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## CULTURE

Discussions about culture—especially those occurring in the United States—tend to center around culture as being a living, breathing relationship among individuals with mutual interests. The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (2007) defines *culture* as “a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behavior, and artifacts with which the members of society use to understand their world and one another.” This definition mirrors what other social scientists describe as culture.

Researchers from anthropology to sociology have a conception and definition of the term *culture*, which differs somewhat from the vernacular, but generally speaking the definition includes items such as traditions, influences, beliefs, customs, expectations, values, norms, celebrations, and shared meanings. In other words, culture can be summarized as the way of life for an individual or group of people that is shared by a national, ethnic/racial, or religious population.

One metaphor for culture is that of a big tent: it includes everything that a population of people believe is their unique identity—their conceptions, behaviors, heritage, and symbols. Culture can and often does encompass arts, beliefs, and institutions of a population that are passed down from generation to generation. Culture is also a group's oneness—its rituals, rites of passage, celebrations, and behavioral patterns that acknowledge what is important to them. In short, culture is the way in which people understand themselves and establish their personhood.

Because all people and cultures differ in meaningful ways, we need to create a society in which different cultures can coexist side by side without major conflicts, and all cultures are encouraged to uphold their customs as they see fit. In doing that, people need to recognize the dimensions of culture that are very important to cultural groups. Language is one such dimension, which includes written and spoken language. In the United States, English is the predominant language, but people speak languages

other than English in the United States, and these languages must be respected. According to the U.S. Census (2011), 55.4 million people (20 percent of the U.S. population) spoke a language other than English at home. Other dimensions of culture include: attitude toward time, space, and proximity; gender roles; family roles; status of age; and taboos.

Culture is not static, but ever changing. Ethnic origins and ancestry create the background and profile of many cultures, but those cultures continue to evolve over generations, leaving a record of historical information that weaves a chronological mosaic of cultural narratives and rituals. Culture brings with it a certain political and economic philosophy, social structure, spirituality, language, and education, all of which confirms that culture matters.

Even though culture is the passport for most people's self-concept and indigenous nature, it should not create boundaries restricting and preventing multicultural relationships. Being culturally responsive and sensitive provides a new horizon for appreciating multicultural awareness. Being open to other cultures will help people discover the items in cultures that reaffirm that we are alike in many ways. Individuals are responsible for stretching beyond their limited worldview and accepting the existence of different cultural practices. This practice will broaden our shared traditions and allow us to learn from each other.

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## CULTURE FAIR TEST

### Definition

A test would be considered a culture fair test or a culture free test if it predicts future academic and test performance equally well for all groups of individuals. A culture fair test is one that assesses

content, knowledge, skills, or aptitudes and could be used in any cultural context without the culture of the examinee being assessed influencing the outcome or results. Unfairness of a test is found when the test or testing process interacts with examinees' internalized cultural experiences or their environmental socialization. The test shows unfair scores if examinees' test scores are affected by cultural and other factors that are not intended to be assessed by the test (Helms, 2006). Identifying test unfairness requires that test developers and test scores determine why one group of examinees tends to do better or worse than another group on a particular test. If the content of a test is comparatively more difficult for one group of individuals than for others, the test is unfair. The key assessment concept underpinning the idea of a culture fair test is that of validity. A valid assessment is one that measures what the assessor intends. If a test or other assessment instrument favors one culture over another, the validity of the test is compromised. A particularly famous and often-cited example of a cultural bias or unfairness in assessment was when the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) had an analogy using the word *regatta*, which many white students knew but far fewer African Americans knew. A test is also considered *unfair* if a test design or the way results are interpreted and used systematically advantages or disadvantages certain groups of examinees, such as individuals of color, individuals who are not proficient in the English language, individuals who are not fluent in certain cultural customs and traditions, or individuals from lower-income backgrounds.

In general, hands-on performance assessments are considered more culture fair than pencil and paper tests; nonverbal contents are considered more culture fair than verbal contents; power tests, which measure how much the examinees know, are considered more culture fair than speed tests, which measure how many questions per hour the examinees can answer correctly; oral instructions are more culture fair than written instructions; and familiar-item contents to the examinees are considered more culture fair than unfamiliar-item contents. Developing culture fair tests should not be the only answer to testing the disadvantaged (Arvey, 1972). In addition to fair

test construction, for the disadvantaged, other accommodations should be made to minimize the distortions in testing that stem from their specific disadvantage.

