Where is Culture in Cross-Cultural Psychology:
A Practitioner of the Discipline Responds to Poortinga's,
"Is 'Culture' a Workable Concept for (Cross-)Cultural Psychology?"

Michael Harris Bond

Faculty of Business

Hong Kong Polytechnic University

> Par ma foi! Il y a plus de quarante ans que je dis de la prose sans que j'en susse rien, et je vous suis le plus obligé du monde de m'avoir appris cela.
> (M. Jourdain in Moliere's *Le Bourgois Gentilhomme*)

Let me begin my remarks by saying that I endorse all that Poortinga (2015) has concluded in his assessment of cross-cultural psychology as approached over the last half century. Indeed, culture is a wobbly, polysemous concept that has assumed iconic status as an all-purpose, albeit typically empty, explanatory variable in our globalizing world. Culture has become the "go-to" construct in ubiquitous media representations to help the person on the street make sense of observed differences in interpersonal behavior and social action between members of identifiable groups. Poortinga's conclusions are much like mine, though we have discovered them in different ways: his by taking the conceptual, literature-informed approach, and mine by engaging in cross-cultural research on specific, social psychological topics across the last four decades.

I applaud culture's emerging star status in public discourse, especially since the omnipresent fascination with culture helps pay my salary. Particularly in business faculties where I now teach, curriculum committees are eager to include courses involving culture, in part so that they can redeem the requirement of accreditation agencies to honor diversity and human rights agendas. Such courses also help attract fee-paying students from non-Western countries who wonder how their local practices may fit into a globalizing world. These courses also help address crucial societal concerns like immigration, multiple identities, inter-personal communication, ethical practices, and justice that concern all 21st century members of our planet. I celebrate this confluence of interests, and am delighted to be teaching cross-cultural management, a subject that I present to my students as "applied social psychology."

Practice as the Test of Truth

When I am asked by psychologists what is my current academic interest, I typically respond, "To explain why a given person responds in a given way in a given social situation." So, where does "culture" fit into this formula, as I go about my business of practicing its application to my outcomes of interest? My position, evolved over decades of publishing articles on culture and trying to make sense of the findings from what I regard as a sub-discipline of social psychology, is that culture is context.

To be more precise, culture enters the interpersonal response equation as the perceived ethnicities, gender, age, and birth places of the interactants, along with the nature of the social situation in which the interactants are currrently embedded (Bond, 2013). These factors function by socializing each interactant to a value, belief, and habit profile that guides his or her response to the other person, or persons, in the interpersonal or inter-group exchange; the perceived ethnicities, gender, age, and birth places of these others involved signal to the actor the likely motive, belief, and normative profile of this other or of these others present, as they are the audience for the actor's responses just as the actor is for theirs.

To be sure, this constitutes a complicated formula. However, depending on the situational press for certain responses, the perceived ethnicities gender, age, and birth places of the actor's opposite number[s] may make little impact on his or her responses. Instead, situational norms prevail. These norms may arise because of what Stendhal termed, "le devoir de la situation," and are operative trans-situationally, as a consequence of the human condition.

Culture, then, is the norms of the situation for a given response interacting with the personality of the actor in varying proportion depending on the "press," or strength, of that situation. As a social psychologist by domain of interest, I define a situation primarily with reference to the individuals participating in the event. We know from the seminal work of Gelfand et al. (2011) that national culture affects how strongly norms determine the response possibilities available to the actor with respect to these others.

With this "definition" of culture, or perhaps what would better be termed "orientation towards studying culture," readers will appreciate that I have done exactly what Poortinga (2015) suggested in his essay by crafting my own working approach to this unwieldy concept, defined in so many ways by so many researchers: "If 'culture,' or some other grand concept, can no longer serve as independent, mediating, or dependent variable, researchers will have to define more precisely the target and scope of their research" (p. 12).

Unde venis et quo vadis?

Where has my thinking come from and where will my current orientation lead my practice? Again, as Poortinga points out, I, like many others, began my work and publications in cross-cultural psychology looking for differences (e.g., my first publication on cross- cultural psychology, Bond & Tornatzky, 1973). The whole field was looking for differences in basic psychological measures as a way to find a "place in the sun" dominated by mainstream

psychologists; differences, we hoped, would draw attention to what we were doing in researching "beyond the pale" with exotic personnel and respondents. My early reputation was made my editing anthologies of these "catalogues of difference" (e.g., Bond, 1986; 1988). Into "the heart of darkness" we ventured.

