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Chapter 11

Toward a psychology of situations across cultures

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The study of psychologically salient features of situations is a natural product of the confluence of personality and social psychology. Social psychology historically has focused on situational variables via experimental manipulation, while personality psychology has developed an array of tools for psychometric assessment, using correlational methods. Combine the two approaches, and the result is a number of modern research programs aiming to assess the psychologically meaningful aspects of situations. However, until recently the growing network of research on situations has barely begun exploring and comparing situations across cultures. Like the rest of psychology, as the study of situations accelerates, it also needs to extend its reach around the world. This chapter will examine how situational assessment has been conducted both within and across cultures, and some of the methodological and conceptual issues that surround the cross-cultural assessment of situations.

Situation Assessment

Every evening, someone in Italy is making pizza with a romantic partner; in Estonia, someone is taking a sauna with family members; in Canada, someone is drinking beer at a pig roast, and in Japan, someone is singing karaoke with colleagues after work. At the same time, people in all of these countries are watching TV, surfing the Internet, or eating dinner with family or friends¹. All around the world, people experience a wide variety of situations, some of

¹ All descriptions are actual situations sampled from 20 countries for the International Situations Project between 2011 and 2013.

which are unique to their culture and some of which are commonly experienced everywhere. How individuals respond to those situations will depend in part on their background; for example, someone from Iraq or Iran may feel uncomfortable (or refuse) taking saunas with various family members, and someone from Canada may shy away from singing karaoke with work buddies.

Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, and Coon (2002) describe culture as ranging from broad and systemic aspects to more subjective and construal-based aspects, and define three levels of analysis: *distal*, *individual*, and *proximal* (Figure 11-1). In this model, evolution, natural selection, and adaptation abilities channel into societal-level distal culture. Distal culture creates broad structural environments within cultures, and leads to social and individual values that result in more specific social situations that may vary by culture. Thoughts and behaviors then depend upon the each individual's construal of the situation.

Insert Figure 11-1 about here

A *distal* perspective to studying situations in cultures focuses on the ways linguistic tradition, philosophy, religion, teachings, and ideology lead to culture-specific situations (Oyserman et al., 2002). Social institutions maintain the history and philosophical traditions of a culture and provide norms and standards for beliefs and behavior. For example, the anniversary of the death of a loved one may be a sad and mournful day in the life of a typical American. Surviving family members will often don black and solemnly visit the grave in tears. In contrast, the Mexican tradition of the "*Day of the Dead*" brings together both death and social festivities. In this culture, it is thought that the soul of the deceased is present, eating, drinking, and

celebrating alongside family members. Because of the stark contrast between the two cultural practices, the situation of “remembering the death of a loved one” may look very different in the US compared to Mexico.

A *proximal* approach examines culture-laden procedures such as parenting, child-rearing systems, educational systems, and economic systems (Oyserman et al., 2002). Unlike values and attitudes, the systems within a society tend to flux over time, so current cultural practices may be considered like furniture within a house. For example, popular child-rearing styles may vary widely from generation to generation, and heated debates between proponents of modern and traditional practices ensure the bewilderment of first-time parents. Chua (2011) attracted much media attention when she summarized the differences between “Tiger moms” and “Elephant moms,” and compared those differences to a resultant child’s academic success. In Chua’s dichotomy, the Tiger mom is involved and pushy, demanding her children gain self-control and mastery over many subjects; conversely, Elephant moms are permissive and free-wheeling, allowing their children to study at their own will, and with whomever they choose.

Do these differences in parenting styles relate to how children and adults perceive their academic environments later on? One study found that Asian students who perceive high academic pressure from their family generally feel unsatisfied with their GPAs, and Asian students who operate under lower academic pressure feel more satisfied with their academic performance, even if their actual GPAs do not differ (Naumann, Guillaume, & Funder, 2012). In other words, clashing childhood experiences may lead two individuals to perceive similar situations in different ways. Studies of the effects of child rearing have proven useful, but other systemic factors within a country may be more difficult to parse apart, such as the effects of economic and political environments (Georgas & Berry, 1995).

Finally, an *individual* approach to describing situations examines how internalized values, attitudes, scripts and social norms relate to how situations are perceived within cultures (Oyserman et al., 2002). This approach sees culture as steering the day-to-day interactions with friends, family, and co-workers. If broad or distal features of cultures serve as a ceiling on the house, and proximal features represent the furniture within the home, individual values and attitudes would be tightly locked inside the house's safe. Even in societies where the more distal features are stable (e.g., language), differences in individual values and attitudes are apparent to any careful observer. For example, the diverse, rich cultures of Asia are often simply categorized as "Asian." By the same token, Australia, England, New Zealand, and Canada are often lumped together as "Anglo" or "Anglo-American." These countries all share the same official language, house majority white populations, and have historical ties with the British monarchy. Yet Bunyard (2000) humorously (and not necessarily correctly) noted the disparity in how each country values its social relationships:

"Aussies: Believe you should look out for your mates.

Brits: Believe that you should look out for those people who belong to your club.

Americans: Believe that people should look out for and take care of themselves.

Canadians: Believe that that is the government's job."

The model developed by Oyserman and colleagues (2002) outlines how cultures may play a role in the broader environment and day-to-day situations (Figure 11-1). A distal approach to the study of cultures and situations may not reveal many differences for countries that share the same language and religious leanings; a proximal approach may confuse multiple factors, making it difficult separate the effects of each country's politics and economic standing on daily situations. The individual approach is most akin to personality research in which respondents are

asked to report their beliefs, attitudes, and values (without necessarily accounting for why differences among individuals or cultural groups may exist). Out of the three, perhaps an individual approach may be the most fruitful way to examine situations across cultures. A person's very existence can depend upon the ability to correctly interpret and respond to others' behaviors within the context of the situation. Thus, it is important to know if the actions of others are based on long-held beliefs or values, or socially adaptive default reactions to the environment at hand.

