

Psychology

for the IB Diploma Programme

Dr Christian Bryan, Peter Giddens and Ellen Heyting

Sociocultural Approach

Psychological terminology	Learning objective
Cognitive dissonance	The role of cognitive dissonance in understanding human behavior.
Compliance techniques	The role of one or more compliance techniques in changing human behavior.
Conformity	The process of conformity and its role in understanding human behavior.
Cultural dimensions	The role of one or more cultural dimensions in understanding cross-cultural similarities and differences in behavior.
Emic approach	The value of emic approaches in researching human behavior.
Enculturation	One or more theories of enculturation for one or more behaviors.
Etic approach	The limitation of etic approaches to researching human behavior.
Models of acculturation	The application of one or more acculturation models to explain the experience of immigrants, refugees or other people taking an extended stay in another culture.
Social identity theory	The application of social identity theory to change or explain behavior.
Social learning theory	The application of social learning theory to explain and change behavior.

▲ **Table 2.4** Sociocultural approach learning objectives from Study Guide, pages 25–26.

Introduction to the sociocultural approach

The sociocultural approach to understanding human behavior emphasizes the influence of social and cultural factors on human behavior. This approach has grown out of social psychology, which explores how social environments, interaction and relationships shape individuals. Sociocultural psychologists investigate how culture influences values, beliefs and behavior.

The study of cross-cultural psychology developed using an etic approach to compare how different cultures shape human behavior. An etic approach means a research strategy that emphasizes the objective analysis and comparison of cultures from an external, often global *perspective*. This can be contrasted with an emic approach, which focuses on understanding culture from within, according to its own norms and values. While the etic approach aims for objectivity and comparability across cultures, it may sometimes overlook the unique aspects and nuances of individual cultures.



However, social psychologists also followed the earlier lead of anthropologists and engaged in an emic approach to research, studying different social and cultural groups from an 'insider perspective', allowing for a deeper and more sensitive understanding of behavior. It is from here that a psychological understanding of Indigenous communities developed into a growing **Indigenous psychology**.

Cognitive dissonance

Cognitive dissonance refers to the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs or attitudes. Cognitive dissonance relates to making behavioral decisions and causing attitude *change*. Cognitive dissonance occurs when a person holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas or values, or participates in an action that goes against one of these three, and experiences psychological stress as a result. Therefore, individuals feel uncomfortable in states of dissonance and seek to reduce it, which leads to a motivational *bias* to change thoughts and/or behavior.

It has been assumed that cognitive dissonance is a negative in people's lives; however, it can actually help to keep individuals mentally healthy. For example, cognitive dissonance can help people to feel satisfied with their choices, especially when the choices cannot be easily reversed, because it makes people justify them. Resolving dissonance may help prevent individuals from making bad choices and/or motivate them to make good ones.



You will be asked to explain or describe a psychological idea or a theory and be expected to provide an example. Make sure you cite a specific behavior and state clearly how it illustrates the idea or theory.

For example, Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) explored cognitive dissonance through an experiment where 71 male students performed boring tasks and were then paid \$1 or \$20 to tell a confederate (a research actor employed to secretly participate) the tasks were interesting. The study aimed to see if small rewards (\$1) versus larger rewards (\$20) would affect their task enjoyment ratings. This was assessed by asking participants to tell a waiting confederate that the tasks were really interesting. Almost all of the participants agreed to walk into the waiting room and persuade the confederate that the boring experiment would be fun. Results showed those paid \$1 rated the task more enjoyable, which suggests that lower compensation led to greater cognitive dissonance, as participants justified the effort for a minimal reward. In contrast, a \$20 payment provided enough external justification, reducing dissonance and allowing participants to rate the task honestly as boring. In this experiment, cognitive dissonance was created in the low-paid condition and so had to be reduced by creating a *bias* that the tasks were more interesting and enjoyable than they really were.



Conceptual question

Cognitive dissonance illustrates how people resolve conflicting beliefs and actions, but how can we know if a change in behavior is truly caused by dissonance or influenced by other social or personal factors?

Cognitive dissonance can occur socioculturally when an individual's deeply held cultural beliefs or practices come into conflict with new cultural norms or values they encounter, often through globalization, migration or exposure to different cultures via media. For example, someone raised in a culture that highly values collective decision-making might experience cognitive dissonance when moving to a society that prioritizes individual autonomy and decision-making. Collective decision-making refers to a process in which a group of individuals comes together to discuss, deliberate and reach a consensus or agreement on a particular issue or course of action. This approach emphasizes the values, input and interests of the entire group rather than just one individual. In contrast, individual autonomy refers to the capacity of an individual to make decisions independently, based on personal values, desires and judgment. This approach prioritizes self-reliance, personal freedom and the right to make choices without needing approval or consensus from others. This dissonance arises as the individual struggles to reconcile their ingrained preference for collective action with the new societal emphasis on individualism, leading to a re-evaluation of personal beliefs or behaviors to reduce the psychological discomfort associated with this conflict.

CAS activity 46

Prepare scenario cards with situations that might cause cognitive dissonance. Examples might include:

- a student who values honesty cheating on a test to avoid failing
- a teenager who believes in environmental conservation frequently using plastic bags
- someone who promotes healthy living regularly eating fast food.