These discovered differences were subjected to two challenges: methodological and conceptual. Methodologically, many reviewers of our work questioned whether we were using equivalent measurement situations and measures, along with the appropriate statistical techniques to enable valid comparisons and conclusions to be drawn. These sorts of challenges continue to be addressed as best we can (see e.g., van de Vijver & Leung, 2011). Conceptually, we were challenged to make sense of these differences (e.g., Messick, 1988); how could these discovered differences be theorized about? Essentially we were asked, "So what?" What did these differences, even if correctly detected according to methodological and statistical dictates, tell us about humans and the many cultures of which they (and we) were a part?

Unpackaging Culture Psychologically

In response, we slowly began to realize that we needed to unpackage these differences in psychological responses across cultural groups, where "cultural groups" were typically student samples from specific locations in an ad hoc collection of nations. If successful, we could then argue that these differences occurred because persons in different nations were genetically endowed and then socialized to have higher or lower levels of the psychological construct, like independent self-construals, that was argued to be responsible for the observed difference (see e.g., Singelis, Bond, Sharkey, & Lai,1999, the earliest unpackaging study in the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology). Psychological constructs became the mediating variables, and a cottage industry of psychological unpackagings sprung up, providing some empirical substance to the vague, fill-in-the-blank construct of "culture."

But, those of us in the research trenches of cross-cultural psychology began to realize that such attempts at unpackaging were not enough; we could not provide more than conjecture about why and how the (usually) national cultures were different in ways that led to the differences in levels of the psychological variables in our studies. We speculated about why, of course, using the available literature. We often found only partial, not full, mediation of culture's effects, however, culture was operationalized, usually by nationality of our respondents. Much was missing by way of explanation, even if we used the current psychological constructs of choice, such as self-esteem, values, and expectancies or beliefs (e.g., Bond, Leung, & Schwartz, 1992).

Puzzlingly, we occasionally found that the psychological construct of choice *interacted* with national culture to predict the outcome of interest (e.g., Bond & Forgas, 1984); apparently, national culture, unpacked in the hypothesized way, made the mediating variable more impactful for one nation's members than for another's. Was this uncooperative finding *the* important feature of culture for cross-cultural *psychologists*? Was culture a sensitizing agent for psychological responding? If so, how can we explain this variability in culture's impact?

Enter the Dragon

In order to solve this problem in a scientifically satisfying way, the field needed three inputs:

1. *Multi-cultural data sets*: Early research involved only two-culture contrasts. With many units of culture, defined as nations, ethnic groups, organizations, schools, families, or dyads, researchers could position cultures with respect to one another on some measured variable. With this larger number of cultural units, the positioning could be tested for its aptness with tests of statistical power and compared to other plausible contenders as explanatory variables for the observed cultural differences.
   Of course, this cultural variable had to be plausibly relevant to the individual outcome of interest, like well-being or mate preferences. Cross-level statistical programs like HLM could then be used to assess the impact of the cultural variable of choice on the individual-level outcome of interest and the process that produced it. Empirically defensible conclusions could then be drawn.

2. *Culture-level variables that make sense to psychologists*: At the level of nations, our field was replete with such suggestive measures, be they psychological, like social axioms (Bond et al., 2004), or eco-social, like affluence (Georgas, van de Vijver, & Berry, 2004). Dimensionalizing of organizational culture (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990), team culture (Guzzo, Yost, Campbell, & Shea, 1993), and dyadic culture (e.g., McAuley, Bond, & Kashima, 2002) followed suit, providing cultural constructs to use for appropriate types of cultures, organizations, teams, and dyadic pairings, respectively.

3. *A wider consideration of what constituted a culture*: Culture is a suggestive concept, easily applicable to a variety of social concepts – ascribed group memberships, like gender, ethnic group, and age category; or achieved memberships, like work organization, profession, religious group, and even urbanite, educated, and poor, as Poortinga states. These persons could be identified and measured on psychological constructs of self-views or other responses. Differences in outcomes could then be described and presented as "cultural" differences, and would be persuasive, especially if complex patterns of inter-related variables could be organized to portray a system within which members of the category were enmeshed.

In this regard, it must be acknowledged that cross-"cultural" researchers are having their cake and eating it, too. Again, as Poortinga (2015) has warned, "If 'culture,' or some other grand concept, can no longer serve as an independent, mediating, or dependent variable, researchers will have to define more precisely the target and scope of their research" (p. 12).

