals from one culture are exposed to a new culture, resulting in changes in behavior and attitude (Ben-Shalom and Horenczyk 2003; Berry 1979; Flannery et al. 2001; Lopez-Class et al. 2011; Miranda and Umhoefer; 1998; Sattler 2001; Snauwert et al. 2003; Ward and Kus 2012). All cultures have distinct patterns of affective, cognitive, and behavioral expression. Cultural diversity occurs when the interaction of a unique set of social environments, geographical locations, historical context, political events, dominant religions, and philosophies combine (Wong et al. 2006). These distinctions may gradually diminish as cultures blend, coexist or when the domination of one culture supersedes all others.

Each individual can be seen as behaving, thinking, and feeling from multiple cultural influences. This same individual is then interacting and reacting to the multiple cultural influences of other individuals which results in an infinite number of astounding combinations (Axelson 1985). This cultural similarity or dissimilarity, which is based on each individual's background and experience, must therefore be the starting point for clinicians and scholars to examine their own cultural context in order to effectively communicate and relate. Multiculturalism implies an approval or celebration of diversity based on either the right of different groups to respect, recognize, or to acknowledge the benefits of membership to the larger cultural society (Heywood 2007). Multiculturalism is closely associated with the concept of cultural pluralism which is defined by Axelson (1985) as the benefits received by the dominant culture "...from coexistence and interaction with the culture of adjunct groups" (p. 13).

In order to better understand the multiple cultural influences that shape individuals' identities and conceptualize personal and environmental strengths, several strategies or heuristics can be utilized. We will now describe the ADDRESSING Framework (Hays 2008) and the four-front approach (Wright and Lopez 2009).

## 2.2 Hays ADDRESSING Framework

Hays (2008) has developed an approach to help researchers and clinicians assess and examine their own values, beliefs, and contexts in order to better understand the impact of culture on our work. Hays (2008) has identified several cultural influences

and identities that affect our human experience. Clinicians must first recognize and then assume responsibility for our own cultural influences as they shape such factors as our decision-making, communication style, case conceptualization, or the client's to whom we are drawn. Researchers must also consider their own cultural influences as these affect development of theory, hypothesis formation, and even the topics we choose to explore. These influences are denoted through the use of the ADDRESSING acronym, along with sample questions a clinician or researcher could ask herself:

- **Age-related issues and generational influences:** What are my age-related issues or generational influences or experiences that may affect my work with clients, students or research?
- **Developmental disability or disability that occurred later in life:** What is the influence on disability on my life? How does my invisible disability affect my work? or How does my family member with a disability influences my understanding and interaction with others?
- **Religion and spiritual orientation:** How does my religious upbringing or spiritual orientation affect my work? What are my current beliefs and how might they affect my work with individuals from different backgrounds?
- **Ethnic or racial identity:** How does my racial or ethnic identity influence my work?
- **Socioeconomic status:** What is my socioeconomic status and beliefs associated with my current status? How does this influence my work with others of a different status?
- **Sexual orientation:** How does my sexual orientation affect my work with others? What are my views regarding people who have a sexual orientation that is different from my own?
- **Indigenous heritage:** Do I have an indigenous heritage that is part of my identity? In what ways does my heritage influence my work?
- **National identity or origin and primary language:** What is my national identity and primary language and how does this influence work with others?
- **Gender-related information:** What gender-related information is significant and how is this intertwined with my cultural identity and heritage? How do my roles and expectations, such as parenting status, marital status, and other family relationships, influence my worldview?

It should be apparent after reviewing the aforementioned questions that a person's identity will evolve over time. As we age, our identity and worldview change. We may become more aware and educated about certain types of acquired disabilities, for example, as our friends and families face these challenges. If we become parents or grandparents or have relationships with partners and end these relationships, each of these life transitions has an effect on our identity, work, and worldview. Cultural identities and influences are complex and fluid. Bronfenbrenner (1992) would suggest that this fluid movement from one system to another is the natural and complex course of our human experiences. Cultural change requires an open examination of the interactions between the individual and their multiple social systems. It is only through this awareness that our own cultural identity, as well as the cultural identity of others, can be fully understood and appreciated.

### ***2.2.1 Self-Assessment***

Hays (2008) notes that it is important for us to first engage in a self-assessment, which requires critical thinking skills, as well as a lens of humility and compassion. Her approach to this self-assessment begins with an examination of how privilege affects relationships between those who have privilege and those who do not. McIntosh (1998) defines privilege as the advantages that one has because they belong to a dominant group. She notes that privilege is like having an invisible knapsack that individuals with privilege often are not aware that they possess. McIntosh goes on to state that the invisible knapsack includes unearned positive advantages and power that a person is given in society due to membership in the dominant group. As an example of privilege, she states that, as a White woman, she is confident that she could move to most neighborhoods without worrying about whether she would be allowed to rent or purchase property. Furthermore, she could be fairly confident that her neighbors will accept her or at least be neutral to her presence in the neighborhood. McIntosh states that awareness of the magnitude of these advantages possessed as a result of privileged status is elusive, as people who have these advantages are taught to remain oblivious to privilege in their daily lives. McIntosh argues that because of this, those who are privileged must be vigilant about bringing their awareness to the forefront, lest they fall back into being unaware of the unearned advantages that are inherent via membership in a dominant group. Similarly, the self-examination in the ADDRESSING model (Hays 2008) is an ongoing process which partly takes place during sessions with clients or in the tasks related to research; however, the majority of the learning takes place through introspection, readings, research, and learning about diverse people outside the working environment. This can involve activities such as attending community events and developing relationships with people of diverse identities. The emphasis here is to explore and understand the effect of cultural influences on our own worldviews, as well as how our group membership(s) can affect others.

### ***2.2.2 Interpersonal Engagement***

The second category in the ADDRESSING framework (Hays 2008) is engaging in interpersonal work. This is where we begin to recognize that it is not only ourselves that are complex beings experiencing multiple influences on our lives and worldview, but that others also are complex and constantly adjusting, changing. No one is a static unidimensional being. Once we realize and appreciate the complexity of ourselves and others, the better we are able to understand those who are different from us. Such recognition can clarify how our decision-making in our professional work is affected by our various cultural values, influences, and worldviews. Similar to the process of identifying the multiple memberships and influences on our worldview, we can utilize the ADDRESSING framework to uncover the cultural complexity of our clients and within our scientific inquiry. By doing this, we can

avoid making generalizations based on physical appearance or primary language (Hays 2008). For example, the curriculum we choose to teach and the research questions we formulate are affected by our complex experiences, cultural environment, and values that are salient in our life (Constantine and Sue 2006; Pedrotti et al. 2009; Snyder et al. 2011). As stated previously, we often identify strongly with more than one cultural group. For example, our society is becoming increasingly multiracial and it is common to find people who identify simultaneously with minority and majority identities (Edwards and Pedrotti 2008). Self, culture, identity, all of these constructs cannot be understood as a static process, though, as over time and depending on the context, an individual may identify more strongly with different groups than at other times during their lives.

### 2.3 The Four-Front Approach

Other frameworks exist that can be used to understand the complex and diverse strengths that can be found in individuals, as well as environments. Scholars have noted that a common error of professional psychology is the primary focus on the deficiencies of the person when making diagnostic, treatment, and policy decisions without regard to the strengths *and* deficits of both the individual *and* the environment (Wright and Lopez 2009). This is a fundamental negative bias that can lead us astray in practice and research by ignoring the strengths and resources that could be developed to increase optimal human functioning. Wright (1991) developed the four-front approach when attempting to understand strengths and deficiencies in others and the environments within which they exist. This approach encourages gathering of comprehensive information about a client's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the influence of environmental stressors and resources. We see this approach as one that can be applied to gathering culturally-relevant strengths and undermining characteristics as well. Wright and Lopez (2009) suggest the following four areas be covered, and in parentheses, we have identified examples of how the approach could be used to identify culturally-relevant variables: (1) resources and opportunities in the environment (such as supportive extended family, a strong church community or other organizations that provide support to the individual, or a workplace that is supportive of the individual's identity, such as being a parent, or being a gay individual); (2) lacks and destructive factors in the environment (such as a workplace that discriminates against the individual, violence in the home or community, or a community that lacks supports for an individual with a disability); (3) strengths and assets of the person (strong ethnic identity, pride in one's culture, or being multilingual); and (4) deficiencies and undermining characteristics of the person (such as confusion about identity or problems in daily living due to age-related factors). Researchers and clinicians are encouraged to consider the multiple cultural identities via the ADDRESSING model, and to integrate this with the four-front approach similar to our previous examples. This process can be challenging, but is important to understand how an individual's multiple identities, strengths, and



limitations influence each other, but also to understand that the individual's behavior and environment are also mutually dependent. Some may argue that this approach will encourage the focus to swing from negative and deficiencies to focusing solely on positive cultural characteristics. To remedy this, Wright (1991) proposed that researchers and clinicians give equal time and space as a reminder to attend to both the negatives and strengths in clinical work and research. Since our current practice in psychology tends to already focus on the negatives and lacks, we, along with others (i.e., Wright and Lopez 2009), encourage clinicians and researchers to spend as much time and effort on uncovering the positives as is spent on the negatives. Adding to this, "culture counts" (Pedrotti et al. 2009) and we urge professionals to integrate the identification and investigation of cultural influences and strengths into their professional practice.

### ***2.3.1 Identifying Individual, Interpersonal, and Contextual Culturally-Relevant Strengths***

As mentioned, professionals can integrate the ADDRESSING model and the four-front approach in order to provide a more balanced conceptualization of individuals and their functioning. Once one is aware of the potential cultural influences that may exist, researchers and clinicians can also identify and recognize individual, interpersonal, and cultural strengths as an important part of the complex human experience via the lens of these frameworks.

