



CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

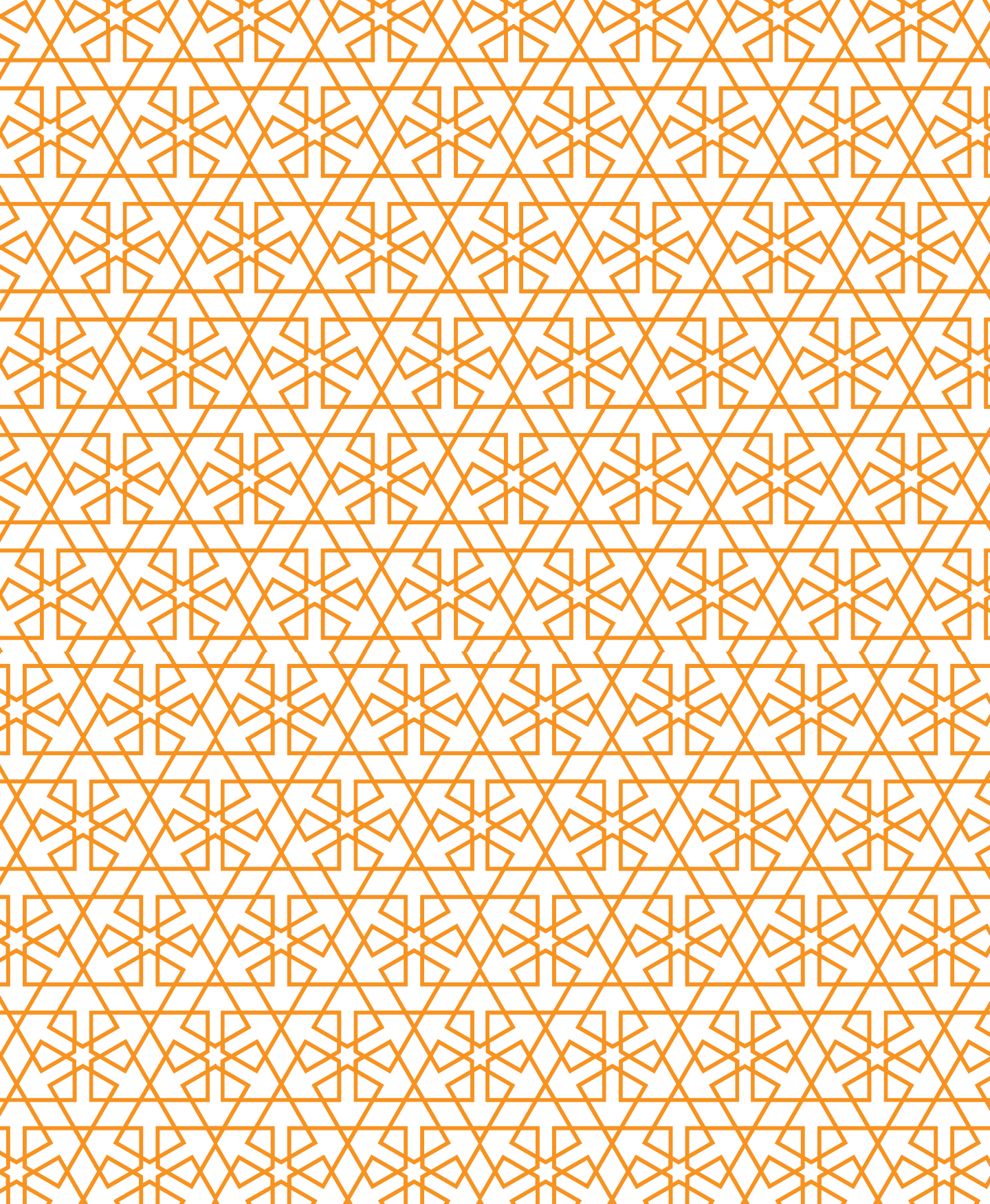
THIRD EDITION



STEVEN J. HEINE

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**CULTURAL
PSYCHOLOGY**



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STEVEN J. HEINE

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



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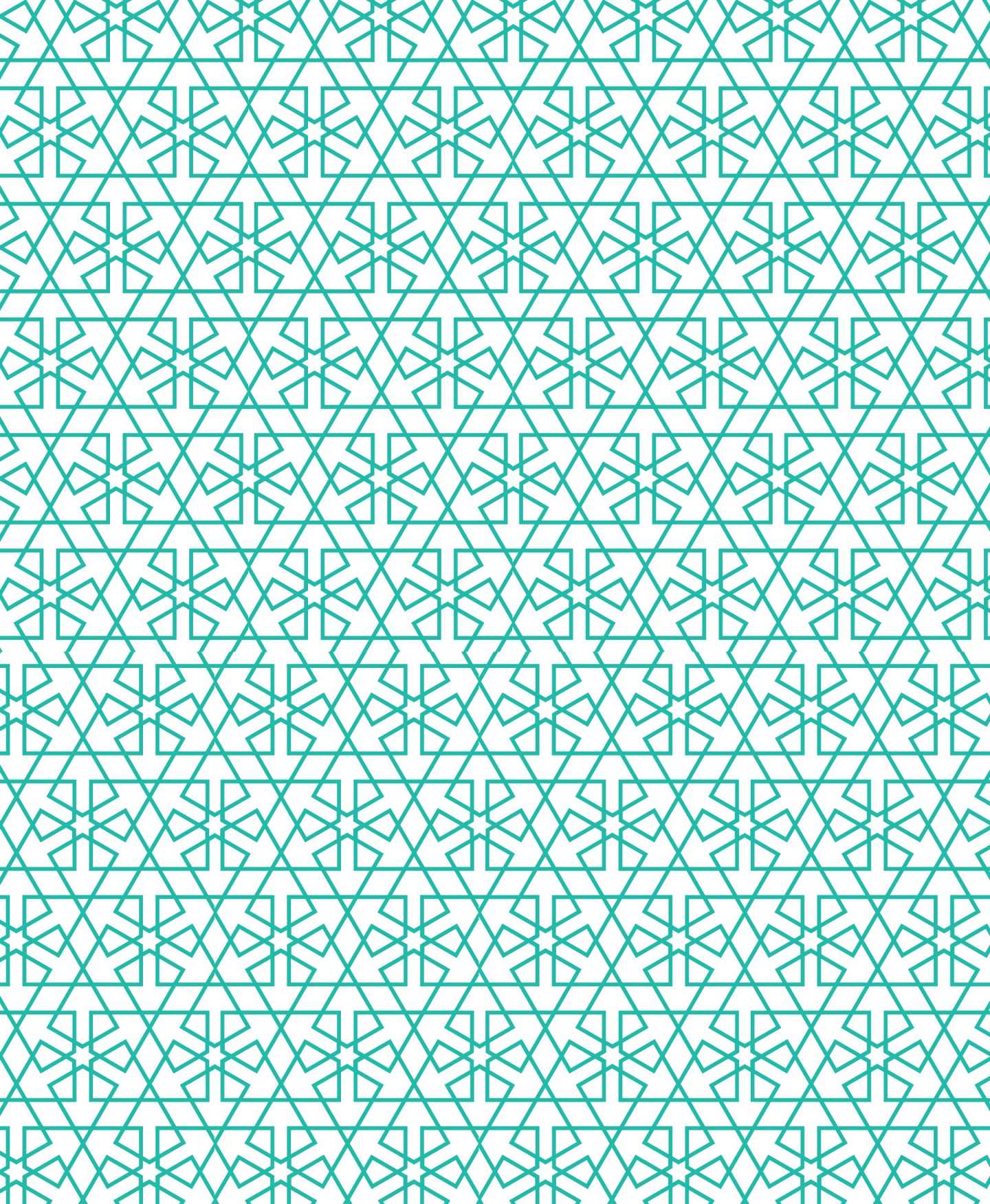
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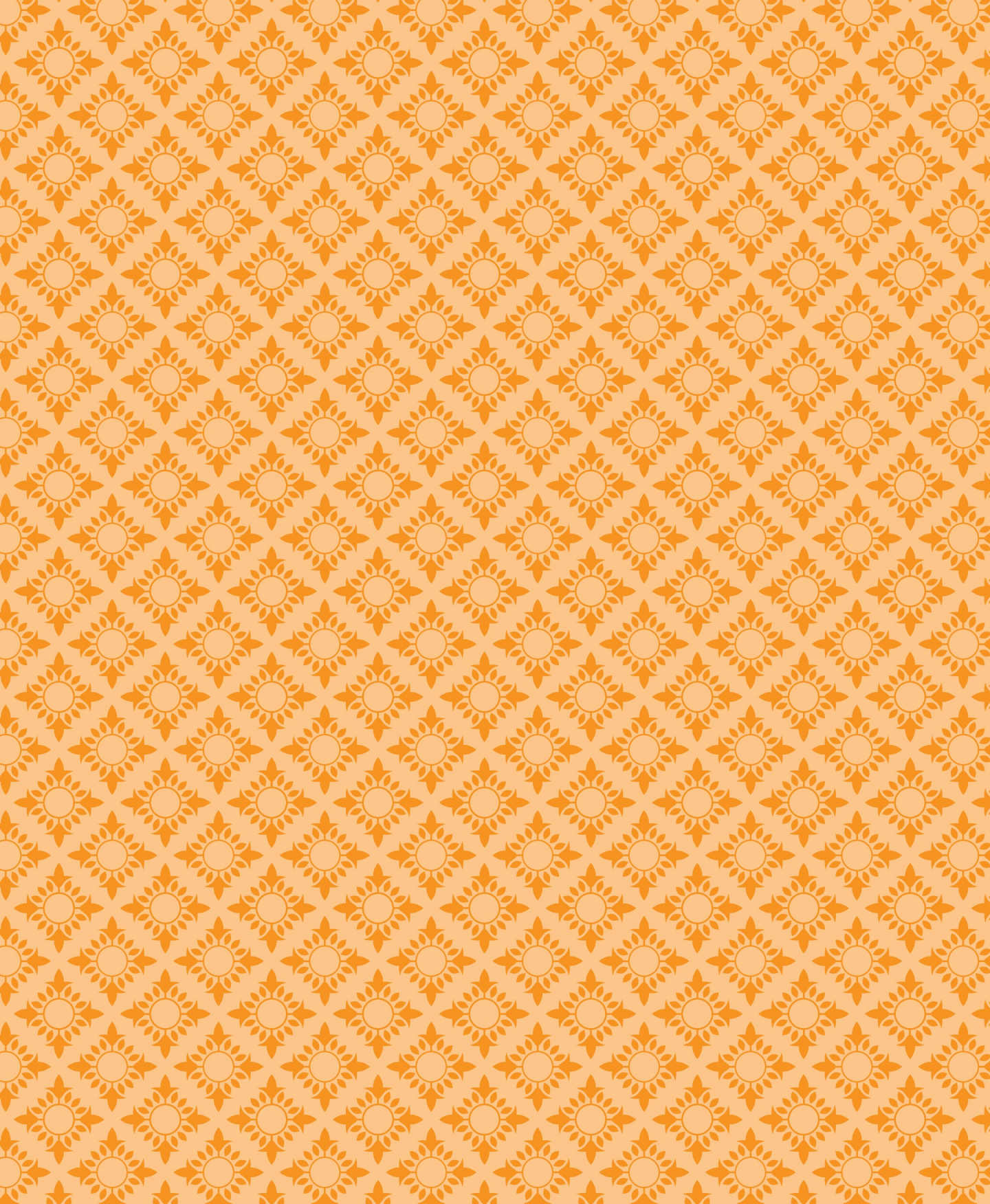