This is exactly what is happening in practice – many of us researchers continue to invoke the powerful, storied concept of culture, but apply ourselves to examine whatever operationalization of culture addresses our current topic of interest and its associated outcomes. We define culture just as we wish for present purposes; it seems that Humpty Dumpty is a cross-cultural researcher, too!

The Grand Design

What is lost in our adventure to date is the writing about culture as a grand design. At least in cross-cultural psychology, there is an absence of writing about the big picture, in the Great Tradition of a Clifford Geertz or a Gordon Redding. That absence is largely because we deal with psychological minutiae, not the system in which they are enmeshed, conjoined, and interacting. We are not trained or rewarded for such skill and vision, and it rarely appears in our literature. It seems to me that Harry Triandis (1995) was the last to try.

The romantics of 19th century sociology and early 20th century anthropology are understandably frustrated. They, including me, lamenting,

> Upon this gifted age, in its dark hour,
> Rains from the sky a meteoric shower
> Of facts . . . they lie unquestioned, uncombined.
> Wisdom enough to leech us of our ill
> Is daily spun; but there exists no loom
> To weave it into fabric."
> (Edna St. Vincent Millay, from "*Upon This Age That Never Speaks Its Mind*," Collected Sonnets. New York: Harper Perennial, 1988, p. 140).

Perhaps, however, we now possess a vision and the tools to realize a different Grand Design, viz., the embeddedness of a given individual in a variety of "cultures," ranging from the nation as the most distal, to the organization or school in which he or she is working, and his or her family, as the more proximal, all interlarded with the demographics of ethnicity, age, and gender of his or her socialization background, and all features of the individual's social identity to which others respond.

This is a daunting agenda, layering and locating the individual within a nesting of cultural identities. Statistical techniques are now available to identify which of these cultural identities carried by each individual create differences in the model of individual responses that the researcher is testing. Not every feature of an individual's culture need be considered, nor will they be impactful in any case. But, we can begin the scientific process of detecting how aspects of an individual's cultural identity make a difference for specific types of responses. At least this approach will help me address the question I have set for myself and stated early in this essay, viz., "To explain why a given person responds in a given way in a given social situation."

I thank Poortinga for stimulating my thoughts on the question of where is culture in cross-cultural psychology.

> "Curiouser and curiouser," cried Alice.
> (Louis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland)

References

Bond, M. H. (Ed.). (1986). *The psychology of the Chinese people*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Bond, M. H. (Ed.). (1988). *The cross-cultural challenge to social psychology*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Bond, M. H. (2013). Refining Lewin's formula: A general model for explaining situational influence on individual social behavior. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 16*(1)*,* 1-15. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12012

Bond, M. H., & Forgas, J. (1984). Linking person perception to behavior intention across cultures: The role of cultural collectivism. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 15*(3), 337-352. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022002184015003006

Bond, M. H., Leung, K., & Schwartz, S. (1992). Explaining choices in procedural and distributive justice across cultures. *International Journal of Psychology, 27*(2), 211-225. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00207599208246876

Bond, M. H., Leung, K., Au, A., Tong, K.-K., Reimel de Carrasquel, S., Murakami, F., . . . Lewis, J. R. (2004). Culture-level dimensions of social axioms and their correlates across 41 cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 35*(5), 548-570. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022022104268388

Bond, M. H., & Tornatzky, L. G. (1973). Locus of control in students from Japan and the United States: Dimensions and levels of response. *Psychologia: An International Journal of Psychological Sciences, 16*(4)*,* 209-213. http://www.educ.kyoto-u.ac.jp/cogpsy/psychologia/

Gelfand, M. J., Raver, J. L., Nishii, L., Leslie, L. A., Lun, J., Lim, B. C., . . . Yamaguchi, S. (2011). Differences between tight and loose cultures: A 33 nation study. *Science, 332*(6033), 1100-1104. http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.1197754

Georgas, J., van de Vijver, F. J. R., & Berry, J. W. (2004). The ecocultural framework, ecosocial indices and psychological variables in cross-cultural research. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 35*(1), 74-96. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022022103260459

Guzzo, R. A., Yost, P. R., Campbell, R. J., & Shea, G. P. (1993). Potency in groups: Articulating a construct. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 32*(1), 87-106. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1993.tb00987.x

