PART 3: CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES, IDENTITY AND BEHAVIOURS

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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PART 3A: ENCUlTURATION

Key Question: Discuss how enculturation influences individual attitudes, identity and behaviours.

Everyone is surrounded by culture – and for those of us living within the same culture into which we were born, it is our ‘own culture’. Even when we have moved to live elsewhere, we are often surrounded by family and friends of our culture so this process of enculturation continues (through socialisation and internalisation), until we are the product of our enculturation. Enculturation is adaptive and helps us to survive and thrive in our culture; it ensures the continuity of cultural practices from one generation to another through vertical cultural transmission from parents to children, as well as horizontal cultural transmission carried out through siblings and friends and oblique cultural transmission from other adults and social institutions. The terms ‘horizontal’, ‘vertical’ and ‘oblique’ to describe the types of cultural transmission are used by Berry and Cavalli-Sforza (1986) in their model of acculturation and enculturation.

Theories of Enculturation

Theories of enculturation (see Berry, 2011; Bornstein, 2010) are developed through looking for cultural universals (similarities) in behaviour between cultures, using the etic approach of large-scale cross-cultural surveys and cultural relativity (uniqueness of each culture), using the emic approach of narrative interviews and observation. All theories conclude the same: that cultural transmission is the means by which we are encultured, and that is a largely unconscious process of internalisation that shapes our attitudes, identity and behaviours.

While attitudes, identity and behaviours can be looked at independently, as we do (below) when discussing acculturation, they are also clearly interrelated, with attitudes shaping and being shaped by identity and identity shaping and also being shaped by attitudes and behaviour. This is relevant to Bandura’s social cognitive theory and reciprocal determinism that we looked at earlier.

Enculturation and Individual Parenting Attitudes

Many studies have been conducted that take a cross-cultural comparative approach to parental attitudes between mothers and fathers in the same culture, and across cultures, to give a gender-specific cross-cultural analysis of parenting attitudes. Parents’ childrearing attitudes constitute important dimensions of
caregiving because attitudes affect parents’ practices toward their children and the types of environments that parents create for their children.

**Key Study: Bornstein et al. (2011)**

**Aim:** To evaluate similarities and differences in mean levels and relative agreement between mothers’ and fathers’ attributions and attitudes in parenting in nine countries. (Attribution refers to parents’ beliefs of the nature of their children’s behaviour as intentional, controllable or dispositional, and their beliefs in the nature of their parenting successes and failures – we are focusing here on attitudes).

**Method:** 1,133 parenting couples of 7–10 year-old children from nine countries provided data regarding the extent to which they held progressive versus authoritarian childrearing views. The Parent Modernity Inventory was used to measure three attitudinal variables:

- **progressive attitudes** (e.g. ‘children have a right to their own point of view and should be able to express it.’)
- **authoritarian attitudes** (e.g. ‘the most important thing to teach children is absolute obedience to their parents.’)
- **modernity of childrearing attitudes** (the difference between the ‘progressive attitudes’ score and the ‘authoritarian attitudes’ score).

The researchers controlled for extraneous variables that had been shown previously to affect the results of research into parenting attitudes: age and education of parents and social desirability bias. As far as possible, data from within each country were gathered from a socioeconomically and geographically diverse sample of parents of both girls and boys.

**Results:** Significant differences between mothers and fathers were observed for all three attitude measures. Mothers showed more progressive attitudes and modernity of attitudes, and fathers reported more authoritarian attitudes overall.

For **progressive attitudes**, Kenya and the Philippines scored significantly lower than the overall mean, and China, Jordan, Sweden and Thailand scored significantly higher than the overall mean.

For **authoritarian attitudes**, China, Sweden and the United States scored significantly lower than the overall mean, and Colombia, Kenya and the Philippines scored significantly higher than the overall mean.