Additionally, behavior is not always volitional, but is often a reactive, nearly automatic adaptation to the environment. The classic formulation of this concept comes from Kurt Lewin (1951), who described behavior as a function of the person and the environment ($B = f(P, E)$). Yet this theoretical function may be easier to conceive in the abstract than to apply in concrete instances. Lewin (let alone any other individual or contemporaneous group) never specified a comprehensive function to predict behaviors from personalities and environments at a level of generality that would match the broad sweep of his postulate. Prolific evidence of gene-environment interactions (Lukaszewski & Roney, 2011; Roberts & Jackson, 2008) have since emerged to demonstrate that Lewin's function is no mere matter of arithmetic proportion. Its complexity varies across applications, becoming quite baffling at times. For example, the exciting finding that the 5-HTTLPR gene interacts with stressful life environments to impact important life outcomes has been questioned (Risch et al., 2009). Recently, Bond (2013) suggested that Lewin's formula be considered in more complex terms by taking into account the strength of situational affordances for sociality and status independent of the actor. These considerations may be particularly important in understanding the varying levels of situational constraints on behaviors across cultures.

How can the person be separated from the situation, given the intricacy of their enmeshment? Some degree of interdependency may be fundamentally irrevocable, but some independent elements are identifiable. The first step would be to examine each factor's respective relationship to another, and discuss the main effects of the pair. More specifically, researchers should first observe what types of behaviors are related to certain personality traits, what types of people (personalities) are found in certain situations, and what types of behaviors are inspired by certain situations *before* looking at the interactions among the variables (Funder, 2009).

Personality researchers labored for decades to develop widely-accepted taxonomies and measures of essential personality traits; developing situational taxonomies and measures will surely not be any easier. Too broad of an approach may lead to situational descriptions so lofty that they are rendered psychologically unimportant; a narrow and subjective approach to studying situations may absorb the study of situations back into the study of personality.

Assessing Situations in Terms of Person Characteristics

Over the past few decades, multiple situational taxonomies have been developed, and the variety of descriptions is very wide (Ten Berge & De Raad, 1999). Situations have been described in broad and objective terms, such as locations, environments, settings and places (Saucier, Bel-Bahar & Fernandez, 2007). Situations have also been considered in terms of social interactions, such as working or playing (Krause, 1970). Finally, situations can be conceptualized in very narrow and subjective terms found in individuals' interpersonal relationships (Reis, 2009).

To develop situational taxonomies, researchers have most often chosen either a *lexical* or *empirical* approach. The lexical approach identifies the most essential situations by assessing the

frequency with which words describing them appear in the dictionary; the more prevalent or important a situation, the more words are assumed to be available to describe it. Van Heck (1984) examined Dutch dictionaries for nouns that referred to situations, finding 263 terms that reduced to 10 factors, including “interpersonal conflict,” “joint working,” and “recreation.” Although words that relate to situations may be discovered in the dictionary, lexical approaches don’t always lead to the most useful taxonomies. For example, just as using a single word to describe certain personality types can be woefully inadequate, so too some situations are surely too complex for one-word descriptions. Block (1995) notes, “How does one convey the kind of person who, in desperate circumstances, becomes unnaturally calm and poised?” Similarly, how can one word summarize a situation in which multiple psychological forces are simultaneously operating, such as a work situation where emotionally important people are present?

An empirical approach seeks respondents’ behaviors or feelings in specific situations, sometimes in terms of how the situation relates to personality (Bem and Funder, 1978). People do not act the same way across different situations, nor does everybody act in exactly the same way in any particular situation. Therefore, a natural next step is to connect personality and situational measures. Several situational taxonomies have been developed based on the actions of the target in the situation, or the types of situations that provoke personality characteristics (e.g., situations that may evoke nervousness, fear, talkativeness, competitiveness or cooperation), and also the Big Five personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experience). Additionally, personality descriptors may be used to describe situations, and vice versa. For example, a person may be prosocial or hostile, unstable or passive, strange or normative. So may a situation, an environment, or even a country.

Pervin (1976) was among the first researchers to ask participants to describe the “traits” of their recent situational experiences, as well as the behaviors and feelings that the situations evoked. Four personality-relevant dimensions emerged: tense-calm, interesting-dull, friendly-unfriendly, and constrained-free. Results revealed that nearly all participants were stable in some of their behaviors across all situations, while other of their behaviors varied more across situations. An interesting aspect of this research was the free-response format it employed. Situational descriptions were thus untouched by test construction biases, allowing for the most relevant terms of the situation to be described by each person. Many times, the situation was described in terms of personality (e.g., volatile, demanding, friendly, generous). After these initial efforts by Pervin, others followed suit gathering information about situations as they pertained to personality.

Ten Berge and De Raad (2001) had respondents provide examples of situations using the AB₅C model of personality characteristics that represents lower-level facets of the Big Five, such as self-disclosure and morality (De Raad, Hendriks, & Hofstee, 1992). For example, if a participant were presented with the adjective “caring,” he or she might construct the following: “The woman is caring because she has many children.” Situations were clustered into broader categories, such as “Situations of adversity” and “Situations of amusement.” The categories were then compared to personality traits. For example, “Situations of Adversity” were suited for the expression of emotional stability or instability. Saucier, Bel-Bahar and Fernandez (2007) also used personality adjectives to determine important situations. The authors chose 50 of the most common person-descriptor adjectives relevant to behaviors in the situations, such as “persistent” and “emotional.” Each word was used to form a sentence in which the participant filled in a blank, such as, “I’m least likely to be PERSISTENT when ____.” If a situation was mentioned

at least ten times, it was considered important in revealing personality. From these, four classes emerged: locations, subjective states, interpersonal associations, and actions and positions.