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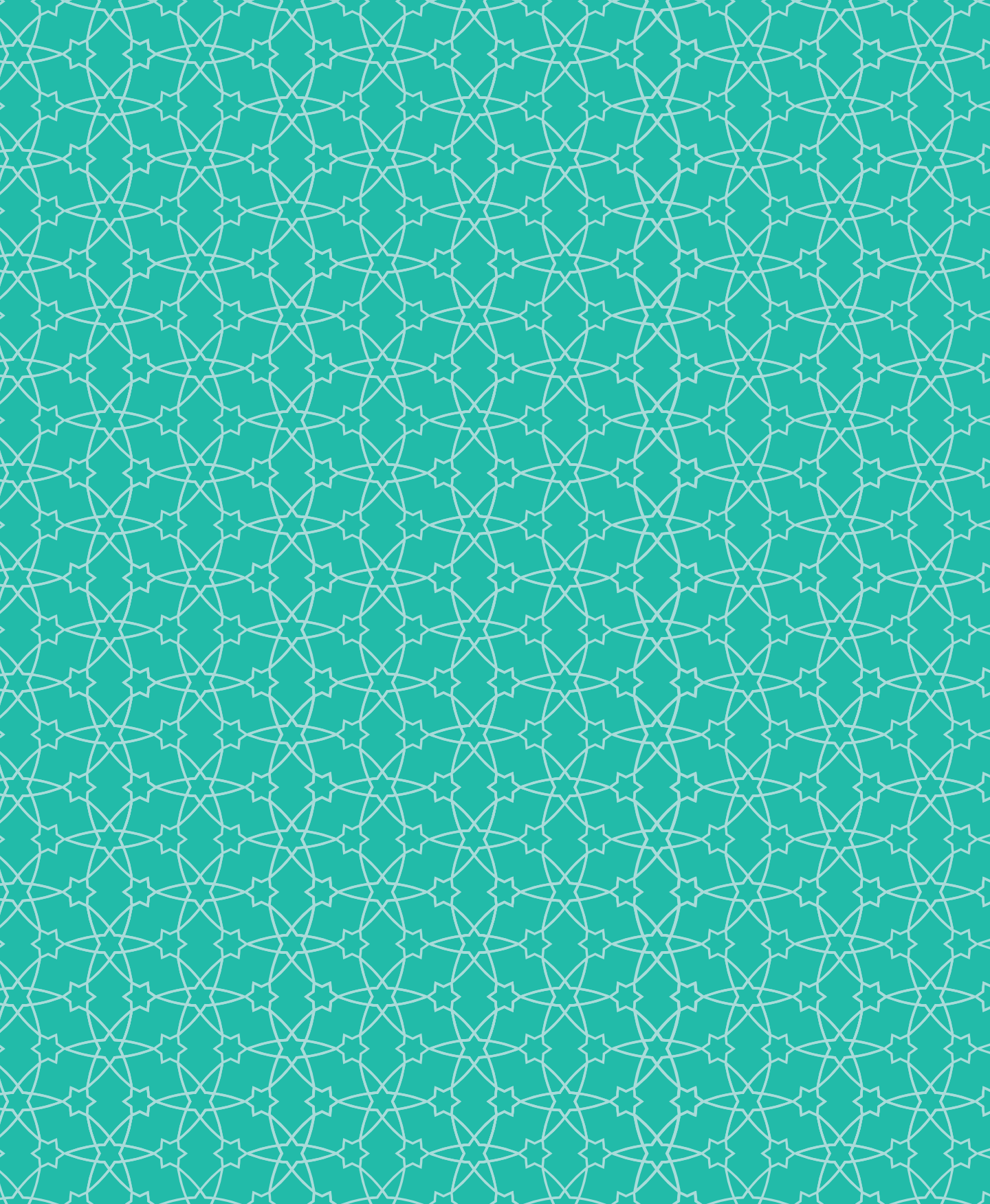
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PREFACE

My own quest to become a cultural psychologist began upon graduating college. There I was with my BA degree in psychology, not knowing what to do with it. So, I moved to the small town of Obama in southwestern Japan (yes, it really was the town's name) to teach English and, hopefully, figure out what I wanted to do with my life. I thought I had been an attentive student in my psychology classes, and I had learned much about how people think. Imagine, then, my surprise upon moving to rural Japan and discovering that much of what I thought I understood about human nature didn't seem to explain how my new friends and colleagues thought and behaved. I went through a series of cross-cultural misunderstandings and gaffes before I came to realize that my ideas about human nature were just plain wrong—they may have explained the nature of North Americans, but they weren't so useful outside of that cultural context. This was interesting to me because from what I had learned in my psychology classes, people *should* think in the same ways everywhere. But in many ways they don't. That insight and those embarrassing cross-cultural misunderstandings led me down the path to becoming a cultural psychologist and eventually to writing this book.

Cultural psychology, as a field, is largely a new discipline, and it continues to produce striking evidence that challenge psychologists' understanding of human nature. In contrast to much conventional wisdom, this new field has been revealing that culture shapes how people's minds operate—sometimes in profound ways. The past couple of decades have been an exciting time, as an abundance of new research

continues to demonstrate that culture is not just a thin veneer covering the universal human mind. Rather, this research has shown just how deeply cultural influences penetrate our psychology and shape the ways that people think. The research underscores how human thoughts occur within cultural contexts, and shows that different cultural contexts can lead to fundamentally different ways of thinking.

When I first started teaching cultural psychology, I greatly enjoyed teaching students about the exciting discoveries coming out of this new field. However, there wasn't really an undergraduate textbook that adopted a cultural psychological perspective. Without a textbook, teaching a course in cultural psychology usually meant having students read the original journal articles describing these new ideas. This made for stimulating classroom discussions, but it also meant that my courses on cultural psychology were typically limited to small seminars for senior students. I discussed this problem with cultural psychologists at other universities, and many said they were in the same situation. Cultural psychology had become a tremendously interesting and important discipline, and had rapidly developed a rich theoretical and empirical foundation unique from other approaches that considered the influences of culture. But at that point, the field lacked an undergraduate textbook that could be used in large lecture classes on cultural psychology, and consequently, very few students were learning about it. I reluctantly came to the realization that the quickest way that I could start teaching larger cultural psychology classes was to write a textbook myself. But it wasn't as easy as I thought it would be, as at first, I failed to appreciate just how much new and significant research was being conducted. In fact, the First Edition of this title took me four years to complete. And even now, as I send the Third Edition to the presses, there is much new and fascinating work that I unfortunately wasn't able to include in time for the deadline.

