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Life's recurring challenges and the fundamental dimensions: An integration and its implications for cultural differences and similarities

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Abstract

We propose that two psychological dimensions, one relevant to relationships and group life (communion, C) and the other to skill acquisition, talent, and accomplishment (agency, A), aid people in interpreting their social worlds. Moreover, our analysis demonstrates the privileged nature of the C dimension and its relative stability compared to the A dimension across contexts and cultures. In Study 1 we use a standard compilation of culturally universal practices and show that the C dimension accounts for the majority of these universals, implying that the meaning of A traits varies more across cultures than that of C traits. In Studies 2 and 3, we provide evidence for this proposal using different judgment paradigms and cultural groups. The findings indicate that there is greater similarity and consensus in how people make sense of and judge information from the C than A dimension. We discuss the findings in terms of the recurring challenges people face over time as a result of living in groups. Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Two core challenges humans have faced over millennia are on the one hand being accepted by others and becoming socially connected and on the other having to manifest skills, competencies, and status, given available opportunities (*cf.* Chance, 1988; Hogan, 1983). We argue that these two evolutionary necessities underlie the fundamental dimensions of *communion* and *agency* discovered and used by researchers to describe various psychological phenomena in personality and social psychology and related disciplines (e.g., Bakan, 1966; Bales, 1950; Leary, 1957; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957; for reviews see Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005; Ybarra, Chan, & Park., 2001). In addition to integrating the idea of life's recurring challenges with these fundamental dimensions, our analysis shows and explains why the *communion* dimension is privileged in terms of what people think about and how they regulate behavior, and it also predicts and explains why the way people make sense of traits and behaviors related to the *agency* dimension, compared to those related to the *communion* dimension, will vary more across contexts, including cultural ones.

The first challenge, connecting with others and being accepted, is addressed by the *communion* dimension (C), which deals with behavioral tendencies such as honesty and kindness and those relevant to group living and a sense of right and wrong in interpersonal relationships. All groups, whether familial, cultural, or those that comprise a larger organization, exert pressure on their members to get along and abide by group norms (*cf.* Homans, 1961; Monane, 1967). Because social rejection is debilitating in many ways (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ybarra, 2002; Ybarra, Burnstein, Winkielman, Keller, Manis, Chan, & Rodriguez, 2008), people generally carry with them the imprint of sociality and the motivation to be good group members regardless of situation or context—thus communion should be a pervasive dimension in much of human life.

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The second challenge, acquiring skills, talent, and status, is addressed through the *agency* dimension (A), which deals with characteristics and behavioral tendencies such as intelligence, competence, and diligence (also see Ybarra et al., 2001). An essential feature of the agency dimension is that talents and skills are not manifested in a social vacuum, as knowledge and solutions to technical or ecological problems cannot be transmitted without the ability to learn from others (Whiten & van Schaik, 2007). Related to this, and unlike the C aspects of behavior, which are expected of all group members, any particular agency-related problem (e.g., the need for protection) or opportunity (e.g., exploiting a resource) should involve only a subset of people or necessitate specific skills and the division of labor. Thus, the occasions for expressing or attaining certain skills, and the status and recognition that results from such displays, may be more limited and tied to the situation (Wish & Kaplan, 1977). So, in terms of *communion*, most if not all people can strive to behave (whether genuinely or not) like good group members. In terms of *agency*, though, different behaviors and skills are likely to be elicited from different members depending on the context.

IS ONE DIMENSION PRIVILEGED? SOCIAL COGNITION AND THE NATURE OF GROUP LIFE

Although behavior and cognition are sensitive to the circumstances and contingencies in people's lives, this does not preclude that one dimension serves as a default by which people view the world, make decisions about it, and regulate behavior. We propose that the C dimension is primary and serves as this default (also see Ybarra et al., 2001).

There are various reasons why the C dimension should be privileged. As discussed earlier, groups pressure members toward following norms (*cf*. Homans, 1961; Monane, 1967), and people strive to be accepted as good group members (*cf*. Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In these extended groups, reciprocal altruism is crucial (Trivers, 1971), as group life is based on getting along and depending on relatives but also non-relatives. Therefore, monitoring others' communion-related behaviors should be more important than monitoring agency-related behaviors because C information reflects whether or not others intend to reciprocate and abide by norms (Ybarra, 2002; Ybarra & Stephan, 1996, 1999; also see Cosmides, 1989). Agency-related information is important in evaluating others, but it is less informative about their commitment to the group. Thus, being sensitive to information about others' C characteristics and behaviors helps sustain indirect reciprocity. This sensitivity should lead to the C dimension being the primary dimension of interest for people in making sense of their surroundings and regulating behavior.

Research from our laboratory (Ybarra et al., 2001) is consistent with this suggestion. We tested how quickly people could recognize stimuli related to the C and A dimensions. We reasoned that if people tend to be more concerned with the C rather than the A aspects of behavior, then the C category and associates should be more accessible in memory, which should facilitate the identification of stimuli related to the C dimension compared to the A dimension. Our findings supported this proposal, as both older and younger adults engaged in a lexical decision task responded faster to words related to the C dimension than the A dimension (Ybarra et al., 2001). Other related findings have shown that even after very short exposures, people make more reliable C than A judgments (Willis & Todorov, 2006). Further, perceivers have greater interest in C than A information in interpersonal judgment (Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998), and when judgments are based on both dimensions, the C aspects of the information are weighted more than the A aspects (e.g., De Bruin & Van Lange, 1999; Lingle & Ostrom, 1979; Martijn, Spears, Van der Pligt, & Jakobs, 1992; Wojciszke et al., 1998; Ybarra, 2001).

The above findings are consistent with the idea that the C dimension is privileged in information processing for different reasons. In developing the present analysis, for our first study we wanted to provide additional and distinct evidence for this proposal.

STUDY 1: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL UNIVERSALS

Method

Materials and Procedure

We content analyzed Brown's list of human universals (Brown, 1991, 2000). The list describes 372 cultural universals in practices compiled from numerous ethnographies written about cultures from around the world. It contains those (observable) universals that all of these cultures exhibit.

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Two independent raters classified the 372 universals into one of four categories: *communion*, defined as practices implicating social interaction, relationships, and the regulation of interpersonal behavior; *agency*, defined as practices enabling people to perform tasks, solve problems, and attain their goals; *both*, defined as practices that have both communion and agency implications; and *neither*, defined as practices with neither communion nor agency related implications. Examples of communion-related universals included: assessing relationships between self and others; airness; taboos; generosity admired; affection expressed and felt; empathy. Examples of agency-related universals included: tools; tool dependency; mental maps; memory; practice to improve skills; critical learning periods. Examples of universals placed in the ''both'' category included: healing the sick; dance; government; division of labor; collective decision making; economic inequalities. Finally, examples of universals placed in the ''neither'' category included: wariness of snakes; liking sweets; right-handedness as norm; sucking wounds; being ambivalent; sickness and death seen as related.

The raters reported no problem with the categorization scheme and showed 70% agreement overall. Given the number of judgments to be made (372) across four judgment categories, the level of agreement is reasonable. The analyses that follow are based on taking each rater's counts across the four categories and averaging them. One could imagine that the common denominator and most basic requirement of all human existence is the need to master one's environment, and therefore expect that a majority of universal cultural features and practices would fall along the agency dimension. We made instead the opposite prediction: because navigating group life should be prior to navigating one's external environment, and because smooth social functioning is a prerequisite for viable cultures, we predicted that the basic common elements shared by most cultures would deal with the communion-related dimension.

Results and Discussion

The results indicated that out of the 372 universals, 244.5 of them could be classified into the C category, the A category, and the ''both'' category. So 66% or 2/3rds of the universals have C and/or A implications.

Of greater interest, we examined the percentage of universals that had to do only with the communion or agency categories. For these two categories, there were 216 universals (avg. of raters' counts), so the percentages we will present next are based on this 216 total. The results indicated that 189.5 of them or just over 87% have to do with the C dimension, whereas 26.5 of them or around 13% have to do with the A dimension, consistent with our hypothesis.

