University of Michigan Law School

University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository

Book Chapters | Faculty Scholarship

2001

The Role of Culture in Appraisal

Batja Mesquita

Phoebe C. Ellsworth
pce@umich.edu

Available at: https://repository.law.umich.edu/book_chapters/127

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.law.umich.edu/book_chapters

Part of the Psychiatry and Psychology Commons, and the Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons

Publication Information & Recommended Citation

Mesquita, Batja, co-author. "The Role of Culture in Appraisal." P.C. Ellsworth, co-author. In *Appraisal Processes in Emotion: Theory, Methods, Research*, edited by K. R. Scherer et al., 233-48. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Book Chapters by an authorized administrator of University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact mlaw.repository@umich.edu.

13

The Role of Culture in Appraisal

BATJA MESQUITA AND PHOEBE C. ELLSWORTH

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries travelers to the South Seas brought back stories of a Malaysian emotional syndrome called *amok,* in which a person rushes around in a state of frenzy, recklessly attacking anyone who gets in the way, and impervious to all attempts at restraint. No Western language had a word that meant the same thing as *amok*, and Westerners were fascinated by this bizarre phenomenon. Fascinated, but not mystified. *Amok* was strange, but it was not unrecognizable, and the term "running amok" was quickly incorporated into Western speech to refer to a kind of violent frenzy that had previously been nameless.

This example illustrates a problem in interpreting cultural differences. Most of the examples of radically different emotions provided in ethnographic reports are somewhat ambiguous, suggesting startling differences but also extending our mental reach to recognize elements of similarity. The emotions described are unfamiliar, but they are not *incomprehensible* (Oatley, 1991), suggesting that some qualities of emotional experience may be culturally idiosyncratic and therefore strange to members of a different culture, while others may be culturally general and therefore more easily understandable. A major challenge for theorists is to develop and test hypotheses about which aspects of emotion are likely to be universal and which are likely to vary across cultures.

Appraisal theories offer a model to explain differences through similarities. They suggest how emotions that seem extremely unfamiliar, once explained, may become comprehensible to people from a different culture. The basic cross-cultural thesis of appraisal theories is the hypothesis of *universal contingencies* (Ellsworth, 1994a; Scherer, 1997b): if people from different cultures appraise a situation in the same way, they will experience the same emotion. If they experience a different emotion, it is because they have appraised the situation differently, and appraisal theories allow us to specify (at least roughly) what this difference in appraisal is likely to be. What is universal is the link between appraisal patterns and emotions—the *if-then* contingency. For example, if people attribute a negative event such as illness to uncontrollable impersonal forces, such as fate or bad luck, they should feel sad or depressed; if they attribute it to the actions of another person, they should feel angry; if they think they themselves are responsible, they should feel guilty. So if people from culture A respond to an event with anger but people from culture B do not, we would expect to

find cultural differences in their appraisal of agency, with the As holding some other person responsible and the Bs blaming themselves or no one.

The universal contingency hypothesis does not imply universality of the events that elicit emotions. Systematic cultural differences in the appraisal of "the same" events may evoke dramatically different emotions. For instance, in middle-class European culture, solitude may be perceived as a welcome opportunity for privacy and thus lead to contentment. But for the Utku Inuits being alone implies social isolation, and the loss of social contact is an occasion for sorrow (Briggs, 1970). If the consequences of social isolation are seen as potentially threatening, being alone can lead to "uncanny feelings" or "fear." This is the case for the Tahitians (Levy, 1973) and the Awlad 'Ali Bedouins (Abu-Lughod, 1986), both of whom consider solitude an opportunity for spirits to disturb a person. The meaning of the situation, rather than the objective condition, makes for the subsequent emotion.

Nor does the thesis of universal contingency imply universality of emotions. Emotions in different cultures are assumed to be similar only to the extent that they are characterized by similar patterns of appraisals. Similarity on some dimensions of appraisal, furthermore, does not rule out differences on others. The combined similarities and differences in appraisal shape the experience of an emotion. The extent to which appraisals and emotions vary across cultures is an empirical question. Rather than assuming universality of certain emotions, appraisal theory calls for empirical study of cultural similarities and differences in appraisal dimensions and combinations and their relation to emotional experience.