Certain situations are required for certain traits to manifest themselves. For example, one cannot be “impudent” unless a situation has an uneven balance of power among those in it (Ten Berge & De Raad, 2002). Ten Berge and De Raad (2002) developed a taxonomy of situations based on one’s ability to deal with those situations, which were related to the Big Five Factors of personality. Sentences to describe situations were constructed from behavioral expressions, including “Understanding a joke,” “Solving a problem,” and “Being in traffic.” The results indicated that a person’s ability to cope with a situation (e.g., an anxiety-ridden one) is a function of personality (e.g., neuroticism). Fleeson (2007) also investigated whether situations were predictors of variability in personality states among individuals. Over a five-week period, participants recorded how they were acting and what the situation was like at five points during each day. Situational reports were prompted by a variety of questions. Some tapped in to objective physical properties of the environment such as locations, while others were more subjective, such as, “How friendly were other people?” Personality states were also reported using adjectives from traditional Big Five scales, such as “During the last half hour, how friendly have you been?” Three essential types of situations were identified: task orientation, anonymity, and others’ status. Changes in state extraversion, emotional stability and conscientiousness were all significantly predicted by the situations. Finally, Vansteelandt and van Mechelen (2004) presented participants with hypothetical situations intended to incite varying levels of anger. Participants were then asked to what extent they would display their anger for each frustrating situation (e.g., not at all; to a strong extent). Participants filled out a questionnaire that assessed trait-like levels of hostility. The ability to distinguish varying levels of frustrating situations and

appropriate responses covaried with underlying trait hostility for each individual. Although a main effect of the frustrating situations manifested in participants reporting some type of frustrating response to the situations was found, the behavior associated with that response depended upon individual differences in hostility.

Lastly, some researchers argue that the most important features of a situation stem from the people who are present in it (Reis, 2008). For example, a meeting is a familiar social situation, but its current members define the psychologically important features, just as the landscape from one romantic relationship to another may vary greatly. Anderson and Thorpe (2009) developed a model of relational situations solely based on significant others. Inspired by the CAPS framework (Mischel & Shoda, 1995), the model was organized in terms of *if...then* patterns. For example, *if* in the company of someone who resembles a significant other, *then* you behave as you would with the significant other. In this light, the important situational determinants of behavior are social in nature. However, studies such as these are few and far between (Reis, 2009), perhaps because a comprehensive list of *if...then* scenarios would lead to hundreds of thousands of different situation-behavior combinations. Moreover, every person has a unique CAPS profile, and such overwhelming complexity can only be resolved by resorting to types of profiles. Additionally, the CAPS framework is quite abstract; situations are typically referred to as "Situation A" and "Situation B" without being specific about the important ways in which situations are different.

Researchers have begun to determine the most suitable methods for developing and measuring situations. Based on the previous studies, a clear link between the situation and the person may be apparent; thus, measures of situations should parallel measures of persons in order to determine the psychologically relevant qualities of both and the relationships between

them. Thus far, research has begun to identify important situations within cultures. Yet few researchers have begun to compare situations across cultures, which is necessary for researchers to determine which aspects of situations are universal and which are culture-specific.

Situations across Cultures

Studies comparing situations across cultures are sparse, and have mostly been limited to work by anthropologists providing rich, detailed and subjective descriptions of culture-specific environments (Shweder, 1991). Some writers suggest that the psychologically salient aspects of situations are evoked by both universal and specific qualities of cultures, and the extent to which people differ across cultures may arise from the differing situations experienced (Brown, 1991; Triandis, 1996). In addition, evidence suggests that members of differing cultures may perceive the same situation differently. For example, Masuda and Nisbett (2001) asked both Japanese and US participants to describe animated vignettes of underwater environments. US participants referred mainly to features of individual fish in their focal visual field, whereas Japanese participants were more likely to mention peripheral or background information. Therefore, it is possible that if reports were gathered from both Japanese and US participants, their descriptions of a given situation might differ substantially.

In line with previous research, most studies of situations across cultures have focused on how situations elicit behaviors related to personality. In one experience-sampling study (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumonot, & Narasakkunkit, 1997), participants in the US and Japan recalled situations that had been relevant to their self-esteem, resulting in 200 descriptions from Japan and 200 from the US. The Japanese situations were translated in to English, and the American situations were translated in to Japanese, resulting in a total of 400 descriptions. Respondents from each country were asked to think about how each situation related to their

self-esteem. Examples included the following: “When I feel that nobody is watching me,” (Japan) and “When I’m dancing” (US). For each situation, if respondents felt their self-esteem would be affected, they indicated to what extent it would increase or decrease. Results indicated that self-enhancement was greater in the US, and that the US respondents produced more self-enhancing situations. In contrast, the situations originating in Japan promoted self-criticism, and these self-critical situations were judged as having more influence on self-esteem than the success situations. It appears that US individuals are relatively likely to notice, elaborate, and emphasize the positive aspects of social situations while deemphasizing the negative aspects. Conversely, Japanese individuals more often notice, elaborate, and emphasize negative aspects while deemphasizing positive aspects (Kitayama et al., 1997).

In another study, Boiger, Mesquita, Uchida, and Barrett (2013) reanalyzed emotional situation descriptions that Mesquita and Karasawa (2002) had gathered. Four times a day for eight days, participants from the US and Japan described situations at 12PM, 3PM, 6PM, and 9PM. Boiger and colleagues (2013) then selected the situations that were interpersonal in nature and elicited anger or shame for both US and Japanese participants. For example, this situation provoked anger: “Lauren was trying to discuss in which order she and her co-workers at her part-time job will take breaks. One of them interrupted her and told her to stop chatting and just take her break” (Japan). On a 7-point Likert scale, participants rated the situations on the likelihood that the situations would elicit either shame or anger. Results indicated that anger is more intense and frequent in the US, whereas shame is more intense and frequent in Japan. Additionally, Kam and Bond (2008) noted that in the US and Hong Kong, relationship deterioration was mediated by anger and shame, and two behavioral reactions (retaliation and avoidance). Consistent with

widely held hypotheses, loss of face was found to be more influential in provoking anger and relationship deterioration for participants in Hong Kong than for US participants.

Morling, Kitayama, and Miyamoto (2002) compared situations that involved either influence or adjustment in the US and Japan. An *influence situation* refers to a situation in which one perceives oneself as able to control or shape the situation. An *adjustment situation* refers to a situation in which one feels able to align their behaviors to fit the situation. Examples of influence situations included the following: “I have a lot of hair and it is difficult to wash. So I cut it short so it is easy to wash now” (Japan) and “I talked my sister out of dating a guy who I knew was a jerk” (US). Examples of adjustment situations included the following: “When I am out shopping with my friend, and she says something is cute, even when I don’t think it is, I agree with her” (Japan) and “I had to adjust last school year when one of my roommates’ boyfriends moved into our house” (US). Results indicated that US participants listed more influence situations and Japanese participants listed more adjustment situations. Additionally, influence situations afforded more efficacy to American participants than to Japanese participants. In turn, adjustment situations afforded more relatedness to Japanese participants than to Americans. Finally, US participants reported stronger feelings of efficacy in influence situations, and Japanese participants reported stronger feelings of relatedness in adjustment situations. Conversely, members of both countries rated efficacy higher in influence situations, and also rated feelings of relatedness higher for adjustment situations (Morling et al., 2002).

Church, Katigbak, and del Prado (2010) investigated the relationships between Big Five characteristics or related behaviors and situations in the US and the Philippines. The authors reviewed the literature for situational categories that might differ in their affordances for behaviors related to the Big Five, which resulted in 11 situational categories (e.g., Relationships,

Intellectual demands, Cooperation). Participants in both countries reported how each of the traits would be expressed in 29 situations that were intended to relate to each trait. Trait-situation items for extraversion included, “With a stranger,” and “With a romantic partner.” Perhaps surprisingly, the authors found more similarities than differences; Big Five behavior-situation patterns did not differ significantly across cultures, although Filipinos reported more situational contexts that related to neurotic behaviors than did participants from the US.

Gelfand and colleagues (2011) studied how situations are perceived across “tight” and “loose” cultures. Countries considered tight exhibit strong norms and a low tolerance for deviant behavior, whereas loose countries have weak norms and a high tolerance for deviant behavior. Data were gathered from 6,823 respondents across 33 nations, and participants rated the appropriateness of 12 behaviors (i.e., arguing, eating, laughing, cursing/swearing, kissing, crying, singing, talking, flirting, listening to music, reading the newspaper, bargaining) across 15 situations (i.e., bank, doctor’s office, job interview, library, funeral, classroom, restaurant, public park, bus, bedroom, city sidewalk, party, elevator, workplace, movies). As predicted, members of countries with higher scores on tightness exhibited behaviors that tied to social norms and monitored their behaviors in situations more so than members of loose cultures. Although the objective features of the situations were unchanged, behavioral responses to similar situations differed meaningfully across cultures.

Similarly, Realo and Gelfand, (2015) had observers record behaviors seen in a bank, bus, funeral ceremony, public park, city sidewalk, restaurant, supermarket, waiting room at the bus station in Greece and Estonia. Greek and Estonian behavior differed significantly in city sidewalks and funeral ceremonies. Greeks ate, read the newspaper and smoked more than Estonians on the city sidewalk. Both on the city sidewalk and during the funeral ceremony,

Estonians conversed more frequently compared to Greeks. Lastly, in both Estonia and Greece, a job interview and a funeral ceremony were considered the tightest (strongest) situations, having a limited number of acceptable behaviors, whereas one's bedroom and the public park were the loosest (weakest) situations, with fewer behavioral constraints. Analyses determined that situational constraints in school and organizational settings, such as classroom/lecture hall, job interview and workplace were much stronger in Greece than in Estonia. Therefore, the findings from this study also suggest that situational strength may vary substantially both within and across cultures.

In general, situational assessment across cultures has been limited. Most studies compare only two countries (e.g., Japan and the US). Comparing just a pair of countries may be problematic because the US is often held up as the standard to which all other countries are compared which may result in seeing the world through a white, educated, industrialized, religious, democratic (W.E.I.R.D.) viewpoint. Additionally, comparing only two or three countries may not suffice for determining which of multiple competing theories offers the best explanations for cultural differences because *every* difference between the countries is confounded with the independent variable of putative interest. One reason for the sparse collection of articles on the assessment of every day situations across a broader array of cultures may be a result of the lack of an assessment tool suitable for many diverse countries and languages.

Choosing the Right Measure for Cross-cultural Assessments of Situations

How should situations be compared across multiple cultures? The issue of evaluating the degree to which assessments are comparable across cultures (or other contexts) is often referred to as "measurement invariance." The problem of measurement invariance has numerous facets.