I tried to write a book focused on what I have found most interesting about the field of cultural psychology. Toward this end, I have written the chapters around some provocative key questions with which cultural psychologists are still struggling. For example, one theme that arises repeatedly throughout the book is the question, how similar are the psychologies of people from different cultures. Human brains are basically the same everywhere, yet people's experiences are vastly divergent, making this a difficult and important question to contemplate. Some other fundamental questions I address include: Where does culture come from? How are humans similar to and different from other animals? What are the many different ways to be human?

I also endeavored to integrate as much cultural diversity into the topics discussed as possible. The text considers research findings from every populated continent, including many investigations of subsistence cultures around the world, as well as explorations of the variance between ethnic groups within countries. I also wrote the chapters to provide a strong emphasis on experimental research throughout, while also paying particular attention to observation studies and ethnographies. I think it's important to gain a sense of the varieties of ways that we can go about studying

culture. I also wanted to highlight how culture underlies all aspects of human psychology, so I have attempted to explore the role of culture across many disciplines both within psychology (e.g., clinical, cognitive, developmental, social, and personality psychology), and outside psychology (e.g., anthropology, evolutionary biology, linguistics, philosophy, sociology). Finally, students will find many detailed examples throughout the book that show how cultural psychologists' theories and research are relevant to their lives. Hopefully, the combination of these ingredients will yield an interesting and educational experience for the readers.

For Instructors

The instructor resources are outlined below.

Art PowerPoints

To aid instructors in quickly and easily creating their own visual aids linked directly to the student textbook, the art, tables, and charts from the book are available as JPEGs and in Art PowerPoints.

Lecture PowerPoints

Lecture PowerPoints, featuring many of the tables and charts from the book, as well as definitions of key terms and original figures, can be used as is or customized for each individual classroom.

Test Bank

The test bank features 490 questions, including 35 multiple-choice and 5 short answer questions in each chapter. All questions have been updated according to Norton's assessment guidelines to make it easy for instructors to construct quizzes and exams that are meaningful and diagnostic. All questions are classified according to educational objective, student text section, difficulty, and question type. The test bank is available in PDF and RTF formats.

Acknowledgments

I was very fortunate to receive an enormous amount of support in writing this book. First, this book would not exist without the sage guidance, clear-eyed vision, and unflinching encouragement on the part of my first editor, Jon Durbin, who worked

very closely with me in the conceiving of and writing of the First Edition. Likewise, I am indebted to Sheri Snively for her inspiration and keen judgment that led to the Second Edition. And I am especially grateful to the clever insights, persistent efforts, and creativity of my editor for this Third Edition, Ken Barton. I'm also very grateful to the rest of the terrific staff at W. W. Norton & Company: Jillian Burr, Evan Luburger, Rachel Mayer, Jane Searle, Patrick Shriner, Scott Sugarman, Julie Tesser, Stefani Wallace, and Lauren Winkler, who have endeavored behind the scenes and have made many important contributions to this book. I am also greatly appreciative of the extremely thoughtful and helpful comments I received from many reviewers, who I list below.

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This book benefited from several discussions over the years with my formal mentors, Darrin Lehman and Shinobu Kitayama, from whom I learned how to become a cultural psychologist, as well as from informal mentors who have educated me from afar, such as Dov Cohen, Hazel Markus, Dick Nisbett, and Paul Rozin. Also, hundreds of conversations over coffees or beers, or on ski lifts with the other members of the Human Evolution, Cognition, and Culture Centre at UBC—Mark Collard, Joe Henrich, Ara Norenzayan, Mark Schaller, and Ted Slingerland—have been

instrumental for developing many of the ideas discussed in this book. I am deeply indebted to the daily conversations that I have with my wife, Nariko Takayanagi, on all matters cultural and Japanese, which have served to inform both the research I have conducted and the ideas that are in this book. I am especially grateful to Ben Cheung for his careful feedback of this Third Edition, and for his excellent work on the accompanying instructor's manual. I would also like to thank Andrew Ryder for his guidance in writing the mental health chapter. A number of my lab coordinators, including Matt Loewen, Louise Chim, Aiyana Willard, Eric Wong, Jenna Becker, and Hee Jin Kim played a key role in helping me conduct background research for the material in the book. Several chapters of this text also benefited from the feedback of many readers, including Emma Buchtel, Edith Chen, Ilan Dar-Nimrod, Takeshi Hamamura, Greg Miller, Janet Werker, and Katie Yoshida, as well as from the many undergraduates who sat as willing and patient guinea pigs as I tried out various drafts of the chapters with them in class. These readers all offered excellent advice, helping to make this a stronger text overall.