For **modernity of childrearing attitudes**, Kenya and the Philippines scored significantly lower than the overall mean, and China, Sweden and Thailand scored significantly higher than the overall mean. Finally, on average mothers and fathers from all countries (except Kenya) held more progressive than authoritarian parenting attitudes.

**Conclusion:** There is a significant difference between attitudes of parents in different cultures, with most holding more progressive than authoritarian attitudes, but the difference between the number of progressive as opposed to authoritarian attitudes varied significantly between cultures. This shows the effect of enculturation on parental attitudes.

**Evaluation of Bornstein et al. (2011)**

- **Strengths:** Large cross-cultural samples from nine different cultures give a breadth to this research and this study was able to show differences in childrearing attitudes between cultures, although a general
concordance between father and mothers was found.

- **Limitations:** The method was self-report, which is susceptible to the social desirability effect. Moreover, the measures had to be translated for each culture, and there is no way of being sure regarding internal consistency. Finally, there may be within-country regional differences in parenting attitudes, which were not explored.

**Critical Thinking**

**Where to now?** Further longitudinal studies of the cultures at each end of the spectrum of parenting attitudes (Sweden and Kenya) would be warranted, to see if these attitudes are culturally transmitted to children, who also develop into progressive or authoritative parents. China is often thought of as an authoritarian culture, and yet it scored high for modernity of childrearing attitudes; this also would bear investigation. Is subtracting the mean of the authoritarian responses from the progressive responses a good way to operationalise modernity of attitudes?

**Enculturation and Individual Identity**

There is a distinction made in the research between cultures where individuals are characterised by an independent self-construal, and societies where individuals have an interdependent self-construal. An independent construal implies that a person sees themselves an autonomous individual separate from others; an interdependent self-construal characterises a person who sees herself/himself as embedded in one’s social network (Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

The identity (self-construal) of the parents affects their cultural transmission of values to their children and their construal of their children as autonomous (independent) or relational (interdependent). Keller et al. (2008) argue that, through generating in their caregivers contingent (dependent) responses towards their own signals, infants experience themselves as the cause for other’s actions, and this fosters the independent (autonomous) self-construal. Therefore we would expect parents from Western middle-class families with an independent self-construal to foster this process; parents from a culture that fosters an interdependent (relational) self would be expected to have a different pattern of communication, if Keller et al.’s premise is true.

An example is given below of the interactive relationship between attitudes to childrearing, a parent’s self-construal (and construal of their child’s identity) as autonomous or relational and behaviour towards the child – encouraging independence or interdependence.
Key Study: Keller et al. (2008)

**Aim:** to investigate if and how cross-cultural differences in the temporal structure of verbal/vocal interactions between mothers and infants during the first three months of life reflect underlying differences in self-construal in the two cultures studied.

**Method:** 48 mother–infant couples were studied, 20 German middle-class and 28 Cameroonian Nso farming families. The ages of the mothers were similar, but the German mothers had a much higher level of formal education. All the German women were living with the father of their child in a stable relationship (married or unmarried). In the Nso sample 62.5% of the mothers were married and the other women were single mothers living with their parents or relatives. Concerning the characteristics of the infants there were differences between the two samples. All of the German infants were firstborns, whereas 68% of the Nso infants had older siblings.

Mother–infant interactions were filmed when the babies were 4, 8 and 12 weeks old. The mothers were told to play with their infants as they would normally do. Each videotape was about ten minutes long, and to allow time for mothers and babies to get used to the process, only the second five minutes were coded. Infant signals, contingent maternal response, no maternal response and synchronous vocalisation were all coded. Reliability was checked by a random sample of ten mother–infant couples (five from each culture) being re-coded by two independent coders.

**Results:** The German infants vocalised more than the rural Nso infants, especially when it came to negative signals (crying). The absolute number of contingent maternal responses was higher for the infants from Germany than for those from Cameroon, but this can be seen as much as an effect of their more frequent vocalisations as any supposed cultural effect. The synchronous responses were higher from the Nso mothers. The non-response tendency increased with age of the infants for the Nso mothers but not for the German mothers. The Nso mothers relied more on a touching style of response – holding close and cuddling without vocal interaction.

**Conclusion:** The study provides tentative support for the assumption that the temporal structure of early caregiver–child interactions follow either co-action (synchronous) or alternating (contingent) mode, and that the first is associated with an interdependent self-construal, while the second is more common with an independent self-construal.

**Evaluation of Keller et al. (2008)**

- **Strengths:** As infancy is a time when we can expect different experiences to have different developmental consequences and both turn-taking and synchronicity in interactions are associated with different types of cognition – analytic (turn-taking) and holistic (synchronicity) – then a study that observes both and relates them back to self-construal is relevant to cultural development studies. Moreover, the study notes the interaction of both and yet the different emphasis given to each in the two different cultures. The checking of the coding by independent verifiers increased the reliability and the internal validity of the study.

- **Limitations:** The sample sizes are small, and the German sample was assessed ten years prior to the Nso sample. It would be interesting to see a larger cross-cultural study of this nature with participants from rural and urban settings in many different cultures. The independent and interdependent self-construals were assumed from previous research to be valid for these groups, but they may not have been.
Critical Thinking

How do we know that the parents’ independent and interdependent self-construals will result in the same identities for their children? This study is a longitudinal study, but only so because the data took a long time to analyse; it would be necessary to revisit the mothers and children over the years to observe interactions and conduct self-reports in order to ensure there is a correlation between not only the mothers’ self-construals and their communication styles, but also between the children’s subsequent self-construals.

Enculturation and Individual Behaviours

Still within the theme of parenting, as an example of vertical cultural transmission, we have seen already how parenting attitudes and self-construal of identity affect parenting behaviour. Culture helps determine both how parents interpret the needs of children and how they react to those needs.

The Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) Inventory (Caldwell & Bradley, 2003) is designed to measure the quality and quantity of stimulation and support available to a child in the home environment. Bradley and Corwyn used this to examine cultural and socio-economic variations in parenting. We focus on the cultural variations in the study below.

Key Study: Bradley & Corwyn (2005)

Aim: To contribute to an understanding of parenting by examining cultural variations in parenting.

Method: Review of data from the HOME inventory, with specific focus on three aspects of the family environment where cultural models of parenting and access to resources are thought to be operative and for which there is evidence of impact on child well-being:

- parental responsiveness
- discipline practices
- exposure to stimulating materials and experiences.

To score items on the Inventory requires a home visit of about an hour, with both direct observation of parenting behaviour and semi-structured interviews with family members.

Results:

- Parental responsiveness: Kung infants from Namibia spend many hours a day in direct contact, as do Longoli children in Kenya. This contrasts to data obtained from Argentine families showing that 70% of infants were hugged or kissed by their mothers during the home visit, but that this figure shrank to 40% by age two and to 25% by age five. By contrast, speaking to the child rose from 50% at age six months to 70% at age two and 80% at age five. A similar pattern emerged in Spain: 71% of children were hugged in infancy, 63% in early childhood; 69% were spoken to in infancy and 89% in early childhood. Studies done in Latin America and the Caribbean using HOME provide a mixed picture as regards the amount of responsiveness shown to young children. Responsiveness scores for children in Paraguay, Argentina and St Vincent’s were lower than US norms, but scores in Costa Rica and Chile were not much lower.

- Discipline practices: In many African societies parental authority is especially important, so parents feel inclined to physically punish children for not behaving. In Kenya, Uganda and Cameroon the tendency to use physical punishment to control children was high, with over 80% of parents saying they spanked their children several times a week. However, such culturally prescribed forms of sternness do not appear to be accompanied by indifference to children’s needs or disrespect for children per se.
As a general rule, Latin American parents were not observed to hit their children any more frequently than did US and European parents during the home visit. However, studies of Mayan families show that different cultural models relating to child control can be found in Latin America. Mayans believe that children gradually learn responsible social behaviour and that they learn it best if allowed choices early and if positively reinforced for volunteered desirable behaviour. In the Mayan cultural model there is acceptance of children’s limited capacity to understand the needs of others or to understand the likely consequences of their actions. In a comparison of Mayan and American mothers, none of the Mayan mothers reported punishing their toddlers for misbehaviour whereas about half the mothers from Salt Lake City, Utah did.

**Exposure to stimulating materials and experiences:** As a general proposition, cultural models of parenting in Arab countries do not place as much emphasis on stimulation of school achievement as is the case for Western democracies and Asian countries such as Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. When the Early Childhood HOME was used in Bahrain, a very broad range of scores emerged. The mean score on the Physical Environment and Variety of Stimulation scales was lower in Bahrain than in the US. Some of the difference may reflect the fact that houses in Bahrain tend to be small, but there is also less tendency to take children to enriching out-of-home experiences.

In Latin America, parents tend not to put high emphasis on stimulation and teaching of academic skills, especially early in life, partly because they believe that children develop at a slow pace; mothers from St Vincent placed less emphasis on academic competence than Americans; and Mayan parents believe development is internally generated. Lesser emphasis on stimulation, coupled with generally lower affluence, often meant that scores on HOME scales such as Play Materials, Learning Materials, Academic Stimulation and Variety of Experiences were lower in Latin America. That said, scores on scales representing stimulation were not uniformly lower than in North America: pass rates on learning stimulation items for Jamaican families were similar to those in the US except for two items. In Chile, only about a quarter of parents told children the name of something during the interview and only about a quarter were credited with consciously encouraging development, and in Argentina only 10% of mothers read to their children at least three times a week during the first year of life, rising to 30% at 24 months.

**Conclusion:** Parenting is influenced by culture, but any notion that parenting is highly constricted by cultural models is partially betrayed by substantial variation observed within and across families from the same culture. Family socio-economic status and demographic patterns (i.e. age of parents and whether they lived in urban or rural communities) and family configuration factors also impacted parenting behaviour.

**Evaluation of Bradley & Corwyn (2005)**

- **Strengths:** The fact that HOME has been selected for use in quite disparate societies suggests that cultural models of parenting around the world contain some of the same principles regarding what children need from parents and what parents should do to raise children. However, to further improve the sensitivity of the HOME inventory, it was modified by researchers to accurately reflect the cultural context in which it was applied, and this in turn suggests real differences between cultures at the level of specific indicators, i.e. while the need for children to grow up to be independent is acknowledged, the means by which this independence is achieved are culturally specific.

- **Limitations:** There is little data in the HOME inventory on school-age children, and it is likely that...
Enculturation would affect parenting behaviours in later childhood as well as in early childhood. A limitation of the HOME in this regard is its inability to distinguish between relatively modest uses of punishment and more severe uses. The matter is further complicated due to changes in scoring criteria in several countries where the use of physical punishment is normative. Had a more differentiated scale on the use of punishment been available, clearer patterns may have emerged.

**Critical Thinking**

*A top-down approach.* In this review, parenting behaviour is seen as a result of a combination of culture, socio-economic status, demographic and family configuration factors. But the observations did not record the role of the child in eliciting certain behaviours from the parents. Parenting behaviour was viewed as behaviour from the parents towards the child, and not as part of an interactive process, as in Keller et al.’s study (above), which would have added richness to the data.

**POSSIBLE EXAM QUESTIONS**

**Short-Answer Question**

Explain how one study demonstrates the influence of enculturation on attitudes, identity or behaviour.

‘Explain’ requires a detailed account of how the research chosen demonstrates the influence of enculturation.

**Essay Question**

To what extent can enculturation explain attitudes, identity and/or behaviour?

‘To what extent’ requires that you consider the strengths and limitations of the explanation of enculturation for attitudes, identity and/or behaviours. Opinions and conclusions should be presented clearly and supported with appropriate evidence and sound argument.