

**The Culture Variable in the Influence Equation** (Draft v3.0 – this paper has been accepted for publication in *The Public Diplomacy Handbook*, to be published by Routledge in March 2008.)

## **Abstract**

Primacy-of-culture perspectives emphasize culture as the dominant variable in cross-cultural influence. Some observers believe that cognition, judgment, and influence processes are unique within cultures, and that Western influence research can not supply useful tools for other cultures. The primacy-of-culture perspective calls for an increasing emphasis on culture, for cultural experts as campaign managers, and for the creation of indigenous canons of psychological research, as necessary to the successful exercise of intercultural influence. This paper offers a dissenting view, and calls for a rebalancing of the influence equation where culture is considered one important variable among many. Evidence is presented of persistent over-attribution to culture, of common human cognition, of universal influence tactics, and of successful influence campaigns conducted by agents who are neither indigenous nor cultural experts. One section is devoted to universals that masquerade as cultural specifics, and another to intercultural replications of classic Western influence research. This paper posits that a closer focus on culture implies a further reduction of attention to other important elements of the influence equation, particularly universals, environmental inducements and constraints, and group variables other than culture. It questions whether redoubling the effort on cultural understanding will continue to yield more successful cross-cultural influence, or whether an approach incorporating more balanced paradigms from influence psychology will ultimately prove more effective. The paper concludes with five generalities regarding the role of culture in the influence equation.

## **Concentration of Influence Research in the West**

By recent count, I've given over 200 presentations to professional audiences on the topic of influence psychology. Two of the most frequently asked questions I've received are: "Aren't most of these influence studies you're referencing, conducted in North America?" followed by "What evidence do you have that these influence tactics will work anywhere else in the world?" These are important questions.

The first question is easier to answer: Yes, most of the studies in the social science canon are from North America. That's due to an accident of history. During the 1920s, Germany was the center of the emerging field of social psychology, and its foremost practitioner was a German Jew named Kurt Lewin who later became known as "the father of social psychology." Having predicted the direction of Germany's future earlier than others, he emigrated to the United States in 1932, where he continued his empirical approach to the social sciences that had such a profound impact on the field. Hitler's loss was F.D.R.'s gain, and soon Lewin's talents were engaged in the American war effort. After WWII, the study of influence psychology gained critical mass, and a rich scientific literature now exists on topics of persuasion, compliance, propaganda and indoctrination.

It's difficult to say how much research is conducted in North America compared to the rest of the world, but one telling estimate comes from the number of replications of a classic conformity study conducted by Solomon Asch in the 1950s,<sup>1</sup> which may be the most frequently replicated study within the influence canon, having been replicated 133 times by a recent count.<sup>2</sup> It appears that approximately 73% of the research was conducted in the US, the remaining 27% spread across 13 other countries, most of them European. North America and Europe combined account for about

88% of the research in this legacy line of inquiry. If other lines of influence research are similarly apportioned, this gives us a view of the problem faced when attempting to generalize findings to the rest of the world. There are many nations that engage in very little influence psychology research, or none at all.

But there's a potential silver lining when one considers *to what* we are attempting to generalize these psychological findings. Are we attempting to generalize to *cultures*, or to *humans*? Bad news if the former, good news if the latter. And that brings us to the formidable follow-up question: "What evidence do you have that these influence tactics will work anywhere else in the world?"

### **The Primacy-of-Culture Perspective**

The question assumes that culture fundamentally changes cognitive processing. Therefore, the primacy-of-culture approach considers psychological research from any particular culture to be largely inapplicable to other cultures. It argues for indigenous psychologies to be built from the ground up within disparate cultures (however they are demarcated) before we may be confident of the practical generalities that are the stock-and-trade of influence psychology. In practice, nationality, language, and geographic region are frequently substituted for culture.<sup>3</sup>

The idea that psychological research from one culture may be applicable to people of other cultures is seen variously as culturally insensitive, impractical, or psychologically invalid. "People from some other nations differ in cognition," writes Helen Klein. "Practitioners simply cannot apply research findings gleaned from Western research and expect it to help in multinational environments."<sup>4</sup> A recent review of information operations in *Jane's* asserts "We need to give IO officers and commanders comprehensive cultural training so they can tailor the right message to the Iraqi people."<sup>5</sup> A primary recommendation from a recent Department of Defense review of Psychological Operations effectiveness recommended "greater familiarization with cross-cultural communication techniques," urging PSYOP to concentrate on a "deep understanding of the target audience's culture and subcultures."<sup>6</sup> I have heard top military analysts echo these sentiments, declaring that "When you are dealing with people in another culture, *everything changes*." The primacy-of-culture perspective implies that people in different cultures process stimuli differently, that they think and feel with different thoughts and feelings that are alien to observers in other cultures—as if people of diverse cultures or geography were, for practical purposes, different species of humans. While currently fashionable in the West, the primacy-of-culture idea is not new.

In the 1950s, an amateur linguist named Benjamin Whorf proposed that language constrained thought.<sup>7</sup> He thought a unique culture with a unique language resulted in unique processes of thought. In the 1960s, Lorand Szalay studied free word associations, and found interesting differences among cultures regarding conceptual associations that were thought to constitute meaning.<sup>8</sup> These theories have been called on to support popular explanations of why Eskimos have more words for snow than do English speakers (which they apparently do not),<sup>9</sup> and questions regarding whether Filipinos, having generic pronouns that don't distinguish between 'him' and 'her,' are unclear on the concept of sexuality (which they apparently are not).<sup>10</sup>

Primacy-of-culture paradigms currently predominate, and are considered by many to be the fundamental ingredient in successful cross-cultural, cross-national, and cross-geographic influence campaigns. For example, the ethnic segmentation of markets is a reflexive practice among many marketers.<sup>11</sup> The cultural lens model, which "captures the nature and origin of cognitive

differences” among people of various cultures, enjoys wide acceptance among information operations intelligencia.<sup>12</sup> Observers of public diplomacy often align with the view that “...culture has emerged as the new dynamic in international relations,”<sup>13</sup> and that cross-cultural sensitivity is the essential ingredient of sound public diplomacy.<sup>14</sup>

Cultural awareness, cultural intelligence, and cultural sensitivity are often-repeated mantras among cross-cultural influencers—as they should be. Cultural tuning increases the likelihood of effective persuasion. It’s merely axiomatic to say that it’s difficult to be influential, without a knowledge of the culture in which one is practicing influence.

The problem comes when cultural knowledge is considered *sufficient* or *primary* for successful intercultural influence, and this is a danger associated with the primacy-of-culture approach. If cultural knowledge is the fundamental ingredient in successful intercultural influence, then the people who conduct influence campaigns should excel in cultural expertise above all else. It follows that indigenous influence agents are to be preferred.

Imagine for a moment that you have found a true cultural expert for an Iraqi influence campaign you are conducting—a sympathetic, loyal, reliable Iraqi who works as an engineer in a local manufacturing plant. He can trace his ancestors back to Hammurabi, and personifies his culture accurately. Is he the ideal person to run your influence campaign? Probably not, because it’s unlikely he’s also a highly skilled influence agent—he might even be a persuasive bungler. His ability to persuade would depend on a set of skills that were entirely separate from his knowledge of the culture. Influence success requires much more than the mere mastery of culture.

### **Dissenting Primacy-of-Culture**

In some quarters, one can find dissent with the idea that culture changes fundamental human cognition, or that cultural sensitivity is in fact the primary ingredient of successful intercultural influence campaigns. Some researchers observe that culture is frequently assumed to be causal, even though other causes may provide better explanations of behavior.

For example, predictable conflicts flare up between certain departments within companies. A perennial quarrel between marketing and production occurs in many organizations, due to their conflicting goals. But professor Livia Markóczy, also an international management consultant, noticed that these conflicts were often misattributed to differences of national culture within international organizations, when one region was primarily responsible for marketing, and another for production. “In my work,” writes Markóczy, “I have found that the actual fault lines in beliefs fall along functional lines and not national ones....The temptation to attribute differences to different cultural mindsets is strong...but may pale in comparison to the differences between the production people and the marketing people in that same firm.”<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere she writes, “Our view is obscured by our expectation of substantial cultural differences...the line between being insensitive and sensitive to cultural differences may be as thin as the line between being sensitive and oversensitive to them.”<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly, Markóczy warns against the “cat and dog” problem: Imagine a Chinese observer looks at a cat, and a German observer looks at a dog. When these two people compare notes, should they assume they’ve seen the same animal and attribute the differences to culture? Or is it more accurate to attribute their differences to dissimilar fields of view?

For example, a recent USAF study asked several subject matter experts to generate a list of commonly employed lines of persuasion, and then to speculate on the influence potential of these themes in various nations where US PSYOP had seen action.<sup>17</sup> The theme of “battle weariness,” for example, was thought to be highly effective for Serbs (ranked #1) but ineffective for Rwandans (ranked last place at #14), which led the authors to comment on differences among cultures. But couldn’t the differences in perceived effectiveness be attributed to other causes—such as a costly, drawn-out conflict in Serbia, compared to a nascent conflict in Rwanda? If so, cost and duration of conflict might be better predictors of this theme’s utility, than nationality.