The research we reviewed earlier indicated that the C dimension is on top of people's minds in terms of concepts accessible in memory (Ybarra et al., 2001). An analysis of Brown's universals (Brown, 1991, 2000) is consistent with this conclusion but at a much broader and encompassing level. The cultural features and practices shared by most cultures appear to be dominated by the social and interpersonal realm. Two explanations could account for this. First, it could be that the C dimension so dominates social life that it includes most cultural traits, and that our analysis of shared traits just reflects this. A second (and our favored) possibility is that communion-related traits are more stable across cultures than agency-related traits, which would explain why they are over-represented among shared traits. Study 2 explores this possibility.

STUDY 2: PROTOTYPICALITY OF PERSONALITY TRAITS ACROSS CULTURE

Along with earlier arguments regarding the occasions with which different tasks or problems call for distinct or specialized skills and the common need to divide labor, one implication of our analysis is that the content of the agency dimension (and how people make sense of it) may be quite variable across situations (*cf*. Wish & Kaplan, 1977) and across cultural contexts. For example, some cultures may rely on fishing technology and related skills, whereas others may rely on foraging or hunting on land. In more industrialized settings, some cultures may rely on developing and exploiting large-scale agricultural techniques, whereas others may rely on developing techniques for manufacturing textiles or computing systems. However, despite differing ecological and work-related niches, all individuals regardless of culture are members of a group-living species, which inspires people to get along, avoid social rejection, and consistently try to manifest traits

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and behaviors that support good social standing. Thus, in this next study using a cross-cultural comparison, we were expecting greater similarity in how people make sense of the communion dimension than the agency dimension.

Method

Participants and Design

Thirty-six students (14 men, mean age = 20.66) from the University of Michigan (USA) and 23 students (12 men, mean age = 25.78) from Seoul National University (Korea) volunteered to participate in the study. All participants were presented with positive and negative traits from the C and A dimensions. The materials were presented in the participants' native language. The materials were originally developed in English and were then translated and back-translated by two bilinguals to ensure equivalence in meaning.

Materials and Procedure

We presented the participants with trait terms that pertained to either the C (positive and negative) or the A dimension (positive and negative). Participants first read through a set of definitions. The communion-related dimension was defined to participants as dealing with ''characteristics relevant to social interaction and a sense of right and wrong in interpersonal relationships.'' The agency-related dimension was defined as ''characteristics relevant to task accomplishment, achievement, and attainment.''

After reading the definitions, the participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each trait was prototypical of the respective dimension, using eleven-point scales (0: *not at all prototypical*, 10: *very prototypical*). In total we presented participants with 40 personality traits, 10 per combination of dimension and valence (positive and negative). The pool of traits was taken from Ybarra et al. (2001, Study 2), who had had two judges classify the traits in line with the above definitions. The traits included: trusting, harmonious, sympathetic, trustworthy, sincere, righteous, jocular, polite, obedient, benevolent (positive C-related); rude, malevolent, crooked, withdrawn, hypocritical, injurious, resentful, tyrannical, snobbish, rebellious (negative C-related); astute, inventive, skillful, knowledgeable, talented, methodical, diligent, witty, attentive, purposeful (positive A-related); inept, hasty, sluggish, ignorant, irresponsible, lazy, mediocre, disorganized, idiotic, haphazard (negative A-related).[1] The traits were presented to participants in one random order. After providing their judgments, the participants were debriefed, given course credit, and thanked for their participation.

Results

To test our hypotheses, we wanted to determine if people across cultures would show higher consensus in rating the prototypicality of the C-related traits than the A-related traits. In order to examine the degree of similarity in ratings, we first computed the mean prototypicality rating for each trait and rank ordered it in each country. Then, within each combination of trait dimension (C, A) and valence (positive, negative), we calculated Spearman rank-order correlations between the ratings provided by the American and Korean participants.[2]

Based on our proposal that people should have a relatively more similar understanding of the C dimension and more divergent understanding of the A dimension, we expected that participants would show reliable consensus in rating the

[1]Although word frequency norms are not available for the Korean language, the traits used in these studies showed a trend in the direction of differing as a function of dimension and valence using English norms (some values not available), with positive C traits being the most frequent. It could be suggested that this might account for greater similarity in the ratings across culture. However, it should be noted that there was even greater consensus for the negative C traits across culture, and these traits had the lowest word frequency norms. Thus, an alternative explanation based on the notion of differences in word frequency is not tenable for different reasons.

[2]Our goal was to assess which traits were seen as most prototypical rather than to assess the extent to which any one trait was judged as prototypical, and that is one reason we analyzed the rank orders instead of the interval level data. The second reason has to do with well-established effects on how people across cultures differentially interpret and use Likert-type, interval level scales (Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002). This is not an issue in Study 3, in which we use more frequency-based scales.

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traits from the C dimension but less correspondence in rating the traits from the A dimension. The results indicated that the correlations across cultures were higher and significant when participants assessed the prototypicality of the C-related traits [r_s (10) = .65, $p < .04$ for positive traits and r_s (10) = .85, $p < .002$ for negative traits]. In contrast, for the A-related traits, the correlations across cultures were not significant [r_s (10) = .16, n.s. for positive traits and r_s (10) = .44, n.s. for negative traits]. We further assessed whether the degree of consensus between cultures for the C dimension was greater than for the A dimension. Thus, we combined the traits across valence and calculated the Spearman correlations for each dimension. The correlation between cultures for the C dimension was r_s (20) = 0.77, $p < .0001$, whereas the correlation for the A dimension was r_s (20) = 0.30, $p > .20$. A test of the two correlations (Fisher r to z) yielded a reliable difference, $z = 2.08$, $p = .038$. These results are consistent with our hypotheses.

The findings from Study 2 indicate that there is good consensus as to what constitutes the C-related aspects of behavior across these two cultures, that is, the traits that govern social and interpersonal behavior. Whether rating the positive or negative C-related traits, the correlations were high and significant. On the other hand, it seems more open to interpretation depending on a person's cultural heritage what constitutes the A-related aspects of behavior, that is, the traits most relevant to performing tasks and accomplishing goals. The findings help to show that C-related judgments are not only more common across cultures, but also that the understanding of what qualifies as the best exemplar of the A dimension is more variable across contexts.

STUDY 3: AMOUNT OF BEHAVIORAL EVIDENCE NEEDED TO INFER TRAITS ACROSS CULTURE

In this last study we wanted to reinforce our analysis by using a different judgment paradigm and by contrasting different cultural groups (US and Hong Kong). We asked participants to indicate how much behavioral evidence they needed before they would judge a person has a particular trait characteristic. Research indicates that Westerners more readily infer negative than positive C traits from behavior, consistent with a social vigilance tendency (Ybarra, 2001, 2002; Ybarra & Stephan, 1996, 1999; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987; Reeder & Brewer, 1979). But given the present argument that people should have a more similar understanding of the C aspects of behavior because of their common group-living experience, the importance of remaining socially connected, and the importance of making sure everyone abides by group norms, we reasoned that both American and Hong Kong participants would show similar judgment patterns for the C dimension, requiring more evidence to infer positive than negative C-related traits.

On the other hand, given the present argument about the context dependency of the A dimension, we expected that American and Hong Kong participants would show different judgment patterns for the A dimension. Specifically, previous research has shown that Westerners readily infer positive compared to negative A-related traits from behavior (Skowronski & Carlston, 1987; Reeder & Brewer, 1979), whereas non-Westerners consider A-related traits to be influenced by social expectations, in addition to effort and dedication (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Randel, Stevenson, & Witruk, 2000; Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990; Stevenson & Lee, 1996). For non-Westerners, this should have the effect of masking internal factors in the performance of such behaviors, which should result in the need for more information in ascribing positive A traits. Thus, we expected that Americans would require less evidence to infer positive than negative A-related traits, whereas participants from Hong Kong would show the opposite pattern.

Method

Participants and Design

Seventy-one participants from the University of Michigan psychology subject pool and 87 students from the University of Hong Kong taking a course on speech perception participated in the study. We presented participants with positive and negative, C and A-related traits. The materials were originally developed in English and were then translated and back-translated to ensure equivalence in meaning. One participant from the US and one from Hong Kong had missing responses, so the degrees of freedom vary slightly across analyses.

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Material and Procedure

In a slight variation of a task used by Rothbart and Park (1986), participants answered the following question for each of the presented traits: ''Before you would say that someone is _____ (e.g., honest), how many times would you have to see that person act the way _____ (e.g., honest) people act?'' The questions were answered on five-point scales than ran from (A) 1–2 times, (B) 3–4 times, (C) 5–6 times, (D) 7–8 times, and (E) 9–10 times. Thus, the higher the scores the more evidence people require before they are willing to say a person possesses that characteristic.

Participants saw 12 traits from Ybarra et al. (2001) in one random order. Six of the traits represented positive and negative characteristics from the communion dimension (positive: helpful, honest, friendly; negative: inconsiderate, deceptive, hostile), and six represented positive and negative characteristics from the agency dimension (positive: creative, intelligent, skillful; negative: unimaginative, stupid, clumsy).[1] After providing their judgments, the participants were debriefed, given course credit, and thanked for their time.

Results

We created four summary scores for each participant, one for their ratings of the positive traits and one for their ratings of the negative traits for each dimension. Then we submitted the scores to a 2 (Culture: US vs. Hong Kong) × 2 (Dimension: C vs. A) × 2 (Valence: positive vs. negative) mixed design analysis.

The overall analysis produced a main effect of dimension, as participants required less evidence to infer C traits ($M = 1.99$) overall than A traits ($M = 2.31$), $F(1, 154) = 40.90$, $p < .0001$. This finding seems related to those of Ybarra et al. (2001) and Willis and Todorov (2006), who showed that people more efficiently process C-related information and make more reliable judgments about it even after short exposure times. The analysis also produced a main effect of valence, $F(1, 154) = 4.13$, $p < .04$, an interaction of dimension and culture, $F(1, 154) = 5.17$, $p < .02$, an interaction of valence and culture, $F(1, 154) = 8.09$, $p < .005$, and an interaction of dimension and valence, $F(1, 154) = 26.57$, $p < .0001$. The analysis also produced a marginal three-way interaction of culture, dimension, and valence, $F(1, 154) = 2.87$, $p < .09$.

The valence main effect indicates that people required more evidence to infer positive ($M = 2.21$) than negative traits ($M = 2.08$). The dimension × culture interaction indicated that for the C dimension Americans ($M = 1.89$) required less evidence than the Chinese ($M = 2.10$). This was not the case for the A dimension (Americans, $M = 2.31$; Chinese, $M = 2.30$). The valence × culture interaction indicated that for positive traits Americans ($M = 2.07$) required less evidence than the Chinese ($M = 2.36$). This was slightly reversed, although negligibly, for negative traits (Americans, $M = 2.13$; Chinese, $M = 2.04$). The dimension × valence interaction indicated that for the C dimension, participants required more evidence to infer positive ($M = 2.16$) than negative traits ($M = 1.82$). For the A dimension a trend in the opposite direction appeared (positive, $M = 2.27$; negative ($M = 2.34$).

Although the three-way interaction was only marginally significant, we had *a priori* hypotheses: we expected no reliable differences in the pattern of participants' judgments for the C dimension, but for the A dimension we expected differences as a function of culture. To examine these hypotheses, we ran 2 (Culture: US vs. Hong Kong) × 2 (Valence: positive vs. negative) mixed design analyses within each dimension.

