DEALING WITH CULTURE CLASHES

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Annotation: We propose that *the culture cycle*—a tool that represents culture as a multilayered, interacting, dynamic system ofideas, institutions, interactions, and individuals—can be useful to researchers and practitioners by: (1) revealing and explaining the psychological dynamics that underlie today's significant culture clashes and (2) identifying ways to change or improve cultural practices and institutions to foster a more inclusive, equal, and effective multicultural society.
Keywords: Culture, multiculturalism, inequality, culture change, cultural divides, identity and conflict.

INTRODUCTION

U.S. Americans are calling out the role of "culture" today as they struggle to make sense of their increasingly diverse and divided worlds. To say "It's cultural," or "It's a culture clash," or "We need a culture change" is becoming idiomatic. People invoke culture as they confront pressing issues in business, government, law enforcement, entertainment, education, and more, and as they grapple with power and inequality in the institutions and practices of these domains (e.g., racism, classism, homophobia, imperialism).

MAIN PART

At the heart of these culture clashes are questions about the meaning and nature of social group differences, as well as the ways in which these differences are more often than not constructed as forms of inequality and marginalization (Markus, 2008; Markus and Moya, 2010; Salter and Adams, 2013; Adams et al., 2015; Omi and Winant, 2015; Adler and Aycan, 2018). Given the demographic changes, cultural interactions and hybridizations, and shifting power dynamics that many U.S. Americans confront every day, we ask how psychological scientists can leverage insights from cultural psychology to shed light on these issues. We propose that *the culture cycle*—a schematic or tool that represents culture as a multilayered, interacting, dynamic system of ideas, institutions, interactions, and individuals—can be useful to researchers and practitioners by: (1) revealing and explaining the psychological dynamics that underlie today's significant culture clashes and (2) identifying ways to change or improve cultural practices and institutions to fostera more inclusive, equal, and effective multicultural society.

Culture consists of explicit and implicit *patterns* of historically-derived and selected *ideas* and their embodiment in *institutions, practices,* and *artifacts*; cultural patterns may, on one hand, be consideredas products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action. This definition conceptualizes culture as a system or a cycle. In this cycle, sociocultural patterns shape or guide people'sactions, while people's actions, in turn, can either reinforce and reflect or contest and change these sociocultural patterns. To visually and conceptually represent the dynamic processes through which the cultural and the psychological interact and mutually constitute one another, we use a tool that we call the "culture cycle" (**Figure 1**).

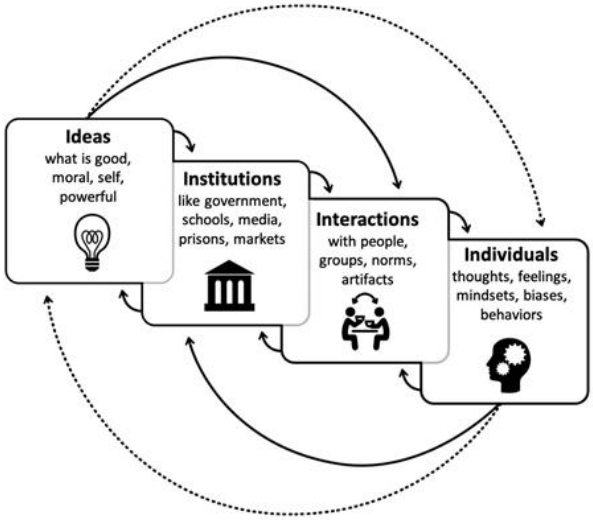


Figure 1 | The culture cycle.
This schematic depicts culture as a system of four, dynamically interacting and interdependent layers. Here, culture is made up of the ideas, institutions, and interactions that guide and reflect individuals' thoughts, feelings, and actions.

CONCLUSION

The phrase "It's cultural" underscores the frustration that people feel when a problem is big, messy, and seems intractable. Sometimes people use it as a way to say that a problem is systemic, but they also often use it as a way to evade responsibility and say that a significant societal problem is not really their problem. We do not deny that culture change is difficult work and may have unintended consequences. Culture changers need to keep in mind how the interconnected, shifting dynamics that make up the culture cycle afford certain ways of being while constraining or downwardly constituting others, and that these dynamics can change or rebalance when intervening in the cycle.

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