To the “cat and dog” problem, we should add the “dog and dog” problem: the Chinese observer sees a black dog, the German observer sees a brown dog—should they conclude they’ve discovered unique, culturally adapted species? Or are they viewing two relatively minor variations of the same type of animal?

One of my military contacts told me about a PSYOP officer who reported that before deploying, he had read, studied, and concentrated on finding whatever he could to improve his cross-cultural communication skills and cultural awareness. Then he deployed to Iraq. When he returned, he reflected on his experience: “What I read was good but largely not useable. What I really needed to prepare me to do the job I did was to watch the first two seasons of *The Sopranos*, because that tells you more about how things work over there than all the culture stuff.”<sup>18</sup> The soldier wished he had invested more time understanding small group dynamics, power, negotiation, and compliance tactics—potentially a more useable skill set.

The officer’s comment has depth to it. Does an increasing investment in cultural understanding actually pay out in terms of proportionately increasing influence success? Is the relationship linear, or asymptotic? Does the culture variable provide enough ‘bang for the buck’ that it justifies the costs of pursuing it to the detriment of other influence variables?

From soldiers to senators, the efficacy of redoubling US efforts at cultural sensitivity are being questioned. Recently, Dr. R. S. Zaharna, a communications professor from American University, was asked to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. When she explained that the ire of Islamic nations was aroused by American “lack of cultural sensitivity,” Senator Biden pounced. Calling her testimony “meaningless,” Biden said: “This notion of cultural sensitivity, which is real, obviously doesn't get us much... If countries in Europe are less sensitive to Muslim interests in their countries, and yet are viewed better than we are, obviously cultural sensitivity is not a defining element of how we are viewed.” Later he added that cultural sensitivity “is always good, but it’s marginal.”<sup>19</sup>

Al Qaeda is universally acknowledged for its ability to effectively manipulate the information environment, and many commentators believe they are winning the information war around the world, attracting sympathizers even in the United States.<sup>20</sup> Are they doing this through sophisticated cultural understanding of, and adaptation to, their Western targets? Unlikely—they reject Western culture and Western thought. To our knowledge, they are not utilizing cultural subject matter experts or employing significant Western cultural adaptation in their messaging. Their successes in the influence wars isn’t attributable to sophisticated cultural targeting; they are communicating and influencing through simple and crude universals—often speaking in their native tongues and relying on someone else to translate!

In a parallel phenomenon of cross-cultural effectiveness, witness the remarkable popularity of American political consultants and campaign methodology throughout the world. Consultant James Carville managed campaigns for Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis, Brazilian President Fernando Enrique Cardoso, Honduran Prime Minister Carlos Flores; President Jamil Mahuad of Ecuador; British Prime Minister Tony Blair; and Prime Minister Ehud Barak of Israel. Consultants Dick Morris and Rob Allyn led Vicente Fox to victory in Mexico. Boris Yeltsin hired three of California Governor Pete Wilson's campaign advisors—George Gorton, Joseph Shumate and Richard Dresne—who later helped elect Arnold Schwarzenegger to Wilson's previous office. Consultant Mark Mellman has been active in campaigns in Uruguay and Russia, help elect Cesar Gaviria to the Columbian presidency. Consultant Frank Luntz recently advised Prime Minister Romano Prodi on his successful campaign in Italy. Phillipine candidates have been hiring American consultants since Marcos' 1969 campaign.<sup>21</sup> From 1998-2000, U.S. political managers and consultants were estimated to make up 58% of the total hired in Latin America, 40% in Eastern Europe, 30% in Western Europe, and 23% in Russia.<sup>22</sup> These consultants were hired based on their effectiveness as influence agents, not their understanding of foreign cultures. Certainly these American consultants employed cultural tuning in their campaigns to some degree, but we can assume they used the influence tactics abroad that worked at home. And indigenous minds were apparently persuaded in large numbers by these consultants' "foreign" tactics.<sup>23</sup>

**We** should also ask whether indigenous influence tactics, when they can be identified, are necessarily beneficial to winning a global influence war. Tactics which may be locally appropriate can be reviled on the world stage. Three examples come to mind. First, the placement of stories in the Iraqi media by the Lincoln Group, the topic of considerable discussion in December of 2005. While "pay-for-play" media is considered unethical in the United States (despite notable lapses<sup>24</sup>), it was culturally adaptive to Iraqi media standards, where placed news stories were commonplace. Second, both presidents Bush have held hands with male Arabic friends. While this is culturally appropriate in Arabic countries as a display of friendship, the practice is seen as weird and smacking of homosexuality in the States—Michael Moore used hand-holding footage in *Fahrenheit 9/11* to denigrate the president to movie audiences. Third, taunting one's enemy in Arabic cultures is a long-standing cultural practice. However, after an Australian film crew captured footage of US soldiers in 2005 who were using loudspeakers to taunt the Taliban with phrases such as "Taliban, you are cowardly dogs!" "You are the lady boys we always believed you to be!" and "Come out and fight like men!" the issue inflamed world opinion against the US.<sup>25</sup> In response, the military banned the use of taunting messages, which had proven both culturally indigenous and effective in provoking the enemy to engage. Pallid, pre-approved, and politically correct pre-recorded messages were substituted (to unknown effect, but the effects of pre-recorded messages are generally less than live messages).<sup>26</sup> Certainly there are significant examples where accurate cultural tuning backfires at home and on the world stage, when local influence tactics are seen as inappropriate. Overhearing audiences apparently do not give influence agents the benefit of the doubt when using culturally tuned tactics, but instead hold influencers to their own cultural standards. It may be that the safest influence tactics are those that share common currency across cultures.

Some observers point to the paucity of cultural message tuning evident in cross-cultural communications from Russia, China, and Islamic countries, and wonder whether the intense focus on culture is unique to Western democracies with ethnically diverse populations, following the US fixation on cultural diversity, racial quotas, ethnic sensitivity, minority set-asides, affirmative action, and other culture-based issues that are notably absent in many (or perhaps most) world cultures, including Islamic ones. Within the American chattering classes, "cultural diversity" is a

revered panacea. It may be that the ingrained values of the Western academic echo chamber are responsible for the call to redouble efforts on cultural sensitivity in the information wars. Ironically, the American veneration of culture may be a significant point of cultural non-adaptation—another American oddity that puzzles the rest of the world.

So the question of how much weight to accord the variable of culture in the influence equation deserves consideration. Social psychologist Thomas Pettigrew has documented the human propensity to attribute strange and negative in-group behavior to situational causes. People tend to believe that the external environment dictates an in-group member's bad behavior. On the other hand, humans tend to attribute an outgroup member's strange and negative behavior to internal (dispositional, racial, or genetic) reasons.<sup>27</sup> Over-attributing causality to nationality or culture may be a parallel human bias. Yet different cultural software doesn't imply different cognitive hardware. In every culture we encounter *humans* who encounter reality in similar ways, whose brains process information in human ways, and who are vulnerable to common biases and errors of thought the world over. And I believe that psychology can offer even more useful information than the first two seasons of *The Sopranos*!

The dissatisfying generality that emerges from studies of culture and cognition is that both commonalities *and* differences are found, supporting the idea of culture as a significant moderator<sup>28</sup> rather than a variable that fundamentally changes the processes of human cognition. R.C. Mishra, a cultural psychologist who studies cognition, writes: “A widely shared view in cross-cultural psychology today is that cognitive processes are universal, shared by all populations, . . . [but] we find evidence in many societies about the existence of cognitive goals that sharply differ from those valued in western societies.”<sup>29</sup> This helps explain many interesting culture-difference findings, such as the study that found Liberian rice farmers could estimate different amounts of rice with 1-2% error, whereas working-class American adults were sometimes wildly inaccurate, overestimating the amount of rice in one case by 100%. Occam's razor applies here—we don't need to attribute this disparity to cultural differences in cognitive processing, when differences in experience and goals would suffice.<sup>30</sup>

The common-yet-different compromise to culture and cognition is echoed by many cultural researchers. Peter Smith writes, “General functions are more likely to yield cultural universals, while specific functions are more likely to prove culturally distinctive. A similar distinction can help to make sense of diverse research findings in many areas of cross-cultural psychology.”<sup>31</sup> Professor Nyiti writes: “While children in different cultures may have to deal with different realities, they all apply the same operations or processes of thought.”<sup>32</sup> And values researcher Milton Rokeach notes: “All men possess the same values to different degrees.”<sup>33</sup> Among cultural psychologists, the idea of universal human cognitive processes are alive and well—they're just not particularly fashionable. So a model espousing that “everything changes” from culture to culture is considered by many to be too simplistic to be useful; to overemphasize selected elements of the whole; and the model's implications—that we must jettison any non-indigenous psychology—to be rash.

### **Slouching Toward Complexity**

Consider the more complex and, I believe, more realistic model put forward by Profs. Kluckhohn & Murray: “Every man is in certain respects (a) like all other men, (b) like some other men, and (c)

like no other man.”<sup>34</sup> This statement implies three important perspectives that the influence agent must master:

“...*Like all other men...*” refers to universals of human behavior. The famous psychotherapist Harry Stack Sullivan insisted that humans are much more similar than they are different. Humans share a genetic code—a common human hardware—which makes the entire species vulnerable to certain influence approaches. For example, a long-term study of successful surrender themes by the Johns Hopkins University discovered that physical hardship, group cohesiveness, and commitment to ideology are trans-cultural predictors of surrender.<sup>35</sup> A recent review of U.S. PSYOP products notes that “The vast majority of them are exceedingly straightforward and demonstrate little guile or cultural specificity.”<sup>36</sup> It would be difficult to imagine that many of the stock-and-trade strategies of influence research, such as reward and punishment, or fear appeal, or value alignment, or decontextualization, or narrative, or messages based on dual-process theory, would be rendered inert due to unique cognitive styles found in particular cultures.<sup>37</sup> The cognitive hardware that we share is universal, but the ability to harness it is not intuitive. It does not follow that each of us has an innate, intuitive command of persuasion, simply because we are human (although this is commonly assumed). By way of analogy: I use a computer every day, so I feel I know how to use my PowerBook pretty well. Yet all I really do is manipulate different software programs. I have no knowledge of how to reprogram or rewire the computer so it will function differently than it does now. I rely on expert programmers to manipulate the hardware so the computer is useable. Likewise, it’s been demonstrated with certainty that we humans have limited insight into our own “hardware,” despite the fact we *feel* we do.<sup>38</sup> Humans show a tremendous capacity for rationalization, if not rationality. Thus, the need for expertise in basic human hardware: the agent who attempts to understand, predict, and control typically human thoughts and behaviors.

“...*Like some other men...*” refers to the social instinct in humans. We are like others in the many groups to which we belong: our kin, our region, our nation, our religion, our ethnicity, our culture, our gender, our career, our age, our ideology. These similarities are studied by the demographer, the sociologist, the culturalist, and by some anthropologists, who make generalizations at the group level. They offer the influence agent important and useful insights. Each group association provides incremental information that helps predict and control human behavior with additional precision. Although nationality is a grouping method frequently emphasized as vital to the exercise of political and military influence, it is but one of many. For half a century, the leading practitioners of commercial market segmentation have been advocating segmentation strategies that go beyond simple demographic variables such as ethnicity, geographic location, and nationality, because by themselves they “are poor predictors of behavior and consequently are less than ideal bases for segmentation strategies.”<sup>39</sup> Yet persistent cognitive biases cause differences in ethnicity, nationality, and culture to loom large during conflict: “They are so different from us,” thinks the typical human embroiled in dispute.<sup>40</sup> This line of thinking is counterproductive to effective persuasion when it causes influence agents to overlook human similarities, because locating commonalities is an important building block of successful persuasion.<sup>41</sup>

“...*Like no other man...*” refers to each human’s unique traits and personality. The clinical psychologist and the personologist excel in understanding humans as unique individuals, and their information is valuable when trying to predict and control the behavior of specific people, such as the opposition’s leadership. Person variables often overwhelm universal and group variables. Professor Gass, author of several popular influence texts, writes: “I don’t think culture is as important as it is sometimes made out to be. It is a factor, as are gender, socioeconomic status,

demographic differences, etc., but culture is not *the* factor. Individual differences almost always swamp gender and cultural differences in persuasion.”<sup>42</sup>

These three perspectives—universal, group, and individual—do a good job of triangulating on the human mind. The influence practitioner would add a fourth: the external environment, which is known to have profound effects on behavior. The famous psychology author David Meyers writes: “Social science’s most important lesson concerns how much we are affected by our environments...when explaining someone’s behavior, we often underestimate the impact of the situation...”<sup>43</sup> While more accurate, this four-part model presents a considerably more complex formula than primacy-of-culture does, which emphasizes cultural understanding as the key to influence success. But complex human behaviors gone awry require sufficiently complex solutions.

### **Influence Universals Masquerading As Cultural Specifics**

Regarding the ability of influence principles to generalize across cultures, it’s important to remember that intercultural psychology places a premium on finding differences, not similarities, between cultures. And humans—including researchers—tend to find what they expect to find.<sup>44</sup> Publishing a study that says, “It appears this effect is pretty much the same in every culture we studied” doesn’t generate the interest or garner the publicity of a study that says, “Look at these interesting differences between cultures!” You can sometimes see this “difference bias” when the title of a paper trumpets differences among cultures, but a careful read of the paper demonstrates that the cultures studied are remarkably uniform. So it’s a safe bet that found differences will be more prominently featured in cultural psychology than found similarities, because of the way that academia rewards the pursuit of statistically significant research.<sup>45</sup> This is not good news for persuasive agents, since commonalities are the coin of the influence realm. Here are a few cautionary examples of the “dog and dog” variety:

- A study of value systems among American vs. Japanese citizens concluded: “These data provide further support for the view that people in the West emphasize individualistic values, while those in the East prefer communal values.”<sup>46</sup> Yet the correlation of rank-ordering of values by Americans and Japanese was reported at  $r=.80$ ,  $p<.0001$ ; that’s a whopping correlation supporting similarity, in a field where correlations of  $r=.40$  are considered “large.” Yet the *differences* were reported!
- A cultural researcher writes, “Studies of conformity in Japan have found...stronger influence among groups who already knew one another than among groups who were previously unacquainted with each other.”<sup>47</sup> This finding is common knowledge to the Western influence researcher, since known others with an established track record are more trustworthy and persuasive in Europe and North America, too.<sup>48</sup>
- Some cultural researchers believe that the problem of intercultural replicability supports primacy-of-culture approaches, based on an Israeli<sup>49</sup> and a Brazilian<sup>50</sup> program of research that attempted to replicate an across-the-board (i.e., not focusing on influence) sampling of single-study US social psychological findings. The Israeli research replicated 24 of 64 findings (with main effects replicating more frequently than interactions, hinting at statistical power problems).<sup>51</sup> The Brazilian research reported about half of US findings were successfully replicated. At face value, the percentages sound underwhelming, but these numbers likely tell us more about research methodology, than they do about the psychology

of humans across cultures.<sup>52</sup> We cannot establish 100% replicability (or anything close to it) as the comparison point for within-culture replications—to which many frustrated researchers can attest. My informal survey of US social psychologists estimating successful replication percentages *within culture* yielded a range from “typical” at 48% to those considering ideal replication conditions, who gave numbers as high as 80%. In this light, the Brazilian program’s findings appear to be within the expected range, and could be considered as support for universalism rather than primacy-of-culture. The important point is that there are a number of methodological reasons why we can’t assume that failures of single studies to replicate, are evidence that people of diverse cultures have different psychologies. Only a sustained research program with multiple successes or failures for each effect, using high-power studies, would be informative.

- A cross-cultural review of upward-directed social influence in the corporate world references a study that discovers indigenous Chinese influence tactics “not tapped by prior U.S. measures.”<sup>53, 54</sup> Three of the more interesting “indigenous” tactics discussed in the review included: praising the target behind his back, showing consideration for the target’s face needs, and working overtime. Yet these are hardly unknown tactics to Western influence researchers, who study them under the headings of ingratiation, face, and exchange or reciprocity. And not only are Western influence researchers in the loop; legions of Western employees engage in these same “Chinese” behaviors to influence the boss.

The problem of viewing universals as cultural specifics doesn’t just exist in academia. Here are a few examples from public diplomacy and the military:

- In citing key problems with US public diplomacy during the Iraq war, an analyst asserts that:<sup>55</sup> (1) US-style mass-media information dissemination programs aren’t effective in the Arab world, which prefers relationship-centered, face-to-face communications. However, it is well known that the same effect holds in the US: face-to-face messages trump mass-media appeals when they’re compared.<sup>56</sup> (2) US-style one-way messages are less effective in Arab cultures than are two-way, relationship-building approaches. However, the same effect holds in the US; dialog-style influence is superior to monologue for persuasion.<sup>57</sup> (3) The US prefers facts and statistics, whereas Arabs prefer metaphors and analogies. However, the *base-rate fallacy* was discovered by studying Western subjects, and it states a similar principle: that dramatic stories and examples usually trump fact and statistic.<sup>58</sup> In fact, a recent meta-analysis found the overall correlation between evidence and persuasion *in the US* to be a miserly  $r=.18$ —hardly evidence of a preference for fact and statistic.<sup>59</sup> (4) Direct, confrontational speech in public settings is considered face threatening in Arab cultures, but “cheered” in US cultures. However, US studies indicate that direct, confrontational, face-threatening communications engender reactance, reduce influence dramatically, and cause it to “boomerang.”<sup>60</sup> As an influence consultant, I would not have recommended any of these four “US preferences” for a US audience, because the research literature does not support any of them. Likewise, culture differences really don’t belong in this conversation of preferred influence styles. Occam’s razor shaves again.
- Regarding the “Shock and Awe” theme in the Iraq war, retired General Anthony Zinni said, “The biggest mistake the United States made in the war was speaking of ‘shock and awe.’ That was a way to say: ‘Your fate is inevitable. We’re going to crush you. The might of America will defeat you. Just surrender and throw down your arms.’ You don’t speak to

Arab pride and Arab manhood in this way. That whole psychological business gave them another cause to fight for, more than they would have fought just for Saddam.”<sup>61</sup> While General Zinni correctly identified the reactance phenomenon (one of the major and universal engines of influence), his remarks made it sound as if it were uniquely Arab to resist the message: “Just surrender and throw down your arms.” In fact, we would expect *most* cultures to react against a message that said, “Your fate is inevitable. We’re going to crush you.” For example, in 1956, Khrushchev told U.S. ambassadors: “Whether you like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you!” In so doing, many commentators believe that Khrushchev unwittingly stoked the cold war, hastening the USSR’s eventual demise. Zinni was correct that a heavy-handed threat of force would not appeal to Arab pride and manhood—but to whose pride and manhood (or basic personhood) *would* such a message appeal? Are we humans so different from each other?

- **At** a recent NATO conference,<sup>62</sup> a speaker from PSYOP strategic studies discussed a “watershed cultural blunder” that occurred in Afghanistan in October of 2005. According to the speaker, two Taliban were killed after they had ambushed a US patrol, and leaders from the nearest Afghani village did not wish to take possession of the bodies. After a few days, US lieutenant in charge of the bodies decided to incinerate them—health considerations were later given for this decision. The incident infuriated Muslims, for whom the burning of bodies is taboo. The speaker commented that the lieutenant in charge likely had insufficient cultural training, and recommended more cultural training that emphasized “respect, respect, respect.” As an audience member, I wondered why this incident was considered a cultural, rather than a human, blunder. Is it uncommon for the enemy’s burning of bodies to be psychologically inflammatory? When have US soldiers or citizens ever been cheered by the news that our countrymen have been immolated by the enemy? If a taboo is shared rather universally by mankind, why would we expect cultural training to highlight it?
- During a discussion of culture’s impact in one of my classes, a soldier who had completed a tour of duty in Iraq spoke up. “People in Iraq are really different than we are,” he said. “When I was in Mosul, I worked with an Iraqi counterpart. We seemed to get along pretty well, despite the differences of culture. Then one day, out of the blue, this guy gives me a bag of vegetables! He just puts them on my desk! Now what was I supposed to do with a big bag of vegetables?” Another student in the class said, “You were probably supposed to reciprocate.” “Interesting you should say that,” said the soldier. “When I got that bag of vegetables, I had a talk with our cultural expert about what it meant, and that’s what she said I should do—give this guy some food in return. So the next day I gave him a box about the same size as the bag he gave me, filled with food. Seemed to work out pretty well.” I pointed out that the soldier’s story actually highlighted the universal norm of reciprocity,<sup>63</sup> more than the uniqueness of Iraqi culture. In what culture, I asked, would it be *inappropriate* to reciprocate to a peer with a gift similar to the one you received? “That’s not my point,” he said. “It’s that he gave me *vegetables*. Now that’s something that would seldom ever happen in the States.” Whether or not you agree with the soldier’s statement (personally, I’ve received vegetables as gifts!), here is an unambiguous example where a working knowledge of universal human psychology would have resolved a seemingly mysterious “foreign” behavior. The Iraqi was trying to start a relationship by giving a gift, and with his gift he was speaking in a universal language that the soldier did not understand—another example of the “dog & dog” problem, where a surface difference obscured a deep similarity.

Of psychological universals, culture researchers Smith and Bond write: "...In order to establish these universals, theorists have needed to formulate their concepts at a relatively high level of abstraction...whether it is the generality or the specificity that can offer greater value to psychology remains open to debate."<sup>64</sup> In my experience, examples *abound* that indicate the practicality and usefulness of generalities that Smith and Bond call "high levels of abstraction" (although I would argue they are actually mid-levels of abstraction). If an influence practitioner were asking my advice, I would recommend understanding the universals of human psychology first, and *then* supplementing them with cultural knowledge—especially when fast action pays dividends. Expensive adjustable sights on a pistol are of little use if the shooter is wobbly. A steady hand and fixed sights are more accurate. A steady hand and adjustable sights are the most accurate. Get in range with universals, and *then* adjust with cultural specifics to increase influence success.

To this point, Dr. Greg Seese, a psychologist who writes doctrine for PSYOP, notes: "Not understanding culture is a barrier, but a bigger barrier is not understanding basic human psychology."<sup>65</sup> We *know* we don't know the other's culture—that's obvious, so we focus on it; but we *don't know* that we *don't know* the reasons for our *own* behavior. That's one reason why culture tends to be overemphasized, and universals tend to be underemphasized, particularly during conflict. We assume the universals of behavior are simple and obvious (when in reality they are neither), and therefore not worthy of investigation. We focus instead on how different the other is.

### **Examining the Influence Replications**

And now for a second way to answer the question: "What evidence do you have that these influence tactics will work anywhere else in the world?"<sup>66</sup> For quantitative answers, we turn to intercultural replications of influence studies, where the same or similar studies have been conducted in multiple cultures. We are of course interested in influence research here, not group dynamics, leadership, or other neighboring areas of social science.<sup>67</sup> Fortunately, Smith and Bond have reviewed a number of influence research lines cross-culturally, and the conclusions I present regarding the experimental replicability of influence paradigms across diverse cultures rely in many places on their excellent work of collecting and reporting these studies.<sup>68</sup>

Cultural replications are valuable but rare, and sometimes my students seem irritated at this fact—as if it's somebody's fault that more intercultural replications are not available! But here are some of the difficulties:

- First, nobody in one country can direct someone else in another country to replicate a study. Indigenous researchers do replications if they find the research line to be compelling, for reasons of their own.
- Second, there's not much academic cachet in repeating someone else's research, especially if your findings duplicate theirs. In general, academic reputations are not made by successfully replicating others' research, although reputations *can* be made by challenging existing research (the rewards are for finding differences, again). This also explains why many replications will tweak a variable or two, so the researchers don't have a mere replication, but something new to add to the literature. These "tweaks" wreak havoc with the ability to compare apples to apples, interculturally.

- Third, the priority of indigenous research is often aimed at pressing local problems—only wealthy countries with time, subjects, and researchers to spare can indulge themselves in large, philosophical questions such as “What are the universals and particulars of influence?”
- Fourth, if a replication is conducted, it can’t be considered definitive, because no single study is—multiple studies are needed to get an accurate fix on social phenomena, especially since social science research chronically suffers from a lack of statistical power to detect effects.
- Fifth, it’s hard to tell if the concepts have translated accurately to another culture—intercultural research is prone to the “dog and cat” problem discussed earlier, where two researchers who believe they are studying the same thing, are actually studying different things.
- Sixth, because of these reasons, when an intercultural replication does occur, it may be conducted decades after the original study was done. The mills of intercultural social psychology grind slowly, but—well, mostly just slowly.

These are the reasons that intercultural replications are relatively rare and valuable. Caveats aside, let’s take a look at three bellwether influence studies, and one study of cultural values that’s often referred to by intercultural influence practitioners. Their ability to replicate in diverse cultures should give us a sense of our bearings:

- In the 1950s, Solomon Asch conducted a series of research studies designed to establish a baseline of conformity within the US.<sup>69</sup> Conformity was one of the “hot topics” that was a legacy issue from WWII. A popular conception at the time was that Germans and Italians were racially predisposed to be obedient and conformist—how else could one explain fascism, after all? And so primacy-of-culture explanations loomed large, as they so often do when cultures are in conflict. Asch had set out to establish a baseline of conformity (or its absence) in the US, and was surprised at the high levels of conformity he actually achieved. Asch placed a real subject among six confederates who gave obviously incorrect answers on a simple matching task. The result—about 37% of responses were affected, conforming to the obviously wrong group answer. Approximately three-quarters of subjects gave at least one wrong, conforming answer during the experiment. This research spawned a great deal of interest and many replications. For 98 known replications in North America, the average effect size was calculated at .95—a large effect size.<sup>70</sup> For 19 studies conducted in Europe, an average effect size of .80 was calculated—also a large effect size, but a little smaller than the North American sample, and the smallest regional effect size overall. (Ironically, this group included “those conformist Europeans” that motivated this line of research!) Other regions may be viewed in the table below. In summary, the size of the conformity effect goes from “large” in Western cultures, to “larger” elsewhere. Because of its ease of replication and the interest it generated, the Asch paradigm is probably the most thoroughly replicated influence study in existence.