On the reverse side of the cards, highlight the common ways people may resolve the cognitive dissonance, such as changing their behavior, changing their beliefs or rationalizing the conflict.

Compliance techniques

A **compliance technique** is a method that attempts to persuade people to comply with a request.

One prominent compliance technique in social psychology is the ‘foot-in-the-door’ technique. This method involves first getting a person to agree to a small request, which increases the likelihood that they will comply with a larger request later on. The assumption behind this technique is that agreeing to a small request creates a sense of commitment or consistency within the individual, making them more inclined to agree to further requests to maintain this self-image. For example, if someone agrees to sign a petition about a political issue (the small request), they might be more likely to donate money to the cause associated with the petition (the larger request) at a later time. This is because people like to be consistent with their self-image. In this scenario, the self-image that has been created with the small request is: ‘I am a good person who cares about this issue’. Therefore, to maintain this self-image, they are more likely to agree to larger requests later. This technique is widely used in marketing, fundraising and persuasion strategies to influence human behavior by capitalizing on the human desire for consistency.

For example, Freedman and Fraser (1966) asked homeowners, first, if they would be willing to place a small sign supporting safe driving in their windows. A few days later, they approached the same homeowners with a much larger request: to place a larger, less attractive sign in their front yards that also promoted safe driving. The results showed that homeowners who had agreed to the small initial request were significantly more likely to comply with the larger request, compared to those who were approached with the larger request first. This study provides empirical support for the effectiveness of the foot-in-the-door technique in increasing compliance with a larger request by first securing agreement to a smaller one.



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A debate within the human sciences is to what extent it is producing valid, useful knowledge. For example, do other areas of knowledge such as the arts provide insight into human behavior that is equally valid?

Do the human sciences and literature provide different types of knowledge about human existence and behavior? Can literature from different cultures provide more insight into human behavior than the often culturally specific human sciences?

Several other compliance techniques are commonly identified in social psychology, each leveraging different aspects of human behavior and decision-making.

- **Door-in-the-face technique:** This involves making a large request that is expected to be refused, followed by a smaller, more reasonable request. The contrast between the two requests makes the second seem more acceptable.
- **Low-ball technique:** This involves making an initially attractive offer to obtain agreement and then making the terms less favorable. The individual is likely to comply with the less favorable terms due to the initial commitment.
- **That's-not-all technique:** Before the person makes a decision, an additional item or benefit is added to the original offer to make it look more appealing, increasing the likelihood of compliance.
- **Reciprocity norm:** This involves the social norm that encourages returning favors. If someone does something for you, you are more likely to feel obligated to return the favor.
- **Social proof (consensus):** Individuals are more likely to comply with a request if they believe that others, especially peers or role models, are also engaging in the behavior or agree with the idea.
- **Authority:** This assumes people are more inclined to follow directions or requests from someone who is perceived as an authority figure, due to social conditioning or respect for expertise.
- **Liking:** This assumes people are more likely to comply with requests from individuals they like or have a positive association with, whether because of personal relationships, attractiveness or similarities.
- **Scarcity:** This involves highlighting the rarity or limited availability of an opportunity. This can increase compliance because people are motivated by the fear of missing out on something valuable.

CAS activity 47

Research examples of where corporations use compliance techniques to influence buying decisions. Think of a real-life example where you or someone you know experienced the technique. Share your example with the class and discuss how effective this technique was in that situation. Rank which ones were more effective and why. Corporations using compliance techniques to influence buying decisions has implications for *responsibility* and how it can be regulated. Furthermore, how might psychologists design studies to *measure* compliant behavior?

Conformity

Conformity refers to the psychological phenomenon where individuals adjust their attitudes, beliefs or behaviors to align with the norms or standards of a group, often in response to real or perceived group pressure.

Where individuals adjust their attitudes, beliefs or behaviors to align with the norms or standards of a group, this is often in response to real or perceived group pressure. This adjustment is typically driven by a fundamental human need for social belonging and acceptance: human beings have a desire to fit in, be accepted

and be perceived as part of a group. The process of conformity highlights the powerful influence of social environments and group dynamics on individual actions, decisions and perceptions.

Asch (1951, 1956) investigated the extent to which social pressure from a majority group could influence a person to conform. In his experiments, participants were asked to match the length of lines in the presence of confederates who intentionally chose incorrect answers. Asch found that individuals often conformed to the group's incorrect choice, despite clear evidence to the contrary, illustrating the strong influence of group consensus on individual judgments (Figure 2.15).

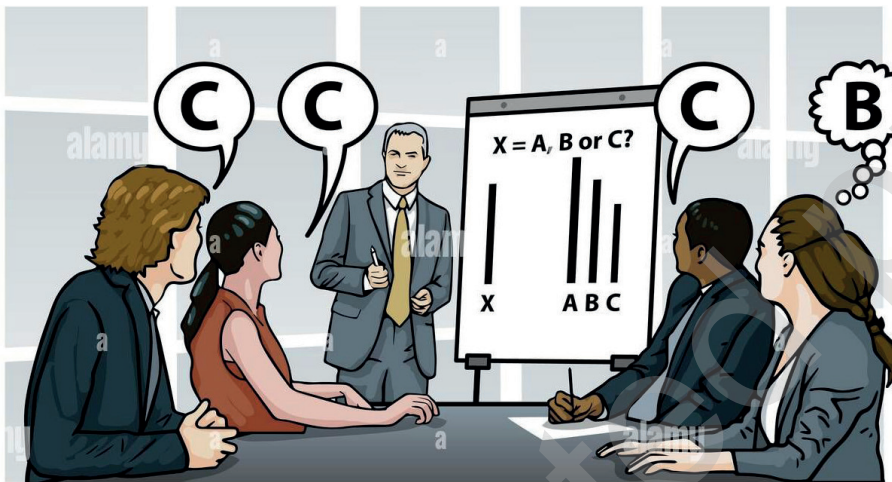


Figure 2.15 The Solomon Asch conformity experiment.