Several researchers have noted that Likert scales, commonly used in cross-cultural research, might artifactually either enlarge or shrink cross-cultural differences (Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002; Hui & Triandis, 1985, 1989; Kulas & Stachowski, 2009; Ross & Mirowsky, 1984; van de Vijver & Leung, 2011). One of the most commonly discussed problems with Likert scales is response bias, which can occur when respondents acquiesce to statements more readily than they disagree, respond in socially desirable manners, endorse the extreme ends of a scale, or favor the middle categories. Those who acquiesce tend to agree with statements or items that are presented regardless of content, and those who want to look good to others or themselves may identify themselves with more positive and socially acceptable items. This may be an attribute of individual differences, but it can also be a cultural phenomenon. Ross and Mirowsky (1984) compared Anglos, Mexicans, and Mexican-Americans and found that those of Mexican origin respond more commonly in a way that puts their best face forward. This may be due to the relatively collectivistic Mexican culture, as acquiescence response bias is greater among collectivist nations. *Extreme response bias* also occurs in cultural groups that tend to favor the extreme ends of Likert scales over moderate responses. In general, European countries tend to have less extreme responses than other countries (McCrae, 2002). A tendency to mark more extreme ends of Likert scales may also result from fatigue, a desire to remain consistent, or familiarity with the hypothesis (Hui & Triandis, 1985, 1989).

Additionally, when residents of different countries have the same underlying latent constructs (e.g., personality traits), but items that measure these constructs do not have the same degree of familiarity or usage across cultures, item bias may occur. Poor translations or the use of idioms and other colloquial language can bias items, and unclear items can increase the frequency of middle category endorsements (Kulas & Stachowski, 2009). When item bias is

present, concerns with measurement invariance arise; therefore item clarity must be established before translations are finalized, and linguistic variation and sensitive translation is often necessary in order to retain the meanings of items.

Finally, when people evaluate their own characteristics they tend to compare themselves to others, which may result in a *reference group effect* (Heine et al., 2002). For example, a tendency to compare oneself to others when responding to items on Likert scales could render the middle point of any response scale to be the perceived average score of the participant's reference group (Heine et al., 2002). Some suggest the reference group effect may directly influence measurement invariance, especially if reference groups differ across populations (Chen, 2008). In one study, participants were asked to rate themselves on personality measures using Likert scales, and then rate themselves again on those same measures, but in comparison to a reference group (family, peers, or people in general). Responses varied depending on the group referenced, and sometimes differences across countries fell away (Credé, Bashshur, & Niehorster, 2010). Ways to counter the reference group effect include instructing respondents to compare themselves to a certain group of interest, or using forced-choice measures (Heine et al., 2002).

Overall, Likert scales may pose multiple problems for cross-cultural researchers. Cultural difference in response styles and poor item translations may exaggerate cultural differences in constructs of primary interest, whereas reference group effects may shrink estimates of cultural differences. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a tool to measure situations that circumvents measurement problems in cross-cultural research. In addition, previous findings suggest that measures of situations should a) be utilized similarly by divergent groups of people, b) allow for

a wide range of situations to be reported, c) contain items that relate to personality, and d) ensure items are as free as possible from culture-specific idioms.

The Riverside Situational Q-sort (RSQ) for Situational Assessment across Cultures

Although previous researchers have used personality as a basis for the development of situational taxonomies, none has produced a *tool* to measure those situations—much less one that is modeled after an existing personality measure. Theoretically this strategy should lead to a measure with psychologically salient items for the description of both situations and personality. Stronger predictions of behavior may also be established because the parallel terms are used to describe the person and the situation. Plus, a situational taxonomy should include situations represented in items measuring any trait because traits represent behaviors that generalize across certain situations (Saucier, Bel-Bahar & Fernandez, 2007). Congruent measures facilitate this parallelism. For example, a personality item like “How talkative is the person?” may be compared to a situational item such as, “How much does the situation invite talking?” In fact, the recently-developed Riverside Situational Q-sort (RSQ; Wagerman & Funder, 2006) attempts to do just that.

The RSQ consists of 89 descriptors of situational aspects derived from a venerable and widely-used Q-sort measure of personality, the California Adult Q-sort (CAQ; Block, 1961). The RSQ began with CAQ personality items as the basis of measurement for important features of situations (Ten Berge & De Raad, 1999; Wagerman & Funder, 2006), while also adding other situational descriptors. For example, the personality item, “Is critical, skeptical, not easily impressed,” yielded the situation item, “Someone is trying to impress or convince someone of something.” The idea was that someone in a situation described in this way would vary in their response to it, depending upon their position on the relevant personality dimension. In the rating

process, RSQ items are sorted into a 9-step forced-choice distribution ranging from “highly characteristic” to “highly uncharacteristic.” Unlike Likert scales, each item is compared to the others so that only three of the most salient aspects of situations may be rated as highly characteristic and another three as highly uncharacteristic.

Forced-choice instruments may be particularly well suited for cross-cultural research for several reasons. First, measures such as the RSQ might help to minimize reference group effects. Heine and colleagues (2002) found that when people were asked to describe their own traits or personal attributes, they tended to compare themselves to those around them—not with those in different countries. The same may happen with situations. If a person from an inland war zone and a person from a peaceful tropical island were both asked to describe the experience of evening walks, one might expect very different descriptions from each person. However, if forced to decide which aspects of the situation are *most* characterized by evening walks, the two descriptions might become more comparable.

Additionally, the ipsative nature of forced-choice instruments such as the RSQ eliminates other response styles that complicate cross-cultural research (Ross & Mirowsky, 1984; van de Vijver & Leung, 1997, 2011). For example, Q-sorts eliminate acquiescence bias by forcing a set number of items into each evaluative category; thus respondents cannot give all items equal, affirmative responses. Likewise, Q-sorting reduces social desirability bias and extreme responding because the highest and lowest rating categories only allow for a few items, thus forcing the most and least desirable items to be spread across categories rather than all being rated as “high” or “low.”

Table 11-1 displays the first version of the RSQ specially developed for cross-cultural research (RSQ 3.15; Funder & Guillaume, 2011). Before translations were done, the RSQ was

revised by simplifying complex items, separating singular yet double-barreled items into two items, and eliminating common idioms that did not make sense in other cultures. Thus, “Situation has potential to arouse internal conflicts and related anxiety (e.g., ambivalence, competing motivations),” was revised to “Situation has potential to arouse competing motivations.” Subtle changes to items were made to help increase universal meanings, making the RSQ easier to translate.

After the RSQ is translated in to the target language, a qualified bilingual person without prior knowledge of the materials translates the items back to English. The two versions are then compared, and translations that lose or change their meanings are revised. Some items that required revision in the Arabic language included, “Situation might evoke warmth and compassion” (back translation: “Situation might evoke warmth and pathetic”), “Exhibits condescending behavior” (back translation: “Displays the behavior of transcendence”), and “Behaves in a fearful or timid manner” (back translation: “Behaves in a fearful or cowardly manner”). These and other translations that changed their meaning were revised before final translations were settled upon.

[PLACE TABLE 11-1 ABOUT HERE]

There are many ways to analyze RSQ data from multiple countries. One way is to look at how behaviors relate to each of the 89 situational items. Initially—and perhaps traditionally—the first study to do this compared the US and Japan (Funder, Guillaume, Kumagi, Kawamoto, & Sato, 2012). Using an open-ended format, participants in both countries wrote what they were doing, where they were, and who they were with the previous evening at 7 PM. This strategy mirrored some of the first efforts to quantify situations (Pervin, 1976). However, the participants’ open-ended answers were only a beginning. They also provided a quantifiable description of the

situation using the items of the RSQ (Saucier et al., 2007). Next, participants described their behaviors in the situation using the 68-item Riverside Behavioral Q-sort (RBQ 3.11; Funder, Furr, & Colvin, 2000). Like the RSQ, RBQ items were originally derived from the California Adult Q-sort (CAQ) personality measure, linking all three measures together.

Results were surprising. In contrast to previous research that has focused on the differences between Japan and the USA, Funder and colleagues (2012) discovered that behaviors associated with situational aspects were highly similar in both countries. For example, when members of the opposite sex were present, respondents in the US and Japan reported making relatively constant eye contact and physical contact, expressed warmth, and felt physically attractive; in both countries, participants were unlikely to feel sorry for themselves, say negative things, or express criticism.

A second way to analyze RSQ data is through country-level comparisons of RSQ profiles. Each participant's entire 89-item Q-sort may be averaged across all participants, resulting in one Q-sort per country. Country-level Q-sorts may then be correlated in order to determine how similar averaged situational profiles are across cultures. Guillaume and colleagues (2015) compared RSQ profiles of situations in 14 languages across 20 countries. Again, participants used an open-ended format to describe what they had done the previous evening at 7 PM, and then they described the situation using the RSQ, which yielded one situational profile for each participant. These profiles were then averaged within each country, creating one situational profile for each. Compared across countries, a 20×20 correlation matrix resulted. The US and Canada reported the most similar situations ($r = .95$); South Korea and Denmark differed the most, but were still highly similar ($r = .73$). On average, college students

across the 20 countries sampled were likely to be engaged in similar, universal situations (e.g., eating dinner with family or friends, watching TV, surfing the internet).

A third way to examine situations using the RSQ is to examine the homogeneity of situational experience within countries. Within-country comparisons among individual RSQ profiles indicated that ratings of situations by Japanese participants were the most the most homogenous (compared to the other 20 countries); South Korean participants' descriptions were on average least similar to others in their country. In other words, the most and least heterogeneous countries in this study were both Asian. This is perhaps surprising, as Asian countries and cultures have been lumped together in psychological studies in the past. These results provide a strong rationale for de-emphasizing "Asian" as a meaningful category for cultural comparison; Asian countries may not be particularly similar to each other compared to other countries around the world; almost certainly, they are not as similar as stereotypes often seem to assume (Bond & Lun, 2014).

Turning to analyses of specific characteristics of situations, RSQ items may be examined to see which situational experiences vary the most and least across countries. The items that varied the most across countries were, "Situation is potentially emotionally arousing," and, "Others are present who need or desire reassurance". The least varying items were, "A decision needs to be made," "Members of the opposite sex are present," and, "Situation is potentially enjoyable." In general, the items describing relatively negative aspects of situations varied most across countries in how mean rankings of items differed; relatively positive items varied least. These findings support a well-known cultural truism, as noted by Tolstoy in his novel *Anna Karenina*, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Content and enforcement of social norms may vary across cultural environments (Gelfand et al.,

2011; Reno, Cialdini & Kallgren, 1993), but this may differentiate positive or desirable situational construals relatively less than negative or undesirable situational construals.

Last, the country means of the 89 RSQ items may be correlated with other country level variables provided by cross-cultural researchers (e.g., Hofstede, 2001). Guillaume and colleagues (2015) examined the country level correlations between the RSQ situational experiences and six dimensions of values, the Big Five personality traits, and GDP. Results showed that openness to experience related to countries where people were free to disagree and weren't abused and victimized; neuroticism was higher in countries where people sought reassurance and felt abused. Finally, countries with higher GDPs and larger populations (e.g., the US and China) were more likely to include situations that related to blame and dominance.

As the first tool developed for cross-cultural assessment of everyday situations, the RSQ has already captured important aspects of situations related to personality. Similar to essential personality traits, aggregated global or general situations yielded expected behaviors. It is not surprising that on average, extraverts talk more than others. It is also not surprising that parties produce more talking. Additionally, this preliminary effort was the first of its kind to reveal that every day situations experienced by university students around the world are highly similar in nature. For possibly the first time, meaningful comparisons of everyday situations both within and across many countries were uncovered to reveal perhaps surprising similarities across countries.

Future Directions

We can safely say the road ahead is a long one. As Bowers (1973) suggested, "Situations are as much a function of the person as the person's behavior is a function of the situation" (pg. 327). In the past, the relationships between behaviors and personalities have been measured and

analyzed widely, and any variance left over was attributed to the situation. Yet this practice is obviously flawed. Without actually measuring the situation, residual variance could just as easily be attributed to another unmeasured trait as it could the situation. Researchers have begun to suggest ways to study person-situation interactions (Furr, 2009; van Mechelen, 2009), but more methods and measures need to be developed.

Thus far, our knowledge of how situational experiences differ across countries is limited, and very few studies have compared more than two cultural groups (Gelfand et al., 2011; Guillaume et al., 2015). The study of situations needs to include more countries and sub-cultures within countries. One possible reason why the findings from Guillaume and colleagues (2015) revealed such similar situations across countries may be because the study tapped in to a global “college” culture (Flere & Lavrič, 2008). Therefore, researchers should eventually move outside university samples and seek data from community members, although these kinds of comparisons entail their own serious problems.

Additionally, our understanding of situations within and across countries may never be complete because the person and the situation are tightly entwined at times, and certain situations within cultures may be highly idiosyncratic. Therefore, investigators should not only examine situations, but also persons and behaviors. The RSQ items were derived from a personality measure—the CAQ—and both have been translated into numerous languages. The CAQ and the RSQ use similar terms to measure both personality and the situation, meaning that the convergent measures make comparisons straightforward. For example, the RSQ item #57, “Situation is humorous or potentially humorous” does not in fact provide information as to whether anyone in the situation found humor. A comparison to CAQ item #56, “Responds to and appreciates humor” would give us richer information about both the situation and the person

involved. Additionally, the RBQ item #19 “Expresses Criticism” would provide useful information about the congruency among person-situation-behavior relationships (Sherman, Nave, & Funder, 2012). Therefore, future studies should investigate the relationships among personality, situations, and behaviors across cultures.

Lastly, Rauthmann and colleagues (2014) recently developed a new taxonomy and measurement tool for situations (RSQ-8) based on samples combined across several cultures. The RSQ was used to develop the “Situational Eight DIAMONDS” dimensions: Duty, Intellect, Adversity, Mating, pOsitivity, Negativity, Deception, and Sociality. The RSQ-8 is a streamlined version of the RSQ specifically tapping the DIAMONDS dimensions. It samples each DIAMONDS dimension with four items and thus contains 32 items instead of the original 89-item version. This tool may be particularly useful in cross-cultural studies that often focus on experience sampling designs where a shorter version of the RSQ-8 may be desirable.

Like personality, situations have universal features: across the globe, people are socializing over meals, watching TV or using the internet. Yet there are also specific situations that would not “translate” well across cultures. For example, during the winter months in Estonia, it is common to visit saunas with one’s immediate family and relatives. This situation may be strange for someone from South Africa, where families do not visit saunas together. Customs and proper social behaviors in Estonia might confuse South Africans, and vice versa. Because psychological processes or construals of situations may at times systematically differ across cultures, some researchers suggest taking an emic approach to the study of situations within cultures (Kitayama et al., 1997). Therefore, future research could also focus on developing new techniques for measuring situations not just across cultures, but also to capture the unique aspects of situations found only within cultures. However, this will not be easy.

Traditionally, the field of anthropology has focused on aspects of cultures that make them unique, and de-emphasized or eschewed entirely comparing cultures with one another. The tradition of cross-cultural psychology is different, focusing on finding ways to make meaningful comparisons between cultures. Reconciling these two traditions is a long-term challenge for both fields.

Conclusion

Situations have been successfully defined, conceptualized, and examined on many levels within cultures (Krause, 1970; Reis, 2009; Saucier et al., 2006; ten Berge & De Raad, 2001, 2002; van Heck, 1984; Wagerman & Funder, 2009). Recently, the study of situations has moved across cultures (Boiger et al., 2013; Church et al., 2010; Funder et al., 2012, Gelfand et al., 2011; Guillaume et al., 2015; Kitayama et al., 1997; Morling et al., 2002). There are many ways to measure situations across cultures, and the RSQ provides one way of doing so. Although unique and country-specific situations are occurring everywhere, it appears that—at least among university students—people are more likely to be engaged in situations that are universally experienced rather than unique country-specific situations. However, the study of situations within or across countries has just begun, and any more attempts to shed light will be welcome.

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Table 11-1

Riverside Situational Q-sort 3.15 in English

1. Situation is potentially enjoyable.
2. Situation is complex.
3. A job needs to be done.
4. Someone is trying to impress P.
5. Someone is trying to convince P of something.
6. P is counted on to do something.
7. Talking is permitted.
8. Talking is expected or demanded.
9. P is being asked for something.
10. Someone needs help.
11. Minor details are important.
12. Situation evokes values concerning lifestyles or politics.
13. Affords an opportunity to demonstrate intellectual capacity. (e.g., an intellectual discussion, a complex problem needs to be solved)
14. Situation is uncertain.
15. Another person (present or discussed) is under threat.
16. P is being criticized, directly or indirectly.
17. Someone is attempting to dominate or boss P.
18. Situation is playful.
19. Introspection is possible. (e.g., the atmosphere allows or encourages reflection upon deeply personal issues)
20. Things are happening quickly. (Low placement implies things are happening slowly.)
21. Someone (present or discussed) is unhappy or suffering.
22. A reassuring other person is present.
23. P is being blamed for something.
24. A decision needs to be made.
25. Rational thinking is called for.
26. Situation calls for self-restraint.
27. Situation involves competition.
28. Affords an opportunity for P to do things that might make P liked or accepted.
29. Others are present who need or desire reassurance.
30. Situation entails frustration. (e.g., a goal is blocked)
31. Physical attractiveness of P is relevant.
32. It is important for P to make a good impression.
33. Situation would make some people tense and upset.
34. Situation includes one or more small annoyances.
35. Situation might evoke warmth or compassion.
36. A person or activity could be undermined or sabotaged.
37. It is possible for P to deceive someone.
38. Someone else in this situation (other than P) might be deceitful.
39. Situation may cause feelings of hostility.
40. People are disagreeing about something.
41. Affords an opportunity to express unusual ideas or points of view.
42. Situation contains physical threats.

43. Situation contains emotional threats.
44. Situation raises moral or ethical issues. (e.g., a moral dilemma is present; a discussion of morality)
45. A quick decision or quick action is called for.
46. Situation allows a free range of emotional expression.
47. Others present might have conflicting or hidden motives.
48. Situation entails or could entail stress or trauma.
49. Affords an opportunity to ruminate, daydream or fantasize.
50. Situation has potential to arouse guilt in P.
51. Close personal relationships are present or have the potential to develop.
52. Someone other than P is counted on to do something.
53. Situation includes intellectual or cognitive stimuli. (e.g., books, lectures, intellectual conversation)
54. Assertiveness is required to accomplish a goal.
55. Situation includes potential for immediate gratification of desires. (e.g., food, shopping, sexual opportunities)
56. Social interaction is possible.
57. Situation is humorous or potentially humorous. (if one finds that sort of thing funny)
58. P is the focus of attention.
59. Situation includes sensuous stimuli. (e.g., touch, taste, smell, physical contact)
60. Situation is relevant to bodily health of P. (e.g., possibility of illness; a medical visit)
61. Success in this situation requires self-insight.
62. P controls resources needed by others.
63. Others present a wide range of interpersonal cues. (e.g., body language, tone of voice, social signals)
64. Situation includes behavioral limits. (e.g., rules or social norms that might or might not be challenged)
65. Situation includes aesthetic stimuli. (e.g., art, music, drama, beauty)
66. Situation is potentially anxiety-inducing.
67. Situation makes demands on P. (either explicitly or implicitly)
68. Affords an opportunity to express or demonstrate ambition.
69. Situation might make P feel inadequate.
70. Situation includes stimuli that could be construed sexually.
71. Situational demands are rapidly shifting.
72. P is being abused or victimized.
73. Members of the opposite sex are present.
74. Potential romantic partners for P are present.
75. Situation has potential to arouse competing motivations.
76. Situation is basically simple and clear-cut.
77. Affords an opportunity to express charm.
78. Situation involves social comparison.
79. Situation raises issues of power. (for P or others present)
80. Affords an opportunity to express masculinity.
81. Others may need or are requesting advice from P.
82. Independence or autonomy of P is questioned or threatened.
83. Situation is potentially emotionally arousing.

- 84. Affords an opportunity for demonstrating verbal fluency. (e.g., a debate, a monologue, an active conversation)
 - 85. People who are present occupy different social roles or levels of status.
 - 86. P is being pressured to conform to the actions of others.
 - 87. Success requires cooperation.
 - 88. P is being complimented or praised.
 - 89. Affords an opportunity to express femininity.
-

Note. P refers to the person whose presence in the situation is at issue.

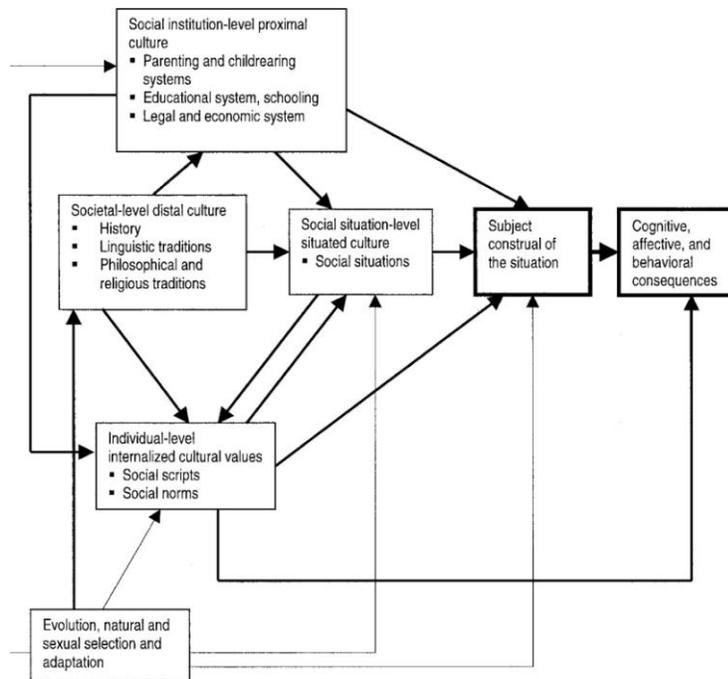


Figure 11-1. A model of cultural influences developed by Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, and Coon (2002). Critical connections between construal and cultural consequences are drawn in bold; narrow lines linking evolution and natural selection to culture represent that the connections may not be causal. From Oyserman, D., Kimmelmeier, M., & Coon, H. M. (2002). Cultural psychology: A new look. *Psychological Bulletin*, 128(1), p. 113, published by the American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.