### *Is a Truly Culture Fair Test Possible?*

Producing a truly culture fair test may be impossible given that communication is involved between the examiner and the examinee. When formal languages are used, such as in tests like the SATs, Advanced Placement exams, or International Baccalaureate exams, people who speak as a first language the language of the assessment have some advantage over those who do not speak the language of assessment as their first language. When the academic subject of the assessment is not language, examining boards generally stress that exam takers should not be penalized for their language skills. For example, in written responses on a biology exam, students should be assessed on their knowledge of biology, not their eloquence or skill in the language of the assessment. However, given that the examinee must read questions in the language of assessment and produce answers in the language, native speakers of the language have greater ease in understanding questions and producing responses that reflect their thoughts. The compromise to validity may be minor—with subtle nuances of reading or writing preventing strong students from earning the high-range marks they would if the test were in their first language, to major—students literally being unable to read the questions asked. Validity can be compromised in ways beyond linguistic skill. Students working in a language other than their mother tongue may experience more stress than other students, and test anxiety can compromise a test's results.

Some assessments do not rely on formal language but rather on informal languages of hand actions, signs, markers, and other nonlinguistic representations. However, for the assessment instructions and questions to have meaning, the examinees must understand and know the meaning of the various forms of nonlinguistic representations. However, as Europeans quickly discovered when they came to the New World in the fifteenth century, Amerindians, who had had no contact with Eurasians for possibly thousands of years, had

different meanings for even the most basic hand signals, which Europeans considered natural and normal and which all humans would understand (Greenblatt, 1992). In light of the fact that some communication must occur between the examiner and the examinee, a truly culture fair test is virtually impossible.

The issue of culture fair tests has grown in importance in the last seventy years, as societies increasingly value diversity and cultural pluralism (see **Cultural Pluralism**). Educators, institutions, and other stakeholders have come to recognize that culture can have a significant bearing on how individuals perform. To honor diversity, ideally assessments would be crafted and administered in a fashion that would not disadvantage individuals because of their cultural background. Having culture fair tests would represent a form of social justice, as no one would be discriminated against based upon their culture. However, most assessments have to be given in a language. Since language is the central element of culture, to be culturally fair would mean to offer exams in test takers' first language, which is often a nonstandard or dialect version of a language. Not only would this not be possible, powerful forces would work against it. For example, one of the most important bases for assessment is to advance educationally, through K–12 education and on to higher education. The results of various educational assessments ultimately have the power to determine how societies allocate important rewards. As is the case with institutional assessment across cultural borders (see **Fair Assessment**), many stakeholders in educational assessment want national and even international benchmarks using standardized assessments and uniform scales of measurements so that these rewards are fairly allocated to those who aspire to them. However, to do so requires using the major languages of common use, especially standard American or British English. Thus, in the name of one type of fairness (a common measurement), another type of fairness (eliminating or reducing the force of culture) is compromised.

#### *Research Findings Related to Culture Fair Test*

**SEARCH FOR CULTURE FAIR TESTS** Despite the conclusion above that a truly culture fair test is

probably impossible, researchers should try, and do try, to identify specific cognitive abilities that are *strongly* impacted by examinees' sociocultural and/or ethnic factors that may characterize a particular sociocultural group, such as sociocultural beliefs and behaviors, environment demands, language, and level and quality of education, and to identify or develop a *relatively* culture fair test (e.g., Shuttlesworth-Edwards, Donnelly, Reid, & Radloff, 2004). For example, researchers (Shuttlesworth-Edwards et al., 2004) found no significant test performance difference on the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-III (WAIS-III) Digit Symbol-Incidental Learning Pairing and Free Recall between black African first-language and white English first-language examinees with various levels and qualities of education, indicating that these memory tasks are *relatively* culture fair to disadvantageous influences of examinees' ethnic and sociocultural backgrounds, including at least twelve years of education, and that Digit Symbol-Incidental Learning Pairing and Free Recall of the WAIS-III is a relatively culture fair test (Shuttlesworth-Edwards et al., 2004).

**CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN TEST PERFORMANCE** Differences in test performance stem from factors outside a test as well as inside a test. An extensive quantitative review (i.e., meta-analysis) study (Van der Vijver, 1997) found that cross-cultural differences in test performance tend to increase (a) as wealth differences such as Gross National Product (GNP) and educational expenditure (i.e., amount of money spend on education per capita per year) of nations increase; and (b) as age and years of schooling increase (Van der Vijver, 1997), which indicates differences in test performance due to factors outside a test.