Hofstede, G., Neuijen, B., Ohayv, D. D., & Sanders, G. (1990). Measuring organizational cultures: A qualitative and quantitative study across twenty cases. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 35*(2)*,* 286-316. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2393392

McAuley, P. C., Bond, M. H., & Kashima, E. (2002). Towards defining situations objectively: A culture-level analysis of role dyads in Hong Kong and Australia. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 33*(4), 363-379. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/00222102033004001

Messick, D. M. (1988). Coda. In M. H. Bond (Ed.), *The cross-cultural challenge to social psychology* (pp. 286-289). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Poortinga, Y. (2015). Is "culture" a workable concept for (cross-)cultural psychology? *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, 2*(1), 1-21. http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-

0919.1139

Singelis, T. M., Bond, M. H., Sharkey, W. F., & Lai, C. S. Y. (1999). Unpackaging culture's influence on self-esteem and embarrassability: The role of self-construals. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 30*(3), 315-341. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022022199030003003

Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview.

Van de Vijver, F. J. R., & Leung, K. (2011). Equivalence and bias: A review of concepts, models, and data analytic procedures. In D. Matsumoto & F. J. R. van de Vijver (Eds.), *Cross-cultural research methods in psychology* (pp. 17-45). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Can Humpty-Dumpty be a Good Cross-Cultural Psychologist?
A Reply to Bond's Comment

Ype H. Poortinga

Tilburg University, Tilburg Netherlands

In numerous publications, Bond has addressed the conceptualization of culture and the methodology of culture-comparative research. His comment (Bond, 2016) on my essay about the status of the concept of culture in our field (Poortinga, 2015) testifies his expertise and insight. There are two points in the comment to which I would like to draw attention: the suggestions Bond has for culture-comparative research, and his vision on culture. I also relate these points to my original argument.

Culture-Comparative Research

Bond describes how cross-cultural psychology could make progress through (i) multi-cultural data sets, (ii) the distinction of individual and culture-level variables, and (iii) the analysis of relationships between variables. These are important principles for an agenda of empirical research. Cross-cultural psychology as an institutionalized field with conferences, a membership organization, and periodicals emerged in the mid-20th century when psychologists took an interest in differences. It can be said that during much of the first half century, the field was geared to comparing groups of people living in distinct contexts, and much effort was spent on organizing such differences in convenient formats. Accessible and literate samples have provided the bulk of the data: countries, students, and dimensions of values have become landmarks of much of our field.

Bond has been both a critic and a contributor to this tradition. He has challenged the broad value dimension of individualism–collectivism, suggesting that further specification is needed (e.g., Bond, 2002). He has been one of the architects of one alternative, social axioms (e.g., Leung et al., 2002), that tends to show more factorial variation across countries, perhaps not surprisingly, as axioms are closer to conventions or everyday

practices. He has followed the recent trend of correlating societal indicators with frequency differences in distributions of genetic polymorphisms (Minkov & Bond, 2015). Methodological difficulties with this approach can probably best be dealt with through large-scale projects, supplemented by various smaller and even local studies. In my dreams I imagine projects much larger than what we have seen so far, with two characteristics: a joint effort from the start including stakeholders from all participating populations, and a component of ontogenetic development (to study how variations in targeted patterns of behavior come about). Large education evaluation studies, such as the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) projects of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) are showing the direction to go. The goal of such projects is to unpackage the *magnum mysterium*, (see Bond & van de Vijver, 2011), "providing some empirical substance to the vague, fill-in-the-blank construct of 'culture'" (Bond, 2016, see above). However, my guess is that the notion of unpackaging leaves scope for disagreement. Poortinga, van de Vijver, Joe, & van de Koppel (1987) wrote: "… the metaphor of a packaged variable implies that there is an essence to be discovered, which until the package has been unwrapped remains beyond the observer's knowledge" (p. 22). The metaphor for culture my coauthors and I preferred was that of the onion; when peeling an onion you take off layer after layer until in the end the onion has disappeared completely. In other words, no variance is left to be explained at the end of a successful analysis.