<b>Nation</b>	<b># Studies</b>	<b>Effect Size</b>
Europe	19	.80 (large)

North America	98	.95 (large)
Arab	2	1.3 (very large)
South America	3	1.6 (very large)
Asia	8	1.7 (very large)
Africa	3	1.8 (very large)

- Muzafer Sharif, his wife Carolyn, and several other researchers conducted the classic “Robber’s Cave” study in Oklahoma, where they took two groups of a dozen boys each to the Robber’s Cave State Park.<sup>71</sup> Phase One of the study allowed campers some time to develop in-group friendships. In Phase Two, the two groups were introduced to each other in competitive situations—rivaling for sporting victories, prizes, etc. Hostility between the two groups developed rapidly, and became so intense that Phase Two had to be ended early. Phase Three attempted to create cooperation between the warring groups, utilizing the tactic of superordinate goals. For example, the chuck wagon “broke down” in the mud, and it required the muscle power of both groups to help free it, so the boys could eat; a movie theater could be rented for the boys only if they all contributed money, etc. These superordinate goals successfully ignited cross-group friendships, and at the end of the experiment, the boys insisted they all ride home in a single bus. This complex and expensive experiment was replicated in the UK, in Lebanon (with Christian and Muslim children), and in Russia. Unfortunately, the UK experiment utilized pre-existing groups of boys, introducing an experimental confound. However, all four nations found that in-group favoritism intensified in Phase Two, after competitive interaction. Competition increased hostility toward out-groupers in three of the four nations (not the UK, perhaps because the pre-existing groups had already arrived at stable judgments regarding the other group). Superordinate goals decreased hostility in the US, UK, and Russia, but the Lebanese experiment had to be aborted before Phase Three could be invoked, because it was discovered that one group of boys had stolen knives to “settle scores” with the other group during Phase Two. These results are indicative of the challenges encountered in complex cross-cultural research, but the main effects in these studies replicated where the original methodology was followed, and where data were available.

Contains:	<b>US</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>Lebanon</b>	<b>Russia</b>
Newly Formed Groups Used	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
In-group Favoritism Found	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Competition Increases Hostility	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Superordinates Increase Cooperation	Yes	Yes	Experiment Ended Early	Yes

- Stanley Milgram studied obedience to authority with a clever series of experiments that asked the question, “On the directive of an authority figure, how much obedience may be

obtained from normal people who are asked to do something that increasingly conflicts with their conscience?”<sup>72</sup> Subjects in this study were assigned to be “teachers,” whose job it was to punish a “learner” for mistakes on a memory task by giving the “learner” an electric shock. Shocks were to be administered in increasing voltages for successive errors, and the “shock-box” had switches ranging from 15 to 450 volts—the larger voltages more similar to electrocution than corrective shock! The “learner,” who was not actually connected to the shock generator, was in fact an actor who had memorized a script, at various voltages telling the “teacher” that he was having heart trouble, later screaming in pain, later demanding release, and later losing consciousness as the shocks got progressively more intense. The smock-jacketed experimenter was also in the room, but his script was limited to a few innocuous sounding phrases, all encouraging the “teacher” to continue with the experiment. The “teacher” subjects were not constrained, and could end the experiment at any time by simply refusing to proceed, or walking out. Psychologists were asked to estimate the number of people shocking the hapless “learner” to the end of the scale; they estimated around 0.1%. Laypeople were also asked to guess, and their responses averaged 1-2%. In striking contrast to uninformed estimations (with professionals an order of magnitude more inaccurate than novices), Milgram obtained 65% compliance in the main condition of his study. These results were so unpleasant, and so against the views that most people held of themselves, that Milgram’s research was attacked repeatedly by scientists and by journalists. He therefore engaged in dozens of replications of his research, as did others, to answer the objections that were voiced: “Certainly women would not behave like this” (they did);<sup>73</sup> “Certainly people would not behave like this in more modern times” (they do);<sup>74</sup> “Certainly my nationality would not behave like this” (see the graph of Milgram-like replications); and of course, the perennial and unanswerable objection, “This research is unethical.”

<b>Country</b>	<b>Percent Obedient</b>
USA (1963, males)	65%
USA (1963, females)	65%
Italy (1968)	85%
Germany (1971)	85%
USA (1974)	85%
UK (1977)	50%
Jordan (1978)	62%
Spain (1981)	>90%
Austria (1985)	80%

The above list represents the Milgram-like replications that were fairly true to the original.<sup>75</sup> Viewing these results is somewhat like a projective test: Do you see a remarkable consistency of human behavior across time and nationality, as would a universalist? Do you see dramatic differences when comparing selected responses to others, as would a culturalist?<sup>76</sup> Or do you see the “same-yet-different” compromise referred to earlier? Either way, we can agree that these results are fundamentally different from what psychologists and lay-people predicted regarding the average person’s behavior, before knowing the results of Milgram’s studies.

- Geert Hofstede published a seminal work on values and culture in 1980. His factor analyses of values revealed four fundamental value dimensions that existed among the 53 cultures he had studied.<sup>77</sup> At the time his data was collected, he was unable to obtain data from the USSR or from China, so his analysis was open to criticism for not being representational. A group of researchers called the Chinese Culture Connection<sup>78</sup> thought Hofstede’s work, particularly the questionnaire he used, was biased toward Western cultures. So the CCC had Chinese subjects list Chinese values of importance, and the study was replicated with a Chinese-generated questionnaire in 23 cultures. Despite the differences of cultural origins, time, gender ratio, subject pool, and experimenter desire to see cultural differences emerge, the analyses once again yielded four factors, three of which duplicated Hofstede’s. The fourth was dubbed “Confucian Work Dynamism” by the CCC, and Hofstede, eventually incorporating it as a fifth dimension, called it “Long Term Perspective.”

In addition to replication research, there are also a host of studies that examine cultural influence differences within single studies. While single studies can seldom be considered definitive, they provide important data that moves the field forward. One’s impressions of the applicability of influence tactics across cultures is therefore determined by which studies one has read, and one’s own biases, so a broad and clear statement of “same” or “different” puts a person on a precarious limb. New research could at any moment sever the limb—and the reputation of the commentator. That aside, my current, subjective call is that the research I have read in the field of intercultural influence does not deviate notably from the variance found within the studies reviewed above. For my own purposes, I have found the “same-yet-different” compromise more useful than either primacy-of-culture or strict universalist approaches.

For reasons mentioned earlier, intercultural research celebrates differences rather than similarities, and the “rock stars” of intercultural research are *reversals*—where the psychological effects of one culture lie in the opposite direction of another. Reversals are rare within intercultural influence research at this time. Currently, we are not seeing research regarding indigenous influence tactics that are unique to certain cultures, and which are unknown or counterproductive in others. This is not to say they don’t exist. There are documented reversals in neighboring fields of social science,<sup>79</sup> so we can’t expect reversals not to occur within the influence canon. When they are discovered, influence agents will of course need to incorporate them into intercultural influence paradigms.<sup>80</sup>

There is clarity about one point. The data do not support the contention that, when in another culture, *everything changes*. Humans are, after all, humans—the world over. As Harry Stack Sullivan said, “We’re all more human than otherwise.” It appears that Western influence research can often get us “within range” in other cultures, and perhaps score the occasional dead-on hit.<sup>81</sup> Certainly we have witnessed other cultures scoring influence hits in our culture, without the benefit of sophisticated message adaptation. Misses should not automatically be attributed to a

misunderstanding of culture—witness the agonizingly high number of ineffective ad campaigns within cultures, produced by and for people belonging to the same culture.<sup>82</sup> The current evidence doesn't support the idea that culture alters fundamental cognitive processes. Neither does it support discarding existing influence research and starting from the ground-up in each culture.

### **A Comparison of Predictions**

When teaching students about the “same-yet-different” nature of intercultural influence, I have often referred to a study of some notoriety by Morris, Podolny, & Ariel.<sup>83</sup> This study examines the nature of reciprocal obligations in four nations: China, Germany, Spain, and the US, and it asks the question: “Do the laws of obligation and reciprocity work differently in different cultures?” The authors used a primacy-of-culture approach to predict who would most likely be helped by an employee in a multinational retail bank. Using national characteristics to predict with whom a person would most likely engage in reciprocal behavior, the six choices were: a powerful person, a person linked to a powerful person, a friend, someone linked to a friend, a coworker, and a superordinate (the “boss”). The authors considered the following national characteristics when making their predictions:

- Chinese: Obligation is characterized by “sacrifice for the group,” showing “a kind of collectivist solidarity.” Exchange hinges on the answer to the question, “Do you have power over me or ties to those who do?”
- German: Obligation was thought to be moderated by “a legal bureaucratic orientation,” with exchanges depending on the answer to the question, “Am I officially supposed to assist you?”
- Spanish: Obligation is governed by “strong norms of warm sociability,” noting that Spanish friendships “are high in affective intensity and longevity.” Exchanges depend on the answer to the question: “Are you my friend or a friend of my friend?”
- North American: Obligation is governed by “whether it profits their individual achievement goals,” adding, “...the paragon of the successful American has been the person who leaves the group or disrupts the social order.” The question of exchange hinges on the answer to: “What have you done for me lately?”

Based on a primacy-of-culture approach, the researchers predicted responses for each nationality (standing in for culture), and obtained data. How well did the primacy-of-culture predictions fit the data? The researchers accurately predicted 16 of 24 cells within the experiment, a hit rate of 67%:

Morris, Podolny & Ariel (2001): Comparisons of Predictions & Results  
(Predictions based on "primacy-of-culture")

	<u>US</u>	<u>HK</u>	<u>Germany</u>	<u>Spain</u>
Powerful		Predicted		
Linked to Powerful		Predicted		
Friend	Predicted			Predicted
Linked to Friends				Predicted
Coworker				
Superordinate	Predicted	Predicted	Predicted	

	<u>US</u>	<u>HK</u>	<u>Germany</u>	<u>Spain</u>
Powerful	Actual	Actual	Actual	
Linked to Powerful	Actual	Actual		
Friend	Actual		Actual	Actual
Linked to Friends	Actual			
Coworker			Actual	
Superordinate	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual

	<u>US</u>	<u>HK</u>	<u>Germany</u>	<u>Spain</u>
Powerful	Miss	Hit	Miss	Hit
Linked to Powerful	Miss	Hit	Hit	Hit
Friend	Hit	Hit	Miss	Hit
Linked to Friends	Miss	Hit	Hit	Miss
Coworker	Hit	Hit	Miss	Hit
Superordinate	Hit	Hit	Hit	Miss

16/24= 67% Accuracy

After having taught this study several times, I began to wonder, what would the hit rate of a universalist's predictions be? Several colleagues agreed that a universalist would not make complex cultural distinctions, but would rather make across-the-board, simple predictions for three targets of obligation: Powerful people, friends, and superordinates. So performing a conceptual replication was a simple task of changing the matrix of predictions:

Morris, Podolny & Ariel (2001): Comparisons of Predictions & Results  
(Predictions based on theories of "universality")

	<u>US</u>	<u>HK</u>	<u>Germany</u>	<u>Spain</u>
Powerful	Predicted	Predicted	Predicted	Predicted
Linked to Powerful				
Friend	Predicted	Predicted	Predicted	Predicted
Linked to Friends				
Coworker				
Superordinate	Predicted	Predicted	Predicted	Predicted

	<u>US</u>	<u>HK</u>	<u>Germany</u>	<u>Spain</u>
Powerful	Actual	Actual	Actual	
Linked to Powerful	Actual	Actual		
Friend	Actual		Actual	Actual
Linked to Friends	Actual			
Coworker			Actual	
Superordinate	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual

	<u>US</u>	<u>HK</u>	<u>Germany</u>	<u>Spain</u>
Powerful	Hit	Hit	Hit	Miss
Linked to Powerful	Miss	Miss	Hit	Hit
Friend	Hit	Miss	Hit	Hit
Linked to Friends	Miss	Hit	Hit	Hit
Coworker	Hit	Hit	Miss	Hit
Superordinate	Hit	Hit	Hit	Hit

18/24= 75% Accuracy

The universalist approach accurately filled 18 of 24 cells, yielding a hit rate of 75%—a few points better than the primacy-of-culture approach. This is only one example, and post-hoc at that, but it illustrates the importance of questioning the utility of cultural generalizations, and the amount of additional predictability actually gained via primacy-of-culture approaches.

## Conclusions

Intercultural psychology, even the attenuated portion devoted to influence psychology, represents a massive amount of theory and data. Clearly this behemoth can't be tamed and caged by one person's perspective. The investigation is also young, so we should expect conceptions of intercultural influence develop in the coming years, refining and changing the generalities of our time. For now, each person must come to his or her own conclusions regarding the amount of weight to accord the variable of culture in the complex equation of human influence. These are the conclusions I've drawn for myself:

- Culture looms large as a causal explanation of human behavior, particularly when cultures are in conflict. Other important influence variables are prone to be overlooked when culture dominates the influencer's view. As 'difference' is emphasized, the potential of ignoring commonality increases.

- Culture is probably best thought of as an important moderator of psychological effects, rather than a variable that fundamentally changes human psychology. We should not expect the established canon of influence psychology to be rendered impotent in the face of a particular culture. Reversals of social influence effects are rare, with some increasing in effectiveness in non-Western cultures. For increased accuracy and predictability within cultures, indigenous research is beneficial and should be pursued.
- As humans, we are both similar to and different from each other. But the social sciences have clearly demonstrated the limitations of human intuition when attempting to access our common cognitive and emotive processes. So asking one's self, "How would I respond?" to access these psychological universals falls far short. Programmatic research coupled with practical experience indicates the way forward.
- When approaching a culture, of which one has little knowledge or mutual history, it is of course important to locate or develop cultural expertise. When resources allow, culture should be considered in conjunction with other group-level variables, with human universals, with environmental inducements and constraints (and with individual particulars when possible). Universal influence tactics enjoy the advantages of broad application, quantifiable track records, and speedy deployment. The latter is important when the adversary is rapidly capitalizing on events to capture mindshare.
- In persuasion, culture becomes increasingly important as the message approaches the target. In other words, the tools of influence used at the home office to create lines of persuasion (such as demonstrating the suffering of innocents in order to put international pressure on an opposing military force<sup>84</sup>) may be based on effective universals. However, the message and messenger benefit from cultural tuning at the point of delivery. But we cannot expect the most brilliantly conceived and delivered message to neutralize a fundamentally disliked product or policy.

This last point serves as a reminder that successful influence requires a blend of theory and methodology, because neither the theoretical checklist nor the empirical questionnaire is as powerful as the two combined.

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<sup>1</sup> Asch, Solomon. (1951). Effects of group pressure on the modification and distortion of judgments, in H. Guetzkow (ed.) *Groups, Leadership and Men*. Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie.

<sup>2</sup> Smith P and Bond M H. (1999). *Social Psychology Across Cultures*. Second Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Cultures is not synonymous with nationality, or language, or geographic region, but the latter are easier to quantify, and are often substituted in practice. It's difficult to find quality research that actually uses culture, rather than geography or nationality, as an independent variable. Culture is a slippery term: How big or small is a culture? Within any identified culture, can't it be broken down into further unique, homogenous cultures? How far down should the cultural division go—does it reach as far as tribes? Neighborhoods? Families? Individuals? How useful is a term to the sciences if it's not easily quantified?

<sup>4</sup> Klein, H. (2004). Chapter 9, Cognition in Natural Settings: The Cultural Lens model. In M. Kaplan ed., *Cultural Ergonomics*. Advances in human performance and cognitive engineering research. Vol. 4, pp. 249-280.

<sup>5</sup> Skinner, T (2006). *Shaping Influence*. *Jane's Defense Weekly*. 23 August 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Lamb, C. (2005). *Review of Psychological Operations Lessons Learned from Recent Operational Experience*. National Defense University Press, Washington, DC, p. 32 (24) and 53 (45).

<sup>7</sup> Often subsumed under discussions of "linguistic relativity" today.

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<sup>8</sup> Szalay, L. B., & Brent, J. E. (1967). The analysis of cultural meanings through free verbal associations. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 72, 161-187. See also Szalay, L. B., & Deese, J. (1978). *Subjective meaning and culture: An assessment through word associations*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

<sup>9</sup> Pullum, Geoffrey K. (1991). *The Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax and Other Irreverent Essays on the Study of Language*. University of Chicago Press.

<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia entry for "Gender-neutral Pronoun."

<sup>11</sup> Ethnic segmentation is considered to be a crude form of segmentation by sophisticated marketers, who often prefer usage, lifestyle, and value-based segmentation strategies that go beyond less-useful ethnic, racial, and geographic segmentation strategies. See Tellis, G. (1998). *Advertising and Sales Promotion Strategy*. Massa: Addison Wesley.

<sup>12</sup> The cultural lens model is an interesting amalgam of various theoretical dimensions of variance among cultures, and proposes that cultural lens training "can enable practitioners to see the world through the eyes of someone from a different nation." See Klein, H. (2004). Cognition in Natural Settings: The Cultural Lens model. In M. Kaplan ed., *Cultural Ergonomics. Advances in human performance and cognitive engineering research*. Vol. 4, pp. 249-280.

<sup>13</sup> Zaharna, R. (2005). *The Network Paradigm of Strategic Public Diplomacy*. Policy Brief, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Joseph Duffey, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society*, spring 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Markóczy, L. (1999). *Us and Them*. Annual editions, International Business, Wiley Press.

<sup>16</sup> Markóczy, L. (1996). Are cultural differences overrated? *Financial Times*, 26 July, 1996.

<sup>17</sup> Barucky J., Karabaich, B., and Stone, B. (2001). Notes from Evaluation of Cross Cultural Models for Psychological Operations: Test of a Decision Modeling Approach. USAF Research Laboratory. This study asks five subject matter experts to propose several lines of persuasion and then to guess, based on their experience, the extent to which those lines of persuasion would be effective in various cultures. The study is actually more an investigation into how SME intuition functions relative to culture, than it is a study of cultural differences.

<sup>18</sup> Frank Reidy, Email 4/27/05. Reidy also inspired the following paragraph regarding Al Qaeda's lack of cultural sophistication.