Factors inside a test could also influence test performance differences. Cross-cultural differences in test performance increase as stimuli complexity of tasks increase, and the differences are also related to types of tasks, because Western tasks show the biggest performance differences and locally developed non-Western tasks show the smallest differences across diverse cultural groups (Van der Vijver, 1997).

**CULTURE FAIR TEST AND CULTURAL CHANGES OVER TIME** A culture fair test would be fair not only in

terms of existing cultures but also in terms of cultures over time, indicating the vastness of human diversity. The well-known Flynn effect (1984, 1987) indicates that intelligence test scores increased in developed countries during the twentieth century and continue to increase in other parts of the world. These findings confuse researchers because the increases are the largest on abstract reasoning (e.g., fluid intelligence, which is related to creativity, which has decreased since 1990 [Kim, 2011]) and culture-free tests, which in fact are *not* supposed to measure cultural changes (Fox & Mitchum, 2013). In contrast, the tests that are supposed to measure cultural changes (e.g., crystallized intelligence) did not increase significantly, even though culture in the world has clearly changed since the early twentieth century. Many hypotheses have been advanced to explain this confusion. Recent research has shown that the increases are due to examinees' know-how (e.g., test-taking skill) or approach to the test item, which is more common among examinees in modern cultures, as individuals take tests more often than people in the 1940s. Test-taking skill is not a real part of intelligence. A study (Fox & Mitchum, 2013) looked into item-specific predictions about differences between cohorts in pass rates and item-response patterns on the Raven's matrices (Flynn, 1987), a seemingly culture-free test that showed the largest Flynn effect. Fox and Mitchum (2013) found that Raven's matrices scores violated measurement invariance between cohorts by underestimating the number of rules inferred by 1940 cohort examinees compared to 1990 cohort examinees. This finding indicates the vast and irregular human diversity that needs to be addressed by culture fair tests. Culture fair tests must try to be fair in terms of diversity and change, which requires "looking beneath the surface features of human variation for principles that transcend both culture and time" (Fox & Mitchum, 2013, p. 995).

### *Suggestions for Increasing Cultural Fairness*

Businesses and educational institutions use tests extensively for the screening of applicants for jobs or training programs. Therefore, ensuring cultural fairness of these tests is critical (Petersen & Novick, 1976). Suggestions to reduce cultural unfairness and to increase fairness include (Gregory, 2004):

- Base major decisions about or characterization of examinees on at least two different test scores.
- Ensure diversity in test developers and test scorers.
- Train test developers and test scorers to be aware of the potential for cultural bias, linguistic bias, and socioeconomic bias.
- Have test materials reviewed by experts in identifying cultural bias, linguistic bias, and socioeconomic bias.
- Have test materials reviewed by representatives of culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse groups.
- Ensure that norming processes used to develop norm-referenced tests include culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse groups.
- Ensure sample sizes used to develop norm-referenced tests are large enough to constitute a representative sample for each culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse group.
- Be aware that although diverse groups can be proportionately represented in the standardization sample, their actual numbers may still be too small to be representative.
- Eliminate any test item on which certain groups perform differently.
- Eliminate items, references, and terms offensive to certain groups.
- Translate tests into the examinees' native language.
- Use interpreters to translate test items for the examinees.
- For determining academic achievement and progress, use multiple assessment measures, such as performance assessments, besides the use of test scores.
- Interpret test scores in the context of collecting multiple sources and use this comprehensive method to make decisions.
- Consider the examinee's background experience when interpreting test scores.
- Be aware that groups have different backgrounds and experiences that affect their test performance and that not all groups have equal opportunity to learn.
- Be aware that a test may be inappropriate or unfair when an individual or a group scores low.

- Be aware that despite the best intentions to develop tests that are culture fair, individuals' stereotypes and prejudice still undermine test administration, interpretation, and use.