Perspective on Culture

Rather than trying to fully explain differences between groups and making "culture" disappear, both as a source of variance and as a theoretical concept, Bond suggests that we take a fresh look at the big picture, i.e., the embeddedness of the individual in a variety of settings or contexts, called cultures. Such a viewpoint is moving away from a culture as a fixed categorical variable and taking a more situational and dynamic approach. Recently, there have been various formulations going in a similar direction. Following Aydinli and Bender (2015), a distinction can be made between approaches that allow for situational effects superimposed on an underlying orientation (e.g., situated cognitions from either a underlying individualist or collectivist position, as proposed by Oyserman, 2011) and approaches that allow switching between different cultural frames that are available to the (multicultural) individual (e.g., Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000). However, as far as I can see, in both kinds of approaches the term culture continues to imply some *essentialism* (the notion that cultural groups have specific shared characteristics) and/or *reification* (the process of making culture real and concrete). For example, Morris, Chiu, and Liu (2015) in a recent chapter introducing "polycultural psychology," write in their abstract that "[i]ndividuals take influences from multiple cultures and thereby become conduits through which cultures can affect each other" (p. 631). It seems to me that Bond's perspective on the cultural identities of the individual in the end appears to maintain that there is more to the package than just wrappings.

A Warm Welcome for Humpty Dumpty?

To me there is a paradox between most of what Bond writes in his comment and his suggestion that, following Humpty Dumpty, we can define culture just as we wish to suit our purposes. In Alice in Wonderland, Humpty Dumpty reserves the right to choose meaning when he says about a word: "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." Are we to understand that Bond suggests that we can attribute meaning to "culture" as we see fit? How can there be a common goal and a common effort by a research community if every member can choose a personally preferred meaning? Of course, there can be different analytic perspectives if we define the subject matter of our research as behavior in context. Bond defines his orientation; to me this comes across as a serious attempt to provide direction to the field, and not as the kind of whimsical choice that Humpty Dumpty stands for.

As I argued in my original essay (Poortinga, 2015), scientific communication demands precise meanings. Bond agrees that culture is too broad a concept for analysis. In concrete culture-comparative research projects, as Bond has conducted, variables are included in the research design that seek to maximize explained variance in the behavior that is the target of examination. There are many explanatory variables, but they all come (or at least are supposed to come) with a clear conceptual definition and an operationalization. There appears to be little difference of opinion on this. My question remains: do we need the concept of "culture" with its Humpty Dumpty associations in this pursuit?

In summary, I can endorse most of Bond's argument, but for me it does not follow that what he is after needs to be called "culture." If we do without this term, we would avoid the surplus meanings that tend to come with it and that are likely to be an impediment on the road to understanding and explanation.

References

Aydinli, A., & Bender, M. (2015). Cultural priming as a tool to understand multiculturalism and culture. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, 2*(1), 1-21. http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1134

Bond, M. H. (2002). Reclaiming the individual from Hofstede's ecological analysis--A 20-year odyssey: Comment on Oyserman et al. (2002). *Psychological Bulletin, 128*(1), 73-77. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.128.1.73

Bond, M. H., & Van de Vijver, F. J. R. (2011). Making scientific sense of cultural differences in psychological outcomes: Unpacking the *magnum mysterium.* In D. Matsumoto & F. J. R. Van de Vijver (Eds.), *Cross-cultural research methods in psychology* (pp. 75-100)*.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Hong, Y.-y., Morris, M. W., Chiu, C.-y., & Benet-Martínez, V. (2000). Multicultural minds: A dynamic constructivist approach to culture and cognition. *American Psychologist*, *55*(7), 709–720. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.7.709

Leung, K., Bond, M. H., Reimel de Carrasquel, S., Muñoz, C., Hernández, M., Murakami,

F., . . . Singelis, T. M. (2002). Social axioms: The search for universal dimensions of general beliefs about how the world functions. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 33*(3), 286-302. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0022022102033003005

Minkov, M., & Bond, M. H. (2015). Genetic polymorphisms predict national differences in life history strategy and time orientation. *Personality and Individual Differences 76*, 204–215. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.12.014

Morris, M. W., Chiu, C.-y., & Liu, Z. (2015). Polycultural psychology. *Annual Review of Psychology, 66,* 631-659. http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010814-015001

Oyserman, D. (2011). Culture as situated cognition: Cultural mindsets, cultural fluency, and meaning making. *European Review of Social Psychology*, *22*(1), 164–214. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2011.627187

Poortinga, Y. (2015). Is "culture" a workable concept for (cross-)cultural psychology? *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, 2*(1), 1-21. http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1139

Poortinga, Y. H., van de Vijver, F. J. R., Joe, R. C., & van de Koppel, J. M. H. (1987). Peeling the onion called culture: A synopsis. In C. Kagitcibasi (Ed.), *Growth and progress in cross-cultural psychology* (pp. 22-34). Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger.