

from one culture to another. The study illustrates the problem of assuming that depression means the same thing across cultures.

Cultural relativism is the principle that helps minimize ethnocentrism. Cultural relativism does not mean to accept everything or think that all cultural practices are correct. We do not want to become *extremists* about cultural relativism (Tavris & Wade, 2001). It just means that others *can* be right and judgment must be made without ethnocentrism.

The relativist view of cultural research can sometimes conflict with psychology's history of studying universals. However, more and more psychological research tries to find out how culture mediates common human characteristics.

Ethnocentrism and cultural relativism represent extremes of a continuum; neither are useful positions.

Social and cultural norms

The concepts **social norm** and **cultural norm** appear frequently in psychology literature. *A norm is expected behavior. Cultural norms are the rules of a cultural group.*

Harry Triandis (1994) uses the term **subjective culture** to describe how people view the man-made aspects of their culture. Everyone creates categories, but what goes into those categories varies tremendously between cultures. Norms arose out of survival needs and pertain to both ecological (natural) factors, such as geographical features, and subjective culture. Norms often serve to control behavior. There are many types of norms, such as *folkways*, where a subgroup has a particular way of doing things, such as how they bring goods to the market, *mores*, an accepted set of behaviors, such as how a wedding should be conducted, *taboos*, or what should be avoided, and *laws*, which are created and enforced by governments. In addition to these, *roles* are a special kind of norm that deals with how people should act in a social situation. For example, there are gender and parental roles.

Children learn about cultural norms from parents, peers, and institutions (Triandis, 2002). "Elements of culture are shared standard operating procedures, unstated assumptions, tools, norms, values, habits about sampling the environment, and the like" (p. 136). Norms come from the *cognitive processing* that depends on how a group samples information from the vast amounts around them. These samplings of information are the psychological process studied by psychologists. How a group samples information shows where the group generally fits on different **dimensions of culture**. For example, people in individualist cultures are more likely to view the self as independent and evaluate the self in terms of personal performance. People from collectivist cultures view the self in terms of relationships with others and evaluate the self in terms of creating harmonious relationships with others. These samplings affect a wide range of behavior. For example, social learning theorists examine how the different views of the self in individualist and collectivist cultures affect depression. These different views are norms about the self that are created when cultural groups sample different aspects of the world. Section 5.15 includes a study on **social learning theory** and depression. Section 5.14 investigates norms and **social identity theory**.

5.5 Using One or More Examples, Explain "Emics" and "Etics"

Etics and **emics** are abstract concepts that are useful to researchers. *Etics are universal behaviors and emics are culture-specific behaviors.* Researchers often approach a cross-cultural study with an etic description of a concept in mind, such as a Western view of depression. The behaviors defining the category "major depression" are useful to the researcher but may be

different from emic descriptions of "depression" within another culture. If paying attention, researchers quickly realize that the original etic description really does not apply and must collect data on the emic description to avoid **ethnocentrism**. Emic descriptions may include the word "depression" but can be used quite differently.

Both Paul Ekman (section 4.10) and Michael Cole (section 4.7) were highly sensitive to distinctions between etic and emic descriptions, and this is one reason why their work is still so valuable.

Let's start with a study that shows why it is important to take emic descriptions of a concept into account, and then we'll look at John Berry's comments on using emics and etics properly in research.

The goal is to use the principles of emics and etics to benefit others.

An interview study about etics/emics and depression

What are the differences between the **emics** of depression and the Western **etics** used to evaluate and treat depression in ethnic populations living within Western cultures?

Rashda Tabassum and colleagues (2000) conducted an interview study to answer this question. They compared emic definitions of depressive symptoms from Pakistanis living in the United Kingdom with the existing predominant etic descriptions used by Western psychiatrists treating them. The study explored women's mental health needs and clarified inconsistencies about the frequency of mental disorder, attitudes toward mental disorder, and **attributions** contributing to attitudes about mental illness. There was concern that Western etics dominated how data was collected in the past and dictated how Pakistanis were viewed as either mentally healthy or unhealthy.

First- and second-generation Pakistani women were participants. All lived in a poor U.K. urban setting. It was hard to get a sample. The interviews were all conducted in family groups because males typically would not allow females to meet with the researchers alone. Twenty-two males born in Pakistan, 29 first-generation women, and 23 second-generation women participated. Interviews took place in participant's homes in English, Urdu, Punjabi, or a combination of the languages. Only seven families allowed the researchers to record the interviews, creating transcription difficulties. When recording was not possible, researchers took detailed notes and categorized responses immediately after the interview. The interviews contained 21 questions. Topics included the perception of causes for mental disorder, help-seeking behavior, family perception and reaction to mental disorder, and the community status of people with mental disorder. The researchers experienced some difficulties translating the questions because Western symptoms did not always directly translate and the Pakistani culture had some different ways of conceptualizing mental disorder.

Data were reported as percentages.

Results showed an emic description of mental disorder centering on *physical symptoms*. The participants were fairly knowledgeable about Western etic mental health models. However, 63% viewed *aggression as a main symptom* of abnormality. Pakistani culture is **collectivist** and emphasizes politeness in social behavior, so aggressive displays are viewed as abnormal, more important than anxious or depressed symptoms. However, many of the other identified causes of mental disorder were similar to those from Western models, with 63% emphasizing **stress** as a primary factor. Recall that stress is an etic, though there are emic features of how the Pakistani display stress.