Therefore, it is the appraisal–emotion association that is assumed to be universal, rather than either emotions or emotion antecedents. Most appraisal psychologists think of emotions as the combination of a series of appraisals on a limited number of dimensions, such as novelty, pleasantness, control, certainty, agency, and compatibility with personal or social values (Frijda, 1986; Roseman, 1984; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985; Scherer, 1984a). The basic idea of universal contingencies is quite recent (Ellsworth, 1994a; Scherer, 1997b), and at this point it is little more than a heuristic idea; very few specific hypotheses have been generated, which perhaps makes sense, since there is very little relevant research. Two hypotheses are obvious. First, similar emotions should be associated with similar patterns of appraisal across cultures. Second, cultural differences in emotions should correspond to predictable differences in appraisal patterns. A third hypothesis is that the set of dimensions proposed by appraisal theorists (and we grant that there are differences among theorists) should predict emotions in all cultures.

Evidence for the Hypothesis of Universal Contingency

If emotional experience is based on the individual's subjective evaluation of an event, unfamiliar emotions should become understandable to people from other cultures if the culture-specific meaning of the event is understood. In ethnographic studies, culturally unique emotional responses are often explained to the reader by revealing the subjective meaning of the antecedents to members of the culture. For example, the anger that many Surinamese people experience when they encounter bad luck can be understood from their belief in black magic (Wooding, 1981). According to the Surinamese, misfortune can be caused by the curses of one's enemies, by human

agents rather than by chance or impersonal forces. The Surinamese tendency to get angry can be understood from the fact that blame is involved in their appraisal (Mesquita, in preparation). There are many other examples of this principle in the literature: once the interpretation of the eliciting event is known, the emotional response to it, however strange it seems at first, becomes fully understandable.

Note that these culture-specific emotion antecedents offer more convincing evidence for the hypothesis of universal contingency than would examples of crossculturally identical antecedent events. If the same kinds of events elicit similar emotions in different cultures, it could be because the event is appraised in the same way but it could also be due to a species-wide biological response, like the startle response to sudden loud noises. Universal contingency between appraisals and emotions can be inferred with more confidence when very different antecedents that result in the same interpretation evoke similar emotions in different cultures.

The hypothesis of universal contingency has been tested in a small number of cross-cultural questionnaire studies. In all of these studies participants from different cultures have been asked to report instances of specific emotions from their past. They then answered questions about how they appraised these emotional events. The largest study included students from 37 different countries in six geopolitical regions: northern and central European countries, Mediterranean countries, Anglo-American New World countries, and Latin American, Asian, and African countries (Scherer, 1997a, 1997b). Other studies have compared students from the Unites States, Hong Kong, Japan, and the People's Republic of China (Mauro, Sato, & Tucker, 1992); students from the United States and India (Roseman, Dhawan, Rettek, Naidu, & Thapa, 1995); students from the Netherlands, Indonesia, and Japan (Frijda, Markam, Sato, & Wiers, 1995); and Dutch, Surinamese, and Turkish community samples in the Netherlands (Mesquita, in preparation). The emotions as well as the appraisal dimensions studied differed somewhat in the different studies, and the researchers also focused on different aspects of the universal contingency hypothesis.

Universal Associations between Emotions and Patterns of Appraisal

The research generally supports the hypothesis that equivalent emotions in different cultures are characterized by similar appraisal patterns. Scherer (1997b) found similar appraisal patterns across cultures for joy, fear, anger, sadness, disgust, shame, and guilt. For example, joyful situations were cross-culturally characterized as expected, very pleasant, requiring no action, and enhancing self-esteem. Across cultures, the situations that produce fear were conceived of as unpleasant, obstructing goals, and hard to cope with. Anger was provoked in situations that were seen as unexpected, unpleasant, obstructing goals, unfair, and caused by other people.

However, Scherer also found cultural differences in appraisal. In comparison to other geopolitical regions, African countries appraised the antecedents of all negative emotions as significantly higher on unfairness, external causation, and immorality, while Latin American countries gave them lower ratings of immorality than the countries in other geopolitical regions.

Similar results were obtained by Frijda et al. (1995) and Mesquita (in preparation), who included different emotions from Scherer and a slightly different set of appraisal dimensions. Despite these methodological differences, the results were com-

parable in that equivalent emotions in different cultures shared a core of similar appraisals but were also different on some other appraisals.

A slightly different way of representing the appraisal–emotion relationship was adopted by Mauro, Sato, & Tucker, (1992), who asked people to remember times they had felt each of 16 different emotions and to rate each of the eliciting situations on several appraisal dimensions. The researchers then compared the absolute and relative positions of the 16 emotion episodes in four cultures on the dimensions of appraisal. They found no significant cultural differences in the positions of emotions on the appraisal dimensions of attentional activity, certainty, coping ability, or norm/self compatibility. They found cultural differences in the absolute but not in the relative positions of emotions on the pleasantness, legitimacy, and control dimensions. On the dimensions of anticipated effort, control, and responsibility, the results from different cultures were substantially different. Again, the evidence supports the hypothesis of a cross-culturally similar experiential core of "equivalent" emotions, but there are cultural variations in the appraisal–emotion relationship as well.

Similarly, Roseman et al. (1995) studied the emotions of anger, sadness, and fear in Indian and American samples. A MANOVA, with emotion and culture as predictor variables and appraisals as dependent variables, yielded a main effect for emotion, providing evidence for a universal appraisal-emotion relationship. Yet, as in the other studies discussed, there were cultural differences as well. A main effect for culture was found as was an emotion by culture interaction. Therefore, culture did influence the appraisal–emotion relationship both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Taken together, these studies show that there are important cross-cultural similarities in appraisal-emotion relationships, supporting the hypothesis of universal contingency. However, each of these studies also suggests that the relationship between appraisals and emotions is subject to cultural influence. The cultural differences have for the most part remained unexplained. One possibility is that the emotion words (and/or the appraisal words) used in the different languages do not represent fully equivalent emotional experiences. If that is the case, the differences in the appraisal–emotion association could reflect subtle differences in the quality of the emotional experience connoted by the different emotion terms and would not challenge the hypothesis of universal contingency. But we have no evidence that these cultural differences can be explained by semantic distinctions in the various languages used, and until such evidence exists, it remains a possibility that the observed differences raise questions about the predictive value of the hypothesis of universal contingency, at least in its current crude form.

Cultural Differences in Emotions Are Explained by Differences in Appraisal

Most studies have thus tested the universality of the appraisal–emotion relationship by asking the question whether similar appraisals characterize similar emotions in different cultures. However, universality of the appraisal–emotion association also implies that cultural *differences* in emotions can be explained by differences in appraisals. The universal contingency hypothesis thus calls for research linking established differences in emotional experience to differences in appraisals. Although several studies have shown that there are cultural differences in the appraisals associated

with particular emotion terms or situations (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Mesquita, 1999; Scherer, 1997b), only one study has demonstrated that these cultural differences have implications for the subsequent emotional experience. Roseman et al. (1995) tested whether cultural differences in the emotional experiences of Indian and American college students were mediated by differences in appraisal. Differences in experience were measured by intensity ratings: compared to the American respondents, the Indians reported lower overall intensity for both sadness and anger. Cultural differences in emotion intensity were accounted for by greater perceived motive-consistency (one of Roseman's appraisal dimensions) in Indians than in Americans. This suggests that the more consistent an emotional event is with a person's motives, the less intense the person's feelings of sadness and anger. Cultural differences in emotional intensity were completely mediated by appraisal differences: after the effect of the appraisal mediator was taken into account, no direct effect of culture on emotional intensity was left.

Evidence for the idea that cultural differences in *actual* emotional experience are mediated by cultural differences in appraisal is thus extremely scarce. One of the reasons may be that it is hard to come up with measures of emotional experience independent from appraisal. One possibility for future research is to test the idea that culturally unique emotions require consideration of culturally unique appraisals of antecedent events. Another possibility is to link cultural differences in appraisals to differences in nonverbal emotional responses such as autonomic nervous system responses or facial expressions. Whatever the method used, research is needed to show that cultural differences in appraisal make a difference in people's actual emotional experience.

The Same Set of Appraisal Dimensions Should Cross-Culturally Distinguish Equally between Different Emotions in Different Cultures

To explain this third prediction of the universal contingency hypothesis, let us suppose we knew the "true" set of appraisal dimensions, a set of dimensions that was relevant to people across cultures. If this were the case, we should expect that the appraisal outcomes on this set of dimensions would differentiate between the emotions within each culture. The variance of emotions explained by this imaginary set of appraisal dimensions should be close to 100%. The percentage of explained variance should also be similar across cultures, because the relationship between appraisal and emotional experience is supposedly a universal one. In principle, therefore, the universal contingency hypothesis would predict that the outcome configurations on appraisal dimensions would fully predict the variance in emotional experience both within and across cultures.

However, in reality we only have a tentative set of appraisal dimensions. Most people would agree that the appraisal dimensions identified so far are neither final nor complete. Therefore, we would not expect the outcomes on the various appraisal dimensions to predict 100% of the emotion variance within each culture. Adding dimensions would, for instance, contribute to the level of explained variance (Scherer, 1997a).[1]

The universal contingency hypothesis does lead to the following two predictions that are related to each other:

1. Even if appraisal outcomes do not fully account for the differentiation in emotions, they explain a significant amount of the variance.
2. The same appraisal dimensions explain an equal amount of the variance in emotions across cultures.