CAS activity 48

Conformity is heightened in our adolescent years and a very normal part of growing up. Looking around your class, where can you see examples of conformity? Does everyone have the same type of shoes, backpack, water bottle, stationary, haircut? Does everyone use the same few slang words or catchphrases? Does everyone listen to the same bands or watch the same media? Where else do you see examples of conformity around you?

It is important not to conflate conformity and compliance: conformity occurs when an individual *changes* their beliefs, attitudes or behaviors to align with the norms or standards of a group, whereas compliance involves changing one's behavior in response to an explicit request or direction from another person. The change in behavior is often temporary and does not necessarily reflect an internal change in beliefs or attitudes. Compliance is driven by the desire to achieve a favorable outcome from the request or to avoid punishment or disapproval for non-compliance, whereas conformity is driven by a desire to fit in or not stand out from the group.

TOK

Conformity can often be presented as a negative human trait by teachers. Is the role of the human scientist only to describe what the case is or also to make judgments about what should be the case? How might conformity be seen in different cultural contexts?



Conceptual question

Asch's research on conformity shows the power of group influence, but can the potential benefits of such research justify the partial relaxation of ethical standards, especially when participants are deceived or pressured?

Consider the concept of *responsibility*. For example, how do researchers study conformity ethically? Do the results of conformity research like Asch outweigh the potential costs to participants? What responsibilities do researchers have?



CAS activity 49

Discuss these questions.

- Why do people conform to group norms?
- Can you think of situations where conformity is beneficial?
- When might it be important to resist conformity?

Cultural dimensions

Cultures are made up of a set of attitudes, behaviors and symbols shared by a large group of people and are usually communicated from one generation to the next. Cultural groups are characterized by different norms and conventions, and cultural norms can be assessed according to where they fall on various dimensions.

Cultural dimensions refers to the academic frameworks used to describe and compare the underlying values, behaviors and attitudes that differentiate cultures from one another. These dimensions provide insight into how societies prioritize various aspects of life and interaction, impacting communication, business practices, government policies and individual behavior.

One of the most influential theorists in this area, Geert Hofstede, identified several key dimensions.

- **Power distance dimension:** This dimension refers to the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept and expect power to be distributed unequally.
- **Uncertainty avoidance dimension:** This dimension assesses a culture's tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, influencing how strictly rules and regulations are followed to minimize unpredictability.
- **Masculinity vs femininity dimension:** This dimension assesses a culture's preference for achievement, assertiveness and material reward for success (masculinity) versus a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life (femininity).

Another dimension is the individualism vs collectivism dimension.

In individualistic cultures:	In collectivist cultures:
the personal is emphasized more than the social	the social is emphasized more than the personal
individual autonomy and self-expression are encouraged, and people are viewed as unique	individual autonomy and self-expression are not encouraged
individual achievement is prioritized over the achievement of group harmony	the achievement of group harmony is prioritized over individual achievement
competitiveness and self-sufficiency are highly regarded	a person's identity is heavily based on membership of the group
a priority is placed on the goals of the individual	a priority is placed on the goals of important groups (e.g. extended families, work groups)
conformity to group norms is low	conformity to group norms is high

Markus and Kitayama (1991) investigated how **self-construals** differ between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Self-construals refer to how individuals define themselves in relation to others: as independent from others or as interdependent with others. They found that people in individualistic cultures (for example, the United States) tend to have an independent view of the self, emphasizing personal goals, traits and achievements. In contrast, people in collectivistic cultures (for example, Japan) tend to have an interdependent view of the self, focusing on their roles and relationships within the group, and prioritizing group harmony and collective goals over individual ones.



Conceptual question

Cultural dimensions provide a way to categorize and compare cultures, but how can we express complex sociocultural constructs, such as power distance or individualism, in terms of observable, measurable behavior?

This difference in self-construal influences various aspects of behavior such as communication styles, conflict resolution and decision-making. For instance, in individualistic cultures, direct communication and asserting one's opinion are valued, whereas in collectivistic cultures, indirect communication and maintaining social harmony are prioritized.

However, while the study highlights cultural differences, it also implicitly suggests underlying human universals that transcend cultural boundaries. For instance, regardless of cultural background, all individuals navigate a complex interplay between the need for autonomy (associated more with individualism) and the need for connectedness (associated more with collectivism). Every culture has mechanisms for addressing these fundamental aspects of human experience, albeit in different ways. The similarity lies in the universal human challenge of balancing self-interest with the interests of the group, which all societies must manage. Therefore, the study illustrates that, despite cultural differences in how self-concept is constructed and expressed, the underlying human needs driving these constructions, such as belonging, esteem and understanding, remain consistent across cultures.



Japan, often perceived as a highly collectivist society, actually exhibits a unique blend of collectivist and individualist traits. While Japan scores high on collectivism in terms of strong group cohesion and loyalty, it also scores relatively high on individualism compared to other Asian countries. This duality is reflected in Japanese workplace culture, where group harmony and consensus are prioritized, yet personal achievement and responsibility are also highly valued.

CAS activity 50

Tell a story about this fish. Is it a leader or is it being excluded by the group and chased away? Does this story tell us anything about your natural tendencies to be more individualistic or collectivist?

Visit this website: <https://play.howstuffworks.com/quiz/are-you-more-of-an-individualist-or-collectivist>. Calculate your individualism and collectivism scores and consider to what extent personal experiences and differences can be generalized to wider populations.



Emic approach

An **emic approach** is a research strategy that focuses on understanding cultural phenomena from the *perspective* of the insider, or the member of the culture being studied. An emic approach seeks to grasp how members of a culture perceive, categorize the world, and explain their own behavior and beliefs according to their cultural norms and values. The emic perspective emphasizes the subjective meanings and interpretations that are significant to the people of the culture.

The value of emic approaches in researching human behavior lies in their ability to provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of cultural practices, beliefs and behaviors from the perspective of those who live them. By prioritizing the insider's view, researchers can uncover the richness and complexity of cultural contexts that might be overlooked or misinterpreted through an outsider's lens. It is argued that an emic approach helps to avoid ethnocentric *biases* and promotes a more respectful and accurate representation of cultural diversity.

Mesquita and Frijda (1992) explored the cultural norms governing emotional expression, revealing significant differences in how emotions are valued, experienced and expressed across cultures. They found that cultures vary in the emotions they commonly experience and express, influenced by cultural norms and values about what is considered appropriate in different contexts. For example, in the United States and in parts of Europe, expressing happiness and pride openly is often encouraged and viewed positively. These cultures value individual achievement and personal success, leading to a greater acceptance and even expectation of expressing positive emotions like pride and happiness as a reflection of individual accomplishment. However, in East Asian cultures, such as Japan and China, there is a greater emphasis on social harmony, collectivism and modesty. In these contexts, overt expressions of happiness and pride may be more restrained, as drawing attention to one's accomplishments can be seen as boastful or disruptive of group harmony. The cultural norm in these societies leans toward humility and the subordination of personal success for the sake of the group's cohesion. As a result, individuals might downplay their personal achievements and express happiness and pride in a more subdued manner.

Therefore, through an emic perspective, researchers can uncover the deep-seated values of modesty, collectivism and social harmony that influence these behavioral norms. They can explore how individuals interpret these emotions and the social rules surrounding their expression, gaining insights into the cognitive and emotional processes that underlie cultural practices.

Enculturation

Enculturation is the process by which people learn the necessary and appropriate skills and norms in the context of their own culture. Cultural norms are rules or expectations of behavior and thought based on shared beliefs within a specific cultural or social group. Enculturation involves learning cultural norms in terms of what is expected by the other members of the culture. It includes implicit (unwritten) and explicit (written) social norms of how to behave appropriately. Cultural norms are learned by interacting with 'gatekeepers' such as parents, media, cultural commentators and schools. This can occur through social cognitive learning theory (observational learning) or direct tuition (being told what you are supposed to do).

An emic approach is focused on understanding a culture from within, relying on the perspectives, values and meanings that are important to the members of that culture. A researcher who is an insider, or a member of the culture being studied, can bring a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the cultural context, which aligns with the goals of the emic approach. This raises questions regarding to what extent it is legitimate for a researcher to draw on their own experiences as evidence in their investigations in the human sciences.

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Enculturation is a process that continues throughout life and reinforces one's identity as a member of one's own culture, as it helps to preserve cultural norms from one generation to the next. For example, Odden and Rochat (2004) researched how social cognitive learning theory influences cultural norm development in Samoa by focusing on line fishing and the comprehension of rank and hierarchy. They conducted their research over 25 months in a Samoan village and observed 28 children aged 4–12 within various village life contexts, while also interviewing key figures about views of child development. Notably, it found that Samoan children learn household chores and fishing primarily through observation rather than direct instruction. By age 12, children were adept at fishing independently, underscoring the significance of observational learning in Samoan enculturation.



One application of this research is that it suggests that such cultural learning practices may pose challenges for Samoan children in North American or European education settings, as these settings can prioritize explicit instruction rather than learning from active engagement and observing social leaders. This highlights the need for educational approaches that respect diverse learning traditions.

CAS activity 51

Think about your own cultural background. What is something you have learned through the process of enculturation – something you just know how to do and don't question as it is 'just the way things are done'.

Etic approach

An **etic approach** is a research strategy that focuses on comparing and understanding cultural phenomena from an external, often universal *perspective*, rather than from within the culture itself. An etic approach seeks to identify commonalities and differences across cultures by applying the same criteria, concepts and methods universally. The etic perspective emphasizes objective *measurements* and analyses that can be universally applied, allowing for cross-cultural comparisons.

The value of etic approaches in researching human behavior lies in their ability to highlight universal patterns and principles that transcend individual cultures. By

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Research into cultural norms raises questions regarding to what extent our perspectives are determined by our membership of a particular culture and to what extent we are able to allow those perspectives to influence the research process.

applying a standardized set of criteria across different cultures, researchers can identify behaviors, practices and beliefs that are common across humanity, as well as those that are unique to specific cultures. This outside-in perspective provides a broad, comparative view that complements the depth and specificity of the emic approach. An etic approach is important for developing cross-cultural theories and for understanding how human behavior is both shaped by and transcends cultural boundaries. It assumes that by applying a consistent methodology across cultures, researchers can minimize the influence of their own cultural *biases*, promoting a more objective and comparative understanding of human behavior across the globe.



Conceptual question

As the etic approach applies universal criteria to compare cultures, how might our knowledge of human behavior be biased if we rely too heavily on external perspectives, potentially overlooking unique cultural nuances?

Hofstede's (1980) work on cultural dimensions utilizes an etic approach to examine how work-related values differ across cultures. By surveying employees of IBM in over 50 countries, Hofstede identified several key dimensions of culture, such as individualism vs. collectivism and power distance, that have universal implications for understanding cultural influences on behavior. His research revealed, for example, that in high power distance cultures, such as Malaysia and Guatemala, hierarchical structures are accepted, and inequality among people is considered normal. In contrast, low power distance cultures, like Denmark and New Zealand, tend to value egalitarian relationships and question authority. This etic approach allowed Hofstede to compare cultures on a global scale, providing insights into how cultural norms shape organizational behavior and management practices universally.

Therefore, etic perspectives can uncover broad, cross-cultural trends, offering a comparative lens through which to view human behavior across different societies.

Models of acculturation

Acculturation is the process by which people *change* as a result of contact with other cultures in order to assimilate with a new culture. Cultural assimilation is the process in which a minority group or culture comes to resemble a majority group or culture. This happens when the minority group is influenced by the values, behaviors and beliefs of the majority group. There are significant ramifications on the food, clothing and language of those becoming introduced to the majority culture. It should be noted that some definitions and evidence suggest acculturation is actually a two-way process of change, whereby minority groups are influenced by majority groups but majority groups are in turn influenced by minority groups. However, research and theory has primarily focused on the adjustments and adaptations made by minority groups, such as immigrants, refugees and Indigenous people. in response to their contact with a majority group.

At the individual level, acculturation has been linked to changes in daily behavior such as food and clothing, as well as numerous changes in psychological processes such as values and thought processes. The key cognitive processes are attention and retention of implicit and explicit social norms and the motivation to reproduce them to accept

group identity. These have an impact on the formation of attitudes toward cultural norms and the perception of the individual's role within them.

Berry (2001) proposed a four-fold model (Figure 2.16) that assumes that acculturation/assimilation is dependent on minority group attitudes toward maintaining their cultural heritage and their attitudes about engaging with other cultural groups. 'Attitudes' refers to a set of emotions, beliefs and behaviors toward a particular object, person, thing or event. Berry divided acculturation into the following areas.

- **Assimilation acculturation:** Migrants do not retain links with their heritage culture and only participate in the culture of the receiving society.
- **Separation acculturation:** Migrants retain links only with their heritage culture and do not participate in the culture of the receiving society.
- **Marginalization acculturation:** Migrants do not retain links to their heritage culture and do not participate in the culture of the receiving society.
- **Integration acculturation:** Migrants retain links to their heritage culture and also participate in the culture of the receiving society.

"is it considered to be of value to develop relationships with the larger society?"	yes	assimilation	integration
	no	marginalization	separation
		no	yes
		"is it considered to be of value to maintain one's cultural heritage?"	

▲ **Figure 2.16** Berry's acculturation model.

Kizgin (2015) explored the effect of consumer acculturation on the identity and behaviors of ethnic Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands, using a questionnaire completed by 530 participants. The study *measured* attitudes and behaviors related to private life choices, such as marriage and child-rearing, and cultural practices, including language-use and social interactions. It found that participants who attached importance to having a partner from the heritage culture and rearing children in the heritage culture's traditions favored using their own ethnic language and mostly interacted with people of their own culture. Conversely, participants who attached importance to having a partner from the host culture and rearing children in the host culture's traditions favored using the Dutch language and mostly interacted with people of Dutch origin. Therefore, acculturation attitudes, especially those relating to private life such as marriage and rearing children, play a significant role in predicting acculturation behaviors in broader aspects of life.

Kizgin's study aligns with Berry's acculturation model by illustrating how individuals balance heritage and host cultures through their attitudes and behaviors. According to Berry's model, immigrants adopt different acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, separation or marginalization) based on their attitudes toward maintaining their original culture and interacting with the host culture. The study

You will learn more about Berry's research in C.3.

shows that those prioritizing heritage culture engage in separation, while those emphasizing host culture lean toward assimilation. The role of private life choices, such as marriage and child-rearing, reflects how personal values shape broader acculturation behaviors.