STEVEN J. HEINE
Vancouver, British Columbia
April, 2015

THIRD EDITION

**CULTURAL
PSYCHOLOGY**



Unlike most readers of this textbook, this Kalahari San man does not see the Müller-Lyer illusion as an illusion. You need to grow up in an environment with carpentered corners to be susceptible to this key visual illusion.

1

WHAT IS CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY?

CHAPTER OUTLINE

A Psychology for a Cultural Species

- ♦ What Is Culture?

Psychological Processes Can Vary Across Cultures

- ♦ Is the Mind Independent from, or Intertwined with, Culture?
- ♦ Case Study: The Sambia
- ♦ Psychological Universals and Levels of Analysis
- ♦ The Psychological Database Is Largely WEIRD

Why Should We Study Cultural Psychology?

You Are a Product of Your Own Culture

Where Does Cultural Psychology Come From?

Humans are an interesting bunch. If a team of alien biologists arrived at our planet and tried to catalog all the different species here, they would no doubt notice how peculiar we humans are. In many ways, we would seem to be ill adapted to survive. We're not particularly strong, we're not very fast, we don't have sharp teeth or claws, and we don't even have a furry coat to keep us warm. Furthermore, we don't ensure the survival of our species through rampant reproduction, like rabbits. The alien biologists would surely wonder what kind of strange beasts we are. The odds would certainly seem stacked against us. Yet despite the apparent disadvantages that humans have compared to other species, the alien biologists would notice that we've populated more parts of the world, in more diverse ecologies, using a broader range of subsistence systems and social arrangements, than any other species. And our numbers keep growing. How is it that humans have come to be so successful?

If these alien biologists were very keen, though, they might note that we humans do have one adaptation that compensates for all that we lack. Humans have culture. We rely on culture more than any other species, and it is our reliance on culture that has allowed us to succeed in such diverse environments. And this reliance on culture has important and profound implications for our thoughts and behaviors. Cultural psychology is the field that studies those implications.

A Psychology for a Cultural Species

One does not need to take a course on cultural psychology to recognize that humans are a cultural species. This fact is immediately evident whenever you travel to a different country or meet people from different cultural backgrounds. In many ways, people from different cultures live their lives differently; they speak different languages, have different customs, eat different foods, have different religious beliefs, have different child-rearing practices, and so on. Much about a person's lifestyle can be predicted just by knowing his or her culture.

Cultural psychology is not original in highlighting the many obvious ways that people's experiences differ around the planet. The unique contribution of cultural psychology, and the main thesis of this book, is that people from different cultures also differ in their psychology. One theme that will be returned to throughout this book is the notion that *psychological processes are shaped by experiences*. Because people in different cultures have many different experiences, we should then expect to find differences in many ways that they think. As you read through this book, I encourage you to examine the kinds of experiences that you have had and the ways that you think, and contrast them to the descriptions provided of people from other cultures.

Although experiences shape psychological processes, they clearly do not determine them. Psychological processes are constrained and afforded by the neurological structures that underlie them. And because the brains that people are born with are virtually identical around the world, people from all cultures share the same constraints and affordances of the universal human brain. Herein lies a challenge for making sense of virtually all cross-cultural studies in psychology: To what extent should ways of thinking look similar around the world because people share a universal brain, and to what extent should they look different because people have divergent experiences? Providing an answer to this question is not always straightforward, because some ways of thinking do appear to be highly similar around the world whereas others appear strikingly different. This tension between *universal and culturally variable psychologies* is another theme that will be addressed throughout this book. As you read through the various descriptions of psychological phenomena, I encourage you to ask yourself whether the evidence suggests that the phenomena are universal or culturally variable.

This chapter provides an overview of how culture is considered by psychologists. We explore questions such as how culture shapes the ways we think, how we can understand ways of thinking as being culturally universal or variable, why it can be important to understand cultural differences, and how the field of cultural psychology came to be.

What Is Culture?

This book investigates the relations between culture and the ways that people think and, as such, it's necessary to clearly define culture. The question of what culture is has been debated among anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists for decades, and there is no single consensual answer that applies to all fields. Some people have focused on the symbolic aspects of culture, some have attended to the physical artifacts of culture, and some have emphasized the habits that are contained in culture.

In this book, I use the term “culture” to mean two different things. First, I use the term to indicate a particular kind of *information*. Specifically, I use culture to mean *any kind of information that is acquired from other members of one's species through social learning that is capable of affecting an individual's behaviors* (see Richerson & Boyd, 2005). In other words, *culture* is any kind of idea, belief, technology, habit, or practice that is acquired through learning from others. Humans are therefore a cultural species, as people have a great deal of “culture” that fits this definition.