The Communion Dimension

For the C dimension the analyses produced a valence main effect, $F(1, 155) = 19.50$, $p < .001$, as participants required more evidence to infer positive ($M = 2.17$) than negative C traits ($M = 1.82$). There was also a main effect of culture, $F(1, 155) = 4.00$, $p < .05$, with Chinese participants requiring more evidence ($M = 2.10$) to infer traits than the Americans ($M = 1.89$). Of greater relevance, the interaction of the two factors was not significant, $F(1, 155) = 1.86$, $p < .18$. As depicted in Figure 1 (top panel), Americans required more evidence to infer positive ($M = 2.01$) compared to negative C traits ($M = 1.77$), $F(1, 70) = 6.07$, $p < .02$, but so did the Chinese (positive, $M = 2.33$; negative, $M = 1.87$), $F(1, 85) = 14.81$, $p < .0001$. These results are consistent with the hypothesis of a social vigilance tendency across cultures for the C dimension.

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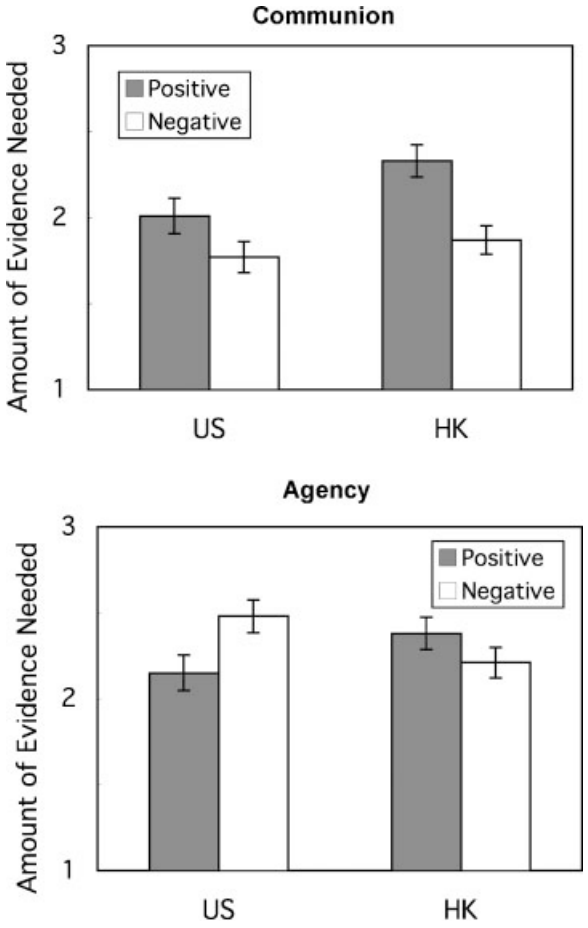

Figure 1. Mean trait judgments (±1 SE) for communion and agency dimensions as a function of valence and culture

The Agency Dimension

For the A dimension, the analyses produced only one significant effect. Consistent with expectations, there was a reliable interaction of Culture × Valence, $F(1, 155) = 12.05$, $p < .001$. As depicted in Figure 1 (bottom panel), Americans required more evidence to infer negative ($M = 2.48$) than positive ($M = 2.15$) A-related traits, $F(1, 69) = 11.48$, $p < .001$, but the Chinese participants required more behavioral evidence to infer positive ($M = 2.38$) than negative ($M = 2.21$) A-related traits, $F(1, 86) = 2.84$, $p < .09$.

The findings from this study indicate that regardless of culture, at least those cultures examined in Study 3, participants have similar behavior-to-trait theories for the C dimension, requiring more evidence before ascribing positive C traits to others. This pattern is consistent with a posited social vigilance tendency in the C dimension (Ybarra, 2001, 2002; Ybarra & Stephan, 1996, 1999) and more generally the idea that the need to monitor and regulate social relations is centrally important for humans. For A-related traits, we found that Americans required more evidence to infer negative traits, whereas Chinese participants showed the opposite pattern. These findings may reflect differences in how much credit is given to innate and internal factors in the manifestation of intelligence and other A-related traits. Specifically, compared to Americans, non-Westerners may abide by a behavior-to-trait theory that puts greater weight on social context, in addition to other behaviors that support A-related traits, such as effort and dedication (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Randel, Stevenson, & Witruk, 2000; Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990; Stevenson & Lee, 1996). These additional factors should mask internal factors in the enactment of behaviors related to such traits, which should result in the need for more

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information in order to ascribe A traits to others. More generally, though, these findings help to support the present analysis indicating that there will be more variation across culture and contexts in how people make sense of the agency dimension compared to the communion dimension.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present studies have shown that the C aspects of traits and behaviors dominate what people think about and do. They have also shown that how people understand and make sense of the C dimension varies less across cultures than how they make sense of the A dimension.

Study 1 provided evidence for the first point by showing that across 372 observed cultural universals in practices, most of them had either C or A implications, or both. And when we looked at those practices classified as only C or A-related, the majority of them were assigned to the C-related category. Thus, a large percentage of what is universal in thought and behavior deals with those aspects of life that are relevant to governing how people interact with others and manage group life.

Studies 2 and 3 built on these findings to examine the idea that how people make sense of the A-related aspects of traits and behaviors varies more across cultural contexts compared to the C-related aspects of behavior. Using different paradigms and comparing different cultural groups, the results showed no cultural differences in judgment for the C dimension. However, for traits and behaviors from the A dimension, the interaction involving culture was significant in both studies. Thus, the C-related dimension produced more similarity across culture, whereas the A-related dimension produced more variation.

The ubiquity of behavioral practices that relate to the communion and agency dimensions makes sense when viewed in the context of the recurring challenges people face over their lifetime and the challenges humans have faced over evolutionary time. On the one hand people need social connections and acceptance, given the many benefits such connections offer (protection, availability of resources, finding mates). This challenge can be met by using the C dimension in information processing and regulating behavior, as it is particularly relevant to group living and a sense of right and wrong in interpersonal relationships. But people also need to develop and attain skills, talent, and status, which are manifested through the A dimension. This challenge can be met by using the A dimension in information processing and regulating behavior, given that the A dimension deals with how people make sense of problems, perform tasks, and distinguish themselves from others.

The potential usefulness of the present results and analyses not only derives from putting the fundamental dimensions in the context of life's recurring challenges, but also from giving a primary role to the C dimension, especially as reflected in the culture-related findings from Study 1. In our analysis, we further propose that a core feature of the A dimension is that talents and skills, and the occasions for attaining and expressing such competencies, may be more limited and tied to the current context. An implication of this reasoning, which we tested and found support for in Studies 2 and 3, is that how people define talent and intelligence, core aspects of the A dimension, may be quite variable across situations, including cultural contexts. On the other hand, with regard to the C dimension, despite differing ecological and work-related niches, humans as members of a group-living species value being socially connected and thus carry the motivation to be good group members and abide by group norms, regardless of context and cultural heritage.

Limitations and Future Directions

Above we suggest that the communion-related dimension, due to its central role in helping people make sense of group life, is not likely to vary across contexts, including culture. As observations accumulate it may turn out that a more accurate way of characterizing the C dimension is that it will encompass some variability in how people make sense of themselves and others, but that compared to the A dimension, it will vary less.

Part of the present analysis builds on the work of many other investigators conducting research in many different areas across decades (for reviews see Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Fiske et al., 2007; Judd et al., 2005; Ybarra et al., 2001). It is important to keep in mind that much of the earlier research was data driven, with the final outcome often being the

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characterization of cognition or behavior as abiding by a small number of dimensions. The present analysis can be applied to some of the earlier research to make some novel predictions too. For example, in studying dyadic interaction, Bales (1950) showed that ratings of members of typical dyads (e.g., parent, child; teacher, student) fell along a task-orientation (A related) dimension and a socio-emotional dimension (C related). The present analysis suggests, though, that the C dimension might serve as a stronger predictor than the A dimension in these ratings, that C status may be more stable over different groups or time, and that members will evaluate and achieve consensus about C status early on and before agency or task status is even contemplated.

CONCLUSION

In discussing our analysis, we propose that there is a ''social'' readiness to people's minds, a conclusion echoed in a variety of findings (see Ybarra et al., 2001, 2008). This readiness for the C dimension makes sense given that the primary challenge for people is to become and stay socially connected. These social connections, with an eye to ecological and environmental demands, in turn may then provide the basis through which people develop and display skills and talents (intelligence) and how they come to make sense of them, the purview of the A dimension.

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