CAS activity 52

Think about the unique aspects of your school's culture. Consider daily routines, social norms, traditions and any unwritten rules. Pair up with a classmate and share your thoughts on what new students need to know to fit into your school culture. Discuss key behaviors, values and customs. Consider how students might feel if they did not have the language or did not understand the meaning behind these norms. Furthermore, consider how to gain a valid *measure* of acculturation behavior of new students. How can we be certain it is accurate? What would *responsible* research consider in this situation?

Social identity theory

Social identity theory (SIT), proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1986), suggests that people define themselves in relation to social groups.

According to SIT, people's sense of who they are is based on their membership of social groups. This occurs via the following processes.

- **Social categorization:** People categorize other people to easily identify them and to begin to understand them. By understanding the categories people belong to, they can better understand themselves and begin to develop their sense of identity. This can explain behavior because it shows how people tend to define behavior as 'right' according to their group's behavior. Individuals usually belong to many groups at the same time and, depending on the group with which they are associating, their behavior is likely to *change* to match the group's behavior.
- **Social identification:** People tend to assimilate into their group by adopting the group's identity and behaving in ways that the group members behave. This can explain behavior because it shows how the group becomes the person's social ingroup.
- **Social comparison:** Once people have categorized themselves within a group, so identifying themselves as members of the group, they tend to compare their group (their ingroup) with respect to another group (their outgroup). This can explain behavior because it shows how people improve their self-esteem by thinking of their group members in a positive light and members of other groups in a negative light.

Furthermore, people also tend to perceive the people in other groups (outgroups) negatively. This process can lead to the outgroup homogeneity effect, whereby members of ingroups will perceive members of their own group as being more diverse than an outgroup and members of an outgroup as being more similar to one another.

Park and Rothbart (1982) focused on the outgroup homogeneity effect within sororities at the University of Oregon, examining whether members viewed their own group as more diverse compared to other groups. Sororities are social organizations at colleges and universities, primarily in the United States and Canada. They are the female

counterpart to fraternities and together these constitute the 'Greek system' in student life, which is a prominent feature of the college social scene. Each sorority is usually designated by a combination of two or three Greek letters and has its own symbols, traditions and values that its members adhere to and celebrate. Through questionnaires, around 30 women from each of three sororities evaluated both their own and the other groups based on ten attributes, including behaviors and qualities perceived as either positive or negative. They found all three groups viewed their own sorority members as being more dissimilar than the other participants thought they were.

- Participants tended to view partying and being sexually active as unfavorable characteristics.
- For the eight positive characteristics, all groups said that they were more characteristic of their own sorority than the other sororities.
- For the two negative characteristics, ingroup *bias* was shown in two of the sororities as they ranked the negative characteristics as being more characteristic of the other sororities than their own.



Conceptual question

SIT breaks down how individuals align with social groups, but what are the strengths and limitations of this reductionist approach when studying the complexity of group behavior?

Therefore, SIT can be used to explain behavior because it shows the process of ingroup favoritism and outgroup stereotyping via outgroup homogeneity on the women's attitudes toward their own and other sororities.



However, Park and Rothbart's (1982) study on outgroup homogeneity within sororities raises several questions regarding its methodological quality and findings. The use of questionnaires, while efficient, may have affected the study's credibility due to potential biases in self-reporting, illustrating how types of measurement can impact study outcomes. The relatively small sample size, taken from only three sororities, limits the generalizability of the findings to wider populations. The

Theories provide a framework for understanding human behavior. However, should human science theories be held to the same standards of predictability as natural science theories given that humans may be more unpredictable to study?

TOK

conclusion, that ingroup members viewed themselves as more diverse and attributed negative characteristics to others, is supported by the data but could be explained by social desirability bias or self-presentation concerns. Alternative explanations, such as differences in sorority culture, might also account for these results. The practical implications suggest the pervasiveness of bias in social group dynamics, while theoretically, the study reinforces concepts of social identity theory. However, future research should address uncertainties such as how varying social contexts might influence these biases, and whether consistent findings emerge across different types of social groups.

CAS activity 53

SIT explains how people define themselves based on their group memberships. Think about the various groups within your school, such as sports teams, clubs or social circles. What roles do these groups play in shaping students' identities and experiences? For example, how does being a member of one sports team create possible differences in identity when compared to another sports team.

Social learning theory

Social learning theory (SLT) (Bandura, 1977) proposes that behavior is modelled by other members of a social group and acquired through observation or imitation based on consequences of a behavior. SLT suggests that behavior is acquired through the following processes.

- **Identification:** Individuals are more likely to learn from observing others they identify with, such as parents, siblings, peers and celebrities.
- **Modelling:** People learn behavior via observation of a role model. For example, a child may learn study habits from modelling an older sibling and same gender models.
- **Attention:** In order to learn a behavior, the individual must pay attention to the model. Factors that influence attention include the attractiveness or the authority of the model.
- **Retention:** Before an individual can imitate a behavior, the observer must actually remember the behavior that was observed. The more a behavior is viewed, the more likely it is to be remembered.
- **Motor reproduction:** To be able to imitate an observed behavior, the individual has to physically be able to reproduce the behavior. This is influenced by self-efficacy and the extent to which people feel able or have the confidence to carry out the behavior.
- **Motivation:** An individual may remember and be able to carry out the observed behavior, but they may lack the motivation to do so. In order to imitate the behavior, the individual must understand what the potential outcome of repeating the behavior is. This is referred to as outcome expectancies. If the observer witnesses the model being rewarded for the behavior (vicarious reinforcement), they may then carry out the behavior in the belief that they will receive the same reward. Vicarious reinforcement assumes that when an individual observes another person being rewarded or punished for a behavior, it leads the observer to alter their own behavior based on the observed outcomes. This type of learning is 'vicarious' because the observer does not directly experience the reinforcement or punishment, but rather learns from seeing it applied to someone else.