Second, I use the term “culture” to indicate a particular *group of individuals*. Cultures are people *who are existing within some kind of shared context*. People within a given culture are exposed to many of the same cultural ideas. They might attend the same cultural institutions, engage in similar cultural practices, see the same advertisements, follow the same norms, and have conversations with each other on

a day-to-day basis. At the most global level, sometimes I use the term “culture” to refer to broad swaths of the earth’s population, which may even include people from a large number of different countries. For example, I often use the term “Western culture” in this book to refer to people participating in cultures that stem from countries clustered in northwestern Europe (e.g., the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, and Germany) and societies of British descent such as the United States, Canada, and Australia.

There are a few challenges with thinking about groups of people as constituting cultures. First, as you can see from the above definition, the boundaries of cultures are not always clear-cut. For example, individuals might be exposed to cultural ideas that emerge from distant locations, such as those from their immigrant parents, experiences that they have while traveling, advertisements that they see from multinational firms, or ideas that they learn from watching a foreign movie. Cultural boundaries are thus not distinct. Although we can never be certain that we have identified a clear cultural boundary that separates two or more samples, a shorthand practice used in many studies described in this book is to look at nationality as a rough indicator of culture. For example, Italians may be compared with Germans, even though we know that not every member of the Italian group was exposed to exclusively Italian cultural messages.

Adding to this complexity, there are other kinds of groups aside from countries that can be argued to have cultures. For example, you can hear people speak of Jewish culture, urban culture, gay and lesbian culture, high socioeconomic status culture, vegetarian culture, Millennial culture, Harvard culture, Mac-user culture, or Trekkie culture. What makes these groups arguably qualify as “cultures” is that their members exist within a shared context, communicate with each other, have some norms that distinguish them from other groups, and have some common practices and ideas. The more that people who belong to these groups share similar norms and communicate with each other, the more these groups warrant the label “culture.” But, as you can imagine, there aren’t always going to be firm boundaries that distinguish any of these groups. The fluid nature of cultural boundaries weakens researchers’ abilities to find differences between cultures, but when such differences are found, they provide powerful evidence that cultures do differ in their psychological tendencies.

A second challenge, as will be described in Chapter 3, is that cultures also change over time, and some shared cultural information disappears as new habits replace the old (although much cultural information persists across time as well). Cultures are thus not static entities but are dynamic and ever changing.

Last, and perhaps the most important challenge in considering cultures as groups of people, is the variability among individuals who belong to the same culture. People inherit distinct temperaments (they are born with predispositions toward having certain kinds of personality traits, abilities, and attitudes), they each belong to a unique collection of various social groups with their own distinctive cultures (for example,

Jason grew up on Oak Street, attended King George Elementary School, often met with his extended family of several cousins, played on the Maple Grove junior soccer team, was in the band at Carnegie High School, and was a founding member of the *Perspectives* school newspaper that he worked on for three years), and they each have had a unique history of individual experiences that has shaped their views. Hence, all of these individual differences lead some people to reflexively embrace certain cultural messages, staunchly react against other cultural messages, and largely ignore some other cultural messages. Individuals are not homogeneous, and the findings that are identified in the studies reported in this book do not apply equally to all members of cultures; the studies reflect average tendencies within cultural groups, and sometimes those cultural groups are extremely broad, such as contrasts between “Western” cultures and “East Asian” cultures (the latter encompassing cultures that have been exposed to Chinese Confucian cultural traditions, such as China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam). So to say that Westerners are more emotionally expressive than East Asians would mean that, on average, people from Western cultures score higher on some measure of emotional expressiveness than people from East Asian cultures, yet there is also an enormous degree of individual variation that includes some extremely expressive East Asians and some quite unexpressive Westerners. Cultural membership does not determine individual responses.

In this latter sense, then, the term “culture” refers to dynamic groups of individuals that share a similar context, are exposed to many similar cultural messages, and contain a broad range of different individuals who are affected by those cultural messages in divergent ways.

Psychological Processes Can Vary Across Cultures

Much of this book focuses on numerous psychological processes that emerge in quite different ways across cultures. Some kinds of cultural variation in psychology may already be familiar to you, as you can observe the differences directly yourself. For example, one striking way that people’s psychology differs between cultures is their sense of humor. What is funny in some cultures might not be seen as that funny in others. The American comedian Jerry Lewis was enormously popular in the 1950s in the United States, but his style of slapstick humor ultimately lost much of its appeal for American audiences. Despite the fact that Lewis had not starred in a successful comedy in the United States since his famous role in *The Nutty Professor* in 1963, his zany humor continued to be appreciated by the French for decades. He was regularly praised by French cinema critics, and in 2006 Lewis received the Légion d’honneur from the French minister of culture for being “French people’s favorite

clown.” Likewise, although the American sitcom *Seinfeld* has enjoyed enormous success in the United States, being named by *TV Guide* in 2002 as the “greatest television show of all time,” it flopped miserably in Germany because most Germans did not find it funny. Yet Germans continued to watch, and love, the 1960s-era American sitcom *Hogan’s Heroes*. Cultures differ so much in their humor preferences that some Hollywood studios are apparently steering away from making comedy movies, because even if a comedy ends up being a big hit domestically, it usually won’t be appreciated, in say, China (unless, curiously, the film stars Adam Sandler) and typically won’t bring in as much revenue from the international box office (Obst, 2011).

The observation that people’s sense of humor differs is something you may have noticed yourself if you’ve watched foreign comedies or have friends from other countries. I think that these kinds of readily observable cultural differences in preferences are the ways that most people think about cultural variation: People from other cultures are different because they like different kinds of jokes, prefer different kinds of food, wear different clothes, worship different gods, vote for political parties with different concerns, and so on. Such differences in preferences are familiar to us because we see similar kinds of differences in preferences among people from our own culture. But as you’ll learn from this book, cultural variation in psychological processes can extend much deeper than just preferences. Many basic psychological processes, such as the ways people perceive the world, their sense of right and wrong, and the things that motivate them, can emerge in starkly different ways across cultures. And the fact that basic psychological processes vary in important ways across cultures raises a difficult question: How can we understand the workings of the human mind when it apparently works in different ways in different contexts? Arguments for cultural variability in psychological processes are controversial, and this controversy reveals the differing underlying assumptions that are embraced by many psychological researchers.

Is the Mind Independent from, or Intertwined with, Culture?

Richard Shweder, who is viewed by many to be the father of the modern incarnation of cultural psychology, argues that much of the field of psychology (what he calls **general psychology**) inherently assumes that the mind operates under a set of natural and universal laws that are independent from content or context (Shweder, 1990). He argues that the guiding assumption of general psychology is one captured in the lyrics of a song by Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder: “People are the same wherever you go.” Surely, in many ways people really are the same wherever you go, and some researchers have attempted to document the many ways that people’s thinking can be said to be the same across all cultures. For example, in all cultures people speak a language using between 10 and 70 phonemes, they all smile when they are happy, they all have a word for the color black, they are all disgusted at the idea of incest

between parents and children, and they all understand the number 2. A list of all the human universals that have been documented can be found in a 12-page chapter in the fascinating book *Human Universals* (Brown, 1991). The study of human universals is a highly interesting, albeit enormously challenging, enterprise that tells us a great deal about human nature. We can learn much about how the mind works by identifying the universal and invariant ways that it operates.

However, in many important ways people are *not* the same wherever you go. For example, in some languages pronouns can be dropped while in others they cannot, people in some cultures bite their tongues when they are embarrassed whereas people in other cultures do not, some languages do not have a word for blue, people in some cultures are disgusted at the idea of incest between cousins whereas people in other cultures are not, and in some cultures people do not understand the number 5. The study of human variability is also a very interesting and challenging enterprise that greatly informs our understanding of human nature and of the ways that the mind operates.

If you have taken a course on introductory psychology before, think back to the questions that were investigated in that course. Was it a course primarily on what all humans share in common, or was it primarily a course on the ways that some people think differently from others? Shweder argues that general psychologists, perhaps as captured in your intro psychology course, tend to be more captivated by arguments about human universality than about cultural variability. This interest in universality, Shweder proposes, arises because general psychologists tend to conceive of the mind as a highly abstract central processing unit (CPU) that operates independently of the content that it is thinking about or of the context within which it is thinking. The underlying goal of general psychology, as Shweder sees it, is to provide glimpses of the CPU operating in the raw so that we can understand the set of universal and natural laws that govern human thought. Context and content are viewed as unwanted noise that cloud our ability to perceive the functioning of the CPU, and thus elaborate experiments are conducted in the highly controlled environment of the laboratory to provide the purest view of the CPU. The computer metaphor here is no accident; indeed, the CPUs in computers do largely function independently of content and context. The wiring between the different semiconductors is not affected by the context that they are in, nor of the content that they are processing. The mind as computer is a metaphor that has been embraced so strongly within general psychology that many of the theories could equally be applied to computers as to human brains.

According to this perspective of general psychology, important cultural variation in ways of thinking cannot exist because cultures merely provide variations in context and content that lie *outside* the operations of the underlying CPU. If cultural differences do appear in psychological studies, this universalist perspective would suggest that they must reflect the contamination of various sources of noise, such as translation errors, or the differences in familiarity that people have with being in