From a research standpoint, knowledge of the facets of the ADDRESSING framework and the four-front approach might assist in developing interesting areas of study. As an example, researchers have investigated how personal identification with certain cultural facets may have an impact on the effects of stressors. Indeed, a strong ethnic identity may be a protective factor by helping individuals appreciate and understand the positive qualities of their ethnic group, thus minimizing negative influences such as discrimination. Support for this hypothesis can be found in the literature. Stronger ethnic identification has been found to be related to higher self-esteem in some cultural groups (Phinney and Chavira 1992; Phinney et al. 1997; Pieterse and Carter 2010; Smith and Silva 2011) and self-efficacy (Phinney et al. 1997; Whitsell et al. 2006), and to buffer against stressors (Lee 2005). Similar to the studies on self-esteem and self-efficacy, researchers can use their knowledge of the ADDRESSING model and the four-front approach to identify variables that emerge from a certain cultural background and environmental context to investigate whether these facets are protective against stress and/or promote optimal human functioning. For example, individual strengths that could be investigated include bilingualism, pride in one's sexual orientation, or personal growth stemming from facing a disability. Interpersonal strengths include a strong religious community, extended family supports, or culture-specific celebrations. Finally, environmental resources include a religious or spiritual space (Pedrotti et al. 2009) and supports in the school and stable work environments. Scholars turning their attention to individual,

interpersonal, and environment strengths rather than solely focusing on the lacks or negatives help balance the research focus as suggested by Wright and Lopez (2009).

As a second example, bicultural identification (i.e., individuals who have intimate knowledge of the norms and customs of more than one cultural group) has been associated with higher global-self-esteem (Oetting and Beauvis 1991; Walters 1999). Bicultural individuals who found themselves immersed in multicultural systems were also more likely to feel a sense of positive psychological well-being and greater self-esteem (Phinney et al. 1997). Brendtro et al. (1990) suggested that individuals who do not feel like an authentic member of the majority group, must find a sense of mastery, belonging, and autonomy in both worlds while maintaining identification with their own group. As a specific example, when asked about American Indian culture, Red Horse, a tribal leader, insisted that his people must remain rooted in American Indian culture while developing ways to find harmony with the majority culture, thus holding a “foot in both worlds” (Hill 1991, p. 85). The ability to live in two worlds has been cited by multiple social scientists as necessary to foster positive growth (Bryant and LaFromboise 2005; Chang et al. 1996; Herring 1994; Hill 1991; Kunitz and Levy 1994; Moncher et al. 1990; Stewart 1984); thus, it appears that understanding the norms of two different cultures could be a strength.

Finally, other researchers have studied how sociocultural environments and cultural diversity may facilitate strengths. Hays (2008) has provided three sources of cultural strengths; personal (i.e., strengths attributed to self), interpersonal (i.e., strengths attributed to our relationships) and environmental (i.e., strengths attributed to our external world) that might be attended to in therapy. Pedrotti and Edwards (2009) provided multiple examples of each strength-based category. These examples should be viewed as a starting point and are not exhaustive. A personal cultural strength may be bilingual ability, culturally grounded craft or skill, spiritual or religious belief system, a sense of pride in one’s heritage, life experience (Pedrotti and Edwards 2009). Interpersonal supports might include a broad view and definition of family; culturally centered festivals, gatherings and celebrations; meaningful rituals and identification as a member of a specific cultural group (Pedrotti and Edwards 2009). Finally, environmental strengths are culturally based choices of food, clothing, housing and decoration; spaces dedicated to prayer, honoring deceased ancestors, or honoring relationship to other living things such as animals (Pedrotti and Edwards 2009).

In using Hays’s (2008) delineations in combination with the four-front, researchers are also able to more easily view individuals as complex beings whose environments also play a role in their development. Simonton (1997, 2000) notes that creative activity increases after societies and individuals open up to various cultural influences such as immigration or travel abroad. Thus, in considering the role of environment (both lacks and resources) one may gain a better understanding of the origin of a particular strength. It is clear that cultural strengths can come from personal, interpersonal, and environmental contexts. Researchers should continue to work to provide additional descriptions of how individual and environmental resources are related to well-being and other positive health markers. Similar to Wright and Lopez (2009), our hope is that clinicians, educators, and researchers

will take a more balanced view by assessing for strengths and environmental resources, rather than just focusing on deficiencies (see also the following for expanded discussions of focusing on strengths in the environment: Lopez et al. 2003; Rasmussen et al. 2003).

## 2.4 Conclusion

The need to integrate multicultural competence more fully into the field of positive psychology is beyond argument. We are complex beings with multiple identities and influences living in a world that is continually more globally connected and interdependent (Gerstein et al. 2009). Other authors have called for taking a more balanced view of others, considering not only deficiencies, but also strengths and environmental resources (Wright and Lopez 2009; Pedrotti et al. 2009; Rasmussen et al. 2003). It is our hope that providing a broad definition of culture and integrating the ADDRESSING framework (Hays 2008) with the four-front approach (Wright and Lopez 2009) as one model to become more aware of the complexity of human experience and strengths and resources, will help us identify ways in which we can increase the adaptive functioning of those with whom we work. Working from such a lens will help us strive toward becoming culturally competent psychologists.

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