SLT suggests that portions of an individual's knowledge acquisition can be directly related to observing others within the context of social interactions.

Bandura's SLT provides a robust framework for understanding how behavior is acquired through observation and imitation within social contexts. However, while SLT assumes that behaviors are learned through processes such as identification, modelling and vicarious reinforcement, it does not fully account for the role of innate biological factors that may also drive behavior. Alternative explanations, such as genetic predispositions and sex-specific differences such as hormonal or neurological influences, can significantly affect an individual's ability to learn or imitate certain behaviors, suggesting that learning is not purely a result of social observation.

A classic example of SLT being applied to explain behavior is aggression. SLT can explain how children may learn aggressive responses if they observe parents, siblings or media characters resolving conflicts through aggression and receiving positive outcomes for such behavior. For example, a boy playing a violent video game with violent male characters might learn aggression through identification with the characters, modelling their behaviors and paying attention to their actions, especially if these characters are perceived as attractive or authoritative. Retention of aggressive behaviors occurs as these actions are repeatedly observed. Motor reproduction might come into play as the boy feels capable of mimicking these actions, influenced by his confidence (Figure 2.17).



Figure 2.17 Motivation to display aggression in real life could be fueled by the perceived outcomes or rewards seen within a game.

Interventions involve exposing children to models who demonstrate constructive conflict-resolution skills. Programs can teach children empathy, communication skills and ways to negotiate or solve problems without aggression, thereby modelling positive social interactions.

The US-based Positive Action program is an evidence-based initiative designed to instill life skills in students from preschool through high school. You will learn more about this in C.3.

Sociocultural Approach

Here are further examples of how SLT can explain and then offer ways to help *change* behavior.

- **Health education and promotion:** SLT can explain how individuals adopt health-related behaviors by observing the consequences of actions in others. For example, seeing a family member suffer health issues due to smoking can lead an individual to refrain from smoking. Therefore, health promotion programs often use role models or testimonials to showcase positive health behaviors, such as quitting smoking or leading an active lifestyle. By observing these models, individuals may feel motivated to emulate the behavior, especially if the models are relatable and the outcomes are desirable.
- **Substance abuse prevention:** SLT can explain how teenagers may start misusing drugs or alcohol because they observe peers or influential figures engaging in these behaviors and receiving perceived rewards, such as social acceptance. Therefore, substance abuse prevention programs sometimes include peer leaders or influencers who demonstrate healthy behaviors and the benefits of staying drug- or alcohol-free. By observing these peers, teenagers may learn and adopt the attitudes and behaviors that discourage substance misuse.
- **Academic achievement:** SLT can explain how students often learn effective study habits or become motivated to excel academically by observing peers who study diligently and receive praise or high grades. Therefore, schools and educators can create environments where positive academic behaviors are modelled by peers or teachers. For example, older students might mentor younger ones, showing them effective study strategies and motivating them through their own success stories.



Use relevant technical terminology in your answers. Create vocabulary lists to help you memorize the key terms. At the end of your answer, provide a summary sentence that links the explanation to the example and to the question.



Investigating psychological concepts in the sociocultural approach

Bias: In what way may our knowledge of human behavior be biased?

Our understanding of human behavior is often biased by the cultural frameworks within which research is conducted, especially when using etic approaches. An etic approach, which compares cultures from an outsider's perspective, can introduce bias because it applies universal criteria to culturally unique behaviors. For example, many studies in psychology are conducted in WEIRD societies, which emphasize individualism. Hofstede's (1980) research on cultural dimensions revealed how such societies prioritize individual autonomy, competition and personal achievement. When researchers apply findings from WEIRD populations to other, collectivist cultures, they risk misinterpreting behaviors that arise from different cultural values. For instance, collectivist cultures emphasize group harmony and social cohesion, where behavior is motivated by relationships and community well-being rather than personal success. Applying individualistic assumptions to such cultures can lead to biased interpretations, limiting the generalizability of findings. This bias reinforces the importance of considering cultural contexts and using emic approaches, which focus on understanding behavior from within a culture's norms and values, reducing the risk of ethnocentrism and providing a more accurate representation of human behavior across diverse societies.

CAS activity 54

Research a cross-cultural study that uses an etic approach. Evaluate how the application of universal criteria may have introduced bias and consider how an emic approach might have yielded different insights.

Causality: How can we know the cause(s) of observed behavior?