Some participants used the terms "anxiety" and "depression," but the words in Urdu had different meanings from Western etic descriptions.

Twenty-five percent of the participants attributed mental disorders to supernatural causes and 35% believed in faith healers.

Most males thought a general practitioner (GP) should be consulted for treatment. Fewer females identified a GP as the first person to consult, but there may be cultural barriers to women getting help from doctors. These difficulties include language barriers, the fact that many doctors are males, and that many Muslim women have difficulty with hospitalization because of the purdah.

One prevalent attitude was that families should cope with mental health problems. Hospitalization was a last resort. Participants were reluctant to discuss intimate family matters with the researchers, even at times saying they did not know someone firsthand with a mental disorder, contradicting previous statements that they did. Pakistanis may fear the stigma associated with mental disorder.

Assuming that a researcher of the same ethnic group speaking the same language bridged the barrier between researcher and participant was a mistake. Western research models where individuals respond to interview questions are not always the best way to collect data in collectivist cultures. In addition, the interviewer was known to be a doctor, so social desirability possibly interfered with the responses.

The study successfully identified barriers that women face in getting mental health services. In addition, differences between emic and etic approaches to understanding mental disorder were uncovered.

Implications of the study include physician training and future data collection. Do doctors have enough information about cross-cultural views of abnormality? How can we collect data to accurately identify another culture's views?

John Berry's comments about using etics and emics properly in research

John Berry (1969) was the first to apply **etics** and **emics** to cultural research in psychology. Berry asked how psychologists could make cross-cultural comparisons without a specifically identified methodology that aided the task.

Etics are pan-cultural groups of continuums and every culture falls onto these continuums in some way (Hank Davis, personal communication, June 2008). Examples of etics are marriage, kinship principles, concepts of intelligence, time orientation and all of the other dimensions of culture, the education of children, and stress.

Examples of emics are specific definitions of marriage and kinship rules, what is valued in educating children, monochronic or polychronic time orientation and how the other dimensions of culture are displayed, and how stress is experienced.

Anthropologists struggled with the dilemma of how to study cultures so they could be understood in their own terms (Berry, 1969). Psychologists shared this dilemma as they became more interested in culture.

Ideally, all cultures should be understood in relation to their own setting.

Berry borrowed the terms emic and etic from anthropologist Kenneth Pike and used them to design a three-step framework for cross-cultural psychology research. Emics and etics were originally used by Pike to distinguish between the sounds particular to a language (emics) and the sounds that could be generalized as universals in language (etics). "By analogy emics apply in only a particular society, while etics are culture-free or universal aspects of our world" (p. 123).

Etics and emics are different ways to gather data about culture. An emic approach studies humans from within their system; the researcher *discovers* cultural practices. On the other hand, an etic approach studies cultures from the outside; researchers collect data that fit into *preexisting categories* assumed to be universal.

Ideally, cultural psychologists should describe both emics specific to a group and etics that make comparisons between cultures possible.

Historically, psychologists entered cultural systems using emics from their own or some other system or with an imposed etic assumed to be useful. These were not always meaningful to those studied.

Berry identified three steps to create universal categories that were really useful to make comparisons between cultures.

1. Out of necessity, psychologists may have to start a research study with an *imposed etic*. Psychologists should remain aware that the imposed etic is a poor approximation of what is really needed for the final results, which is to create true emic descriptions of the culture, one that is meaningful to the people in the culture being studied. True emic descriptions of a culture involve continually altering the imposed etic. The researcher moves on to step 2 only if this can be done without completely destroying the original etic categories used for scientific discovery.
2. Researchers create new categories that reflect what is observed in another culture. Berry called these new etics the *derived etics*. The derived etic categories are now useful for making comparisons between two groups.
3. Finally, derived etic categories are applied to new research settings, modified emically again, and then more new etic categories are created. It is only when all groups for comparison have been studied this way that we have real *universals* for comparison.

The goal of this three-step process was to create instruments that were appropriate for measuring behavioral similarities and differences between cultures.

Both Ekman and Cole approached other cultures with one set of imposed etics, realized that they had to modify those etics with emic descriptions, and created new methods that allowed for true comparisons between cultures. Tabassum's research is also valuable for finding future variables that are real comparisons between cultures.

5.6 Examine the Role of Two Cultural Dimensions on Behavior: Introduction to the Dimensions of Culture

Promoting global cooperation with an understanding of others

Did you know that, during experiments, people from the United States trust other people who are identified as belonging to their in-group, even people without obvious connections, more than they trust others from an out-group, even when someone from an out-group is identified as someone with a potential connection? Did you know that in the same experiment, Japanese persons trusted the unconnected in-group member but also trusted an out-group member when the out-group member was identified as having a potential connection? Japanese persons, just like those from the United States, did not trust an unconnected out-group member. (See section 5.13 for definitions of in-group and out-group.)

In experiments, the Japanese conform to the same degree as people from the United States in groups where they have informal ties but conform much more in groups where they have formal ties.

Knowing these things about people's behavior is extremely valuable. *If we want to promote more global cooperation, it is essential that we understand how people are likely to act in the context of different situations.*

By understanding the **dimensions of culture**, we have been able to design studies that show how culture affects individual behavior. *Instead of arming ourselves with guns in the future, might we arm ourselves with good information that helps us understand others?*