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### CYBER RACISM

Les Back, a professor of sociology at the University of London, coined the term *cyber racism* in the early 2000s. His definition describes how digital technology is being used to promote racism: “The Net has provided a means for people to sense, listen, feel and be involved intimately in racist culture from a distance” (Back, 2002, p. 629). According to Back, cyber racism encompasses a range of subcultural movements in Europe, North America, and beyond. However, despite the diversity of these movements, they exhibit the following common features:

- A rhetoric of racial and/or national uniqueness and common destiny
- Ideas of racial supremacy, superiority, and separation
- A repertoire of conceptions of racial Otherness
- A utopian revolutionary worldview that aims to overthrow the existing order (Back, 2002, p. 632)

The Internet offers a new medium for the expression of racism due in large part to its nearly autonomous environment. The perpetrators use simulation games, cartoons, online books, digital newsletters, photos, white power music, and video feeds of racial activities. These sites, of which there are hundreds, promote a vast amount of conspiracy theories including the denial of the Holocaust and the justification of slavery. Not surprisingly, the net of hate cast by cyber racists reaches far and wide; as Back (2002) says, they “define a gallery of ‘Others’ as their enemies” (p. 639). The enemy list often includes blacks, Jews, and whites who are in blended relationships and marriages—race mixers, gays, lesbians, and immigrants. As an aside, it appears that cyber racists also constitute one of the largest groups in favor of gun ownership. While gun ownership obviously does not equate with being a supporter of the cyber racist movement, there are some close ties and convincing correlations among gun ownership advocates—especially the strong

emotional appeal made by people in the cyber racist movement for not banning assault weapons.

Of course, the proliferation of cyber racism on the Internet belies the movement's origins in print media (Gilligan, 2011), but recent controversial events such as Barack Obama's presidential election have spurred the culture to grow in both size and volume. The relative affordability and accessibility of digital media has allowed individuals to reach out, from the comfort of their homes, and discover others who are willing to engage in violent rhetoric. For many people who are involved in this culture, the Internet provides an effective and autonomous means of communicating hate messages, as opposed to the obvious personal confrontations of the past. The old robe-and-hood wardrobe of groups like the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) have now given way to the more fashionable attire of laptop computers and iPads. These digital devices serve as the new tools of persuasion and propaganda for the racial hate movement.

In addition to promoting racial intimidation, cyber racism has created a unique form of cyber bullying. According to the Racism No Way (2014) project, "Cyber bullying is commonly defined as the use of information and communication technologies to support repeated and deliberate hostile behavior intended to harm others." Obviously, these activities carry a racist intent when enacted by cyber racists, who often rely on racially offensive materials or campaigns to support familiar themes: white nationalism, common destiny, racial supremacy, superiority, and genocide. In some regions of the United States and Europe, these bullying efforts have garnered a substantial following of white female and youth, but regardless of the perpetrator, there is always a frightening potential for violent rhetoric to manifest into real-life violence.

Attention must be given to these acts of violence, especially among law enforcement agencies that must practice more vigilance in actively investigating individuals and organizations engaged in this type of terrorism. More often than not, the position of some law enforcement agencies is that cyber racist media is protected as free speech.

However, there are increasingly more cases being brought before courts challenging the free speech

claims of cyber racists. One such case involved a former city of Denver employee who worked at the city of Denver's planning department. He was arrested after authorities traced a racist, hate-filled email to a computer in his home. The former employee, who is white, allegedly sent an email to an African American woman, who works as a human resources manager, on the same day that he was notified of his termination. In the email, this employee repeatedly called the HR manager a "n\*\*\*" and suggested that she was now being targeted by the KKK (Daniels, 2009). According to Daniels (2009), the reason that this former employee's email was not considered "free speech" is that both the state of Colorado and the city of Denver have laws against "ethnic intimidation/threats," and it was under those laws that the former employee's email was prosecuted.

Online hate is not going away any time soon; however, individuals who are victims of this type of racism should not be left to fight off these attacks alone. Law enforcement agencies should become more active in investigating the cyber racist movement. Perhaps more states and cities should consider enacting an ethnic intimidation/threats law in order to prosecute offenders. Just as neighborhoods become aware of child sex offenders through the Sex Offender Registry, cyber racism attackers should also be listed in a type of government-sponsored registry. Neighborhoods could develop a service for their residents in which the names and locations of individuals and Internet servers posting cyber racist content would be made known, thereby helping to identify these reprobate individuals in local communities. This service could build on the neighborhood watch group model by posting information of racist cyber sites that are discovered in communities across the United States. By taking such action, individual residents would have the information they need to make informed decisions about whether or not they want to live in a community that houses a cyber-racist element.

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