Establishing causality in the sociocultural approach requires careful consideration of how social and cultural factors shape behavior. One way to understand causality is through the examination of compliance techniques, which show how external social pressures can lead to changes in behavior. For example, Freedman and Fraser (1966) demonstrated the 'foot-in-the-door' technique, where people first agreed to a small request and were later more likely to comply with a larger one. This study manipulated social interaction and commitment to establish the cause of behavioral change, showing how people's desire for consistency with their earlier actions led them to comply with subsequent requests. The study's controlled setting allowed researchers to infer that compliance was a result of the social influence technique rather than other factors. However, in real-world settings, causality may be more difficult to establish, as social behavior is often influenced by multiple interacting factors such as cultural norms, personal values and group dynamics. Nevertheless, by isolating specific social variables, studies like Freedman and Fraser's help us understand how social pressures and expectations can directly influence human behavior.

CAS activity 55

Choose a study and critique it for how well it controls for variables. Analyse whether the study's conclusions about causality are justified. Suggest additional controls or steps that could have been taken to improve the strength of the causal inferences. What are the limitations of applying these findings to broader social contexts?

Change: How can we know if a behavior is a result of natural maturation or purposeful intervention?

To distinguish between behaviors that result from natural maturation and those due to purposeful intervention, researchers often examine how cultural practices shape behavioral development over time. For example, Odden and Rochat (2004) investigated how Samoan children learn cultural norms and skills, such as fishing, primarily through observational learning rather than direct instruction. This form of enculturation was compared with educational systems in countries where direct instruction is more common. By observing the children over 25 months, the researchers concluded that the children's independent mastery of fishing by age 12 was a result of the cultural practice of learning through observation rather than a natural developmental process that would occur without this cultural influence. This demonstrates that purposeful cultural intervention – through social learning – can shape behavior, differentiating it from changes that might be attributed solely to maturation. However, in real-world settings, it can be difficult to completely isolate cultural interventions from other factors, such as family dynamics or environmental changes, that also contribute to behavioral development.

CAS activity 56

Research another study that examines the role of cultural practices in shaping behavior. How do the researchers differentiate between changes due to cultural intervention and those resulting from natural maturation? Create a flowchart that illustrates how the researchers differentiated between changes due to natural maturation and those caused by an intervention.

Measurement: How can we express complex psychological constructs in terms of observable, measurable behavior?

In the sociocultural approach, complex constructs such as acculturation and identity formation are often measured through observable behavior and self-reported attitudes. Berry's (2001) model of acculturation, for example, categorizes individuals into four strategies – assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization – based on their interactions with the host culture and maintenance of their heritage culture. To measure acculturation, researchers use questionnaires that assess participants' behaviors, such as language use, social interactions and cultural practices, as well as their attitudes toward their heritage and host cultures. By quantifying these responses,

researchers can classify individuals' acculturation strategies and observe how these relate to broader outcomes, such as psychological well-being or social integration. This approach allows researchers to make measurable observations about how cultural interactions influence behavior, although relying on self-report measures can introduce bias, as participants may respond based on social desirability or personal perceptions rather than actual behavior. Still, these tools are valuable for expressing complex sociocultural constructs in a way that can be systematically analysed and compared across groups.

CAS activity 57

Choose another sociocultural construct, such as social identity or conformity. Find a study that measures this construct and explain how the researchers turned it into observable, measurable behavior. What tools or methods did they use?

Perspective: What are the strengths and limitations of a reductionist approach to studying behavior?

The reductionist approach, which breaks down complex social behaviors into simpler elements, can provide valuable insights but also risks oversimplifying human experiences. For instance, Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory reduces cultural behavior to measurable categories such as individualism versus collectivism, or power distance. This approach allows researchers to compare cultures systematically and identify broad patterns in behavior. However, one limitation is that it may overlook the nuances of how these dimensions play out in real-world contexts. For example, while Hofstede's framework categorizes cultures as either individualistic or collectivistic, many societies exhibit a mix of both traits, depending on context, social groups or personal situations. In Japan, for instance, while collectivist values like group harmony are prioritized, there are also strong individualistic elements in certain aspects of life, such as professional achievement. The reductionist approach provides a useful framework for cross-cultural comparisons but can miss the complexity and fluidity of cultural experiences. Thus, while reductionism offers clarity, it must be balanced with holistic approaches that capture the richness of human behavior.

CAS activity 58

Identify another example of a reductionist study in sociocultural psychology. Discuss the benefits of simplifying complex social behaviors for research purposes, but also consider what important cultural or social factors might be overlooked.

Responsibility: Can potential benefits of research justify partial relaxation of ethical standards?

In sociocultural psychology, ethical dilemmas often arise when research involves social manipulation or deception. For example, Asch's (1951) study on conformity involved placing participants in a situation where they had to choose between conforming to a group's incorrect answer or standing by their own judgment. The study revealed critical insights into how social pressure influences conformity, highlighting the powerful role of group dynamics in shaping behavior. However, the ethical issue lies in the deception used, as participants were misled about the true

nature of the experiment and could have experienced distress when realizing that they conformed to an incorrect group answer. While the study's findings have been influential in understanding social influence, researchers must carefully consider the ethical implications of manipulating participants in such ways. The potential benefits of the research – advancing knowledge of social influence – must be weighed against the psychological harm participants may experience, and ethical guidelines such as informed consent and debriefing are important for balancing these concerns.

CAS activity 59

Imagine you are part of a Research Ethics Committee evaluating a study you have researched. You can choose one from this chapter and access the full version online, or use an entirely new study. Discuss whether the potential benefits of the research outweighed the ethical concerns, and how the researchers balanced these considerations.