<sup>19</sup> American Public Diplomacy and Islam. Transcript from Panel Two of a Hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. February 27, 2003. <http://www.iraqwatch.org/government/us/hearingspreparedstatements/us-sfrc-panel2-022703.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Is Al-Qaeda Winning the War? (27 May 2004). *Jane's Intelligence Digest*. Of course, examples of this thesis abound.

<sup>21</sup> Chua, Y. (2004). With a Little Help from (U.S.) Friends. Special Election Issue, *The Campaign*. <http://www.pcij.org/imag/2004Elections/Campaign/consultants.html>

<sup>22</sup> Plasser F & Plasser G. (2002). *Global Political Campaigning: A Worldwide Analysis of Campaign Professionals and Their Practices*. Praeger Publishers. See also: Bowler S. & Farrell D. (2000). The internationalization of campaign consultancy. In *Campaign Warriors: Political Consultants in Elections*, J. Thurber & C. Nelson (Ed.), 153-74. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

<sup>23</sup> This insight came from political consultant, public relations strategist, and reserve PSYOP officer Mark Myers ([www.e-magination.com](http://www.e-magination.com)).

<sup>24</sup> It's ironic that the *Los Angeles Times* broke the Lincoln Group Iraqi media placement story. In 1999, the *LA Times* arranged a profit-sharing venture with the nearby Staples Center, where the *LA Times* promoted the Staples Center in news copy, and then benefitted financially from Staples Center revenues. The *LA Times* isn't alone in making questionable arrangements for self benefit—recall CNN's pre-war agreement to censor all Saddam atrocity stories.

<sup>25</sup> *The World News*. Taliban Burning Claims Probed. October 23, 2005.

<sup>26</sup> NATO JSPOC, Hurlburt Field, FL, Dec 5-8, 2006. Nonattribution rules were in place, thus the omission of the speaker's name.

<sup>27</sup> Pettigrew, T. (1979). The ultimate attribution error. Extending Allport's cognitive analysis of prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 5, 461-476.

<sup>28</sup> A moderator is a variable that modifies the relationship between two other variables. For example, an individual finding himself in the close proximity of a cohesive group is more likely to conform to that group, but even moreso in Asian cultures than in Western ones. In this case, culture is a moderator of the main effect of conformity.

<sup>29</sup> Mishra RC. (2001). Cognition Across Cultures. In *The Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, ed. D Matsumoto. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 119.

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<sup>30</sup> Occam's Razor refers to a goal in the sciences for simplicity over needless complexity. Explanations of reality should "shave off" assumptions that aren't necessary. The source for the rice study is Gay, J. & Cole M. (1967). *The new mathematics and the old culture*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

<sup>31</sup> Peter B. Smith. (2001). *Cross-Cultural Studies of Social Influence*. In *The Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, ed. D Matsumoto. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 366.

<sup>32</sup> Nyiti, R. (1982). The validity of "cultural differences explanation" for cross-cultural variation in the rate of Piagetian cognitive development. In D Wagner & H Stevenson (Eds.), *Cultural perspectives on child development* (pp. 146-165). San Francisco: WH Freeman.

<sup>33</sup> Rokeach, M. (2000). *Understanding Human Values*. Free Press.

<sup>34</sup> Kluckhohn C & Murray HA, 1948. *Personality in Nature, Culture and Society*, New York: Knopf

<sup>35</sup> Johns Hopkins University Operations Research Office (1953). *Psychological warfare and other factors affecting the surrender of North Korean and Chinese forces*. Washington DC: Johns Hopkins University Operations Research Office.

<sup>36</sup> Lamb, C. (2005). *Review of Psychological Operations Lessons Learned from Recent Operational Experience*. National Defense University Press, Washington, DC, p 113. Dr. Lamb's comment appears to be an observation on the current state of US PSYOP. It is probably also a criticism regarding insufficient cultural tuning of PSYOP product, when other comments throughout his paper are considered.

<sup>37</sup> These are approaches familiar to influence practitioners, and can be found in most influence textbooks. Decontextualization removes an event or behavior from its surrounding context, usually in an attempt to make the event or behavior look bad. Value alignment "repackages" an argument so it aligns with the target audience's value system. Narrative venues are lines of persuasion that have been worked into stories. Dual-process theories such as Petty & Cacioppo's ELM and Chaiken's Heuristic-Systematic model, propose that humans are persuaded through two fundamentally different routes, depending on how involving the target finds the topic.

<sup>38</sup> There are many demonstrations of the failure of human introspection. Nisbett & Wilson 1977 is an excellent example, giving case after case of humans misunderstanding the causes and motivations of their own behavior. Nisbett, R., & Wilson, T. (1977). Telling more than we can know: Verbal reports on mental processes. *Psychological Review*, 84, 231-259. A perpetual embarrassment for the field of psychology is that Freud is considered its modern founder. Freud went off-track in many ways, and some of his difficulties can be traced to his methodology. He employed reflection and intuition, rather than experimentation, as his primary methodology. One of the most interesting themes in psychology is the inability of humans to understand their own cognitive processes by "reflecting" upon them. In a nutshell, humans have little access to their cognitive processes, and it has only been by the slow and agonizing process of experimentation—including random samples, holding variables constant, employing statistical analyses, etc.—has the field made progress.

<sup>39</sup> Haley R. (1985) *Developing effective communications strategy: a benefit segmentation approach*. New York : Wiley. p.3. Hayley notes that demographic information (variables such as race, gender, age, geographic location, etc.) accounts for only about 5% of "micro-behaviors" (referring primarily to the consumption of certain brands). Haley claims that psychographic segmentation, which includes more psychological variables, doubles that number. He notes wryly that segmentation "still leaves a substantial amount of room for improvement."

<sup>40</sup> Differences loom large during conflict, causing humans to overlook commonalities. "Differentiation is typical during intergroup conflict. Rather than noticing shared similarities, the groups tend to emphasize their differences." — Donelson Forsyth, *Group Dynamics* p. 388.

<sup>41</sup> Persuasion—not compliance, which does not have the same common ground needs as persuasion. Regarding the fundamental nature of commonality to successful persuasion, many influence textbooks devote a chapter to the importance of similarity and commonality. *Bargaining for Advantage* by Richard Shell (2006) contains an elegant chapter addressing the importance of finding common ground.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Gass and John Seiter recently published the third edition of their popular textbook, *Persuasion, Social Influence, and Compliance Gaining*. The quote is from personal correspondence with the author.

<sup>43</sup> David Meyers, *Social Psychology*. In this quote, Meyers is referring to the human bias called the "Fundamental Attribution Error" or the "Correspondence Bias."

<sup>44</sup> Gilovich T (1993). *How we know what isn't so: The fallibility of human reason in everyday life*. New York: Free Press.

<sup>45</sup> The politics of academic publication give an outsized advantage to statistically significant findings over nonsignificant ones. (It's important to note that statistical significance is *not* the same as importance, although it's often treated that way. It's possible to discover a trivial, yet statistically significant finding.) Statistical significance is merely

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a way of saying the findings of a study have conformed to a certain level of confidence that the results aren't merely a fluke. A finding that can claim statistical significance is much more likely to be published. Yet nonsignificant findings may be very important, too, but their chances of being published are slim... because a nonsignificant finding may mean *either* it could be a chance finding (in which case we don't care to know about it) *or* that the effect in reality is not there (in which case, we'd want to know this information). The problem is, there's no way to determine which of these two options a nonsignificant finding represents. The Achilles heel of social science, sometimes called "the file drawer problem," is that studies not finding effects often get thrown in the file drawer, so nobody knows how many times an effect has been sought and not found. Imagine, for example, that 20 researchers decide to focus on a politically hot topic that's likely to get them attention and media coverage if they can find the effect they seek. Let's say these 20 researchers test to see if women are in fact better than men at math. Now assume 19 of those studies do not show a significant female superiority in math, but one does. Nineteen go into the file drawer and one gets published—perhaps to eventually show up in the media, or as the basis of legislation. This is why I recommend to my students to be very cautious about studies that support highly politicized stances...one never knows how many studies looked for the effect and failed. You never hear the media say, "In tonight's news, one new study that shows women are actually superior in math skills to men...but nineteen other studies didn't."

<sup>46</sup> Akiba, D and Klug W. (1999). The different and the same: Reexamining east and west in a cross cultural analysis of values. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 1999, 27(5), 467-474.

<sup>47</sup> Peter B. Smith. (2001). Cross-Cultural Studies of Social Influence. In *The Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, ed. D Matsumoto. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 364.

<sup>48</sup> Perloff, R. (2003). *They Dynamics of Persuasion*. Second edition. New Jersey: Earlbaum.

<sup>49</sup> Amir Y & Sharon I. (1987). Are social-psychological laws cross-culturally valid? *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 18, 383-470.

<sup>50</sup> Rodrigues, A. (1982). Replication: A neglected type of research in social psychology, *Interamerican Journal of Psychology*, 16, 91-109.

<sup>51</sup> Interactions (where the DV "differences are different," depending on levels of the IV) are less likely to replicate across the board, because they simultaneously represent a higher level of complexity and diminished statistical power to attain them. When interactions don't replicate, but main effects do, the researcher is correct to suspect problems of statistical power.

<sup>52</sup> A low replication rate across cultures does not surprise seasoned researchers, for methodological reasons, not psychological ones. Considering statistical power alone, let's be optimistic and imagine the original and replication studies both had power of .80 (a high standard that many studies do not attain). The chances of two studies finding the same real effect would then be 64%, even if the procedures, experimenters, and subjects were *identical*. The methodologist Jacob Cohen points out that low power (caused primarily by small sample size) is a chronic problem in the social sciences, causing real effects to frequently go undetected. In fact, Cohen calculated that if an effect were really there to be found, the typical social sciences study would have about a 48% chance of detecting it with a single study—chances that are a little worse than a coin-flip. If Cohen's estimate is correct, that means the average chance of two studies finding the same real effect, all else being identical, would be 23%. Small sample sizes, poor operationalizations, non-interval data, less-than-perfect translations, different research conditions, and other methodological differences would only serve to drive the number down—so we can not expect high replication numbers for purely methodological reasons alone, and it would be erroneous to conclude that a failure to replicate the typical single study supports a "difference-of-culture" conclusion.

<sup>53</sup> Peter B. Smith. (2001). Cross-Cultural Studies of Social Influence. In *The Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, ed. D Matsumoto. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 367.

<sup>54</sup> Sun H. and Bond M. (1999). The structure of upward and downward tactics of influence in Chinese organizations. In J. Lasry, J. Adair & K. Dion (Eds.), *Latest contributions to cross-cultural psychology* pp 286-299.

<sup>55</sup> Zahaarna, RS. (2003). The Unintended Consequences of Crisis Public Diplomacy: American Public Diplomacy in the Arab World. *Foreign Policy in Focus*, June 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Rice R & Atkin C (1989). *Public Communication Campaigns*. Second edition. Newbury: Sage. This book provides many examples of the effectiveness of FTF appeals, compared to mass media appeals. The caveat here is that mass media appeals, while less powerful compared to FTF appeals, are considerably more efficient in terms of reach, and may be the only tool available when FTF communicators are in short supply.

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- <sup>57</sup> Canary, D; Cody M; Manusov V. (2003). *Interpersonal Communication*. Boston: Bedford. The chapter on Listening is particularly germane.
- <sup>58</sup> Nisbett R, Borgida E, Crandall R and Reed H. (1976). Popular indication: Information is not necessarily informative. In JS Carroll & JW Payne (Eds.), *Cognition and social behavior* (pp.113-133). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- <sup>59</sup> Stiff, JB. (1986). Cognitive processing of persuasive message cues: A meta-analytic review of the effects of supporting information on attitudes. *Communication Monographs*, 53, 75-89.
- <sup>60</sup> Thompson, G. (2004). *Verbal Judo: The Gentle Art of Persuasion*. New York: Harper Collins.
- <sup>61</sup> The Buffalo News. April 4, 2003. 'The wrong war at the wrong time,' former mideast envoy maintains. See also: <http://www.vaiw.org/>
- <sup>62</sup> NATO JSPOC, Hurlburt Field, FL, Dec 5-8, 2006.
- <sup>63</sup> Alvin Gouldner's research was seminal in documenting that all cultures conform to the rule of reciprocity. Gouldner, AW. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, 25, 161-178.
- <sup>64</sup> Smith & Bond. (1999). *Social Psychology Across Cultures*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon. p. 96
- <sup>65</sup> Author's personal correspondence with Dr. Seese
- <sup>66</sup> Some readers may be wondering, can an American even address the topic of influence in other cultures? For that matter, can a man be a gynecologist? Can a black attorney represent a white defendant? Can a septuagenarian possibly be a good pediatrician?
- <sup>67</sup> This is an important point, because some reviews of cross-cultural influence do not appear to distinguish between influence and other types of social research. For example, the chapter found in Matsumoto's 2001 *Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, entitled "Cross-cultural Social Influence," includes group dynamics, leadership theories, explicit negotiation, and conflict resolution...topics which receive scant, if any, attention in mainstream textbooks on influence psychology. Some authors, finding large cultural differences and even reversals in neighboring and non-influence areas of psychology, then argue for primacy-of-culture perspectives on influence as well.
- <sup>68</sup> Smith & Bond. (1999). *Social Psychology Across Cultures*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- <sup>69</sup> Asch, S. E. (1955). Opinions and social pressure. *Scientific American*, pp. 31-35. Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: A minority of one against a unanimous majority. *Psychological Monographs*, 70.
- <sup>70</sup> Effect sizes tell researchers how "large" the effect is, how much impact it has, or how important it is. One advantage of effect sizes over measures of significance is that effect sizes are not affected by the number of subjects in the study. A rough guide for these effect sizes: small = .2; medium, = .5; large = .8.
- <sup>71</sup> Sherif, M., Harvey, O. J., White, J., Hood, W., & Sherif, C. (1961). *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robber's Cave Experiment*. Norman: University of Oklahoma, Institute of Social Relations
- <sup>72</sup> Stanley Milgram (1963). Behavioral study of obedience. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 67, pp. 371-378. Also see: Stanley Milgram (2004). *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. New York: Harper Collins.
- <sup>73</sup> "Who are more obedient—men or women? Milgram found an identical rate of obedience in both groups—65%—although obedient women consistently reported more stress than men. There are about a dozen replications of the obedience experiment world-wide which had male and female subjects. All of them, with one exception, also found no male-female differences." See <http://www.stanleymilgram.com>
- <sup>74</sup> Thomas Blass analyzed the Milgram research available, spanning 25 years from 1961 to 1985, to see if obedience tapered off as humans "become more sophisticated," as so many people like to believe. The answer is 'No'—no correlation between obedience levels and year exists. Humans are humans, after all, despite the passage of time. See: Blass, T. (1999). The Milgram paradigm after 35 years: Some things we now know about obedience to authority," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 25, pp. 955-978.
- <sup>75</sup> Unfortunately, a number of Milgram-like intercultural replications made significant changes in the methodology, such as substituting verbal criticism for shocks, or significantly changing the appearance and similarity of the victim, or asking only women to shock another woman. These changes were probably made to avoid clean replications of the original, which helps the researcher get published, but is problematic when trying to understand intercultural differences.

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<sup>76</sup> I generally refuse to present this research to international audiences, after bad experiences in the past, where people object strenuously to high compliance scores posted for their nationality. Interestingly, audience objections generally follow those raised years ago to Asch & Milgram's original work.

<sup>77</sup> Hofstede G (1980). *Culture's Consequences*.

<sup>78</sup> Chinese Culture Connection (1987). Chinese values and the search for culture-free dimensions of culture. *Journal of Cross-cultural psychology*, 18, 143-164.

<sup>79</sup> For example, the social loafing phenomenon within group dynamics research has been observed to reverse in some Asian countries (Karu & Williams, 1993) and in Israel (Earley, 1993) with participants working harder in groups, than as individuals. However, this effect has also been found in the US, where "social facilitation" is known to occur for simple and well-learned tasks. In negotiation, problem-solving approaches appear to induce reciprocation in some cultures, but provoked other cultures to take advantage. (Graham, Mintu & Rodgers, 1994).

<sup>80</sup> Incorporate them how? is the next question. If there *were* unique, indigenous influence tactics, would it necessarily be wise to use them? Given that modern communication technologies make it difficult to influence anywhere in the world without the rest of the world hearing about it, how would those influence tactics play to a world audience? For example, pay-for-placement in the Iraqi media is culturally sensitive—it's how things are done in Iraq. Yet the Western media—despite occasional indulgences in similar practices (*LA Times* profit sharing with the Staples Center, CNN spiking anti-Saddam stories, *NYT's* Jayson Blair, CBS's forged documents)—blew a gasket over this culturally-adapted influence tactic, causing the Allies to lose additional traction in the info wars. Might it be that the universals of influence would still be the safest tools of choice, even if culturally unique influence tactics were discovered?

<sup>81</sup> Certainly the reader will distinguish policy from influence technique!

<sup>82</sup> This problem is hotly discussed among advertisers in industry magazines and books with titles like: *What Sticks? Why Most Advertising Fails & How to Guarantee Yours Succeeds*. A current review estimates a 37% failure rate in US advertising campaigns that are designed by and for Americans. See Neff, J. (2006). *Half of your advertising isn't wasted – just 37%*. *Advertising Age*, Vol. 77, Issue 32.

<sup>83</sup> Morris M, Podolny J, Ariel S. (2001). Culture, norms, and obligations: Cross-national differences in patterns of interpersonal norms and felt obligations toward coworkers. In Wosinska et al. (Eds.), *The Practice of Social Influence in Multiple Cultures*. Mahwah NJ: Erlbaum.

<sup>84</sup> Portions of this paper were written while images of the civilian dead of Qana were being broadcast.