The relevant research seems to provide mixed evidence for the first prediction. The variance in emotions explained by appraisal has not exceeded the 40% in any of the studies. Compiling the results across cultures, Scherer's (1997a) discriminant functions of appraisal explained 39 percent of the variance in emotions.[2] Averaging over the three cultures studied, the discriminant functions of Frijda and colleagues (1995) explained about 40% of the variance in emotions. Finally, Mauro and colleagues (1992) found that their appraisal factors explained 13–31% of the variance on five affect scales. Whereas the evidence thus suggests that appraisal, overall, is a considerable factor in the differentiation of emotions, it is unclear whether it supports the claim of the universal contingency hypothesis that appraisal corresponds to the emotional experience. Even taking into consideration that the set of appraisals identified is tentative and that only a restricted set of appraisal dimensions has been used to predict, the level of prediction is not very high. Forty percent is a long way from 100%.

The research also provides mixed evidence for the second prediction of the universal contingency hypothesis, that the same appraisals cross-culturally predict emotional experience to the same extent. Scherer (1997a) found that across all emotions, the appraisal profiles of different cultures were intercorrelated at r = .80, implying that the relative contribution of each appraisal dimension must be largely similar across cultures and across emotions. However, he also found some sizeable differences between the intercultural correlations of appraisal profiles for individual emotions . On average, joy profiles were most correlated across cultures (r = .99) and disgust profiles least (.61). As Scherer acknowledges, "the possibility that part of the differences [in the cultural intercorrelations] between emotions may be due to culture-specific appraisal tendencies for specific emotions cannot be ruled out" (1997a, p.137). The difference in the levels of intercultural correlations of the emotion profiles thus leaves room for culture-specific associations between appraisal and emotion. However, in most cases, Scherer favors the explanation that the different levels of cross-cultural correlations stem from differences in the articulation of appraisal profiles of given emotions: joy had a clear and distinct appraisal profile, whereas disgust was less clearly distinguished by its appraisal. Therefore, the more articulated the appraisal profile of an emotion, the higher the correlation of the appraisal profile and the emotion across cultures.

In support of the prediction that the same appraisal dimensions cross-culturally explain the variance in emotions to a similar extent, Frijda et al. (1995) found similar percentages of explained variance in the three cultures they studied: appraisal accounted for 39% of the variance in Dutch and Indonesian emotions and for about 41% in the Japanese. However, they also found that the percentage of variance explained by particular appraisals differed across cultures. For example, valence explained 23% of the variance in the Dutch emotion words, 30% in the Indonesian, and 15% in the Japanese. Therefore, although the combined appraisal dimensions explained similar levels of variance cross-culturally, the independent impact of each appraisal seemed

to differ to some extent across cultures, again raising the possibility that the association between appraisal and emotion is not entirely universal.

Mauro and colleagues (1992) regressed the combined appraisal dimensions onto five factors of emotional experience. They found that the variance explained for each factor of emotional experience ranged from 13% to 31%. However, they observed significant differences across cultures in the relations between appraisal and experience for four out of the five factors of emotional experience. The interaction of culture and appraisal accounted for 4–5% of the variance of emotions. Consistent with the universal contingency hypothesis, appraisal thus predicted emotional experience, but it did so in somewhat different ways for different cultures.

In summary, the little research that exists so far provides support for the relation between appraisal and emotional experience. Yet it is unclear whether it confirms the hypothesis that emotional experience is *contingent on* appraisal. The correlations between appraisal and experience are far from perfect. This may be due to measurement problems or an incomplete operationalization of "appraisal." Yet at this point we cannot be sure that the low level of explained variance is due to practical problems alone. The research also supports the notion that the same set of appraisal dimensions predicts considerable variance in emotions within many different cultures. However, slight variations in the relative contribution of appraisal dimensions in different cultures are suggested as well. The implications for the universal contingency hypothesis are not completely clear. One reason for the differences found may be that emotion lexicons in different languages do not perfectly map onto each other. Differences in appraisals may be due to differences in the exact meaning of supposedly equivalent emotion words in different languages. It cannot be ruled out, however, that the relation between appraisal and experience may be somewhat different in different languages; this latter possibility would challenge the universal contingency hypothesis.

Appraisal is not the only component of emotion that contributes to emotional experience. Several studies of both single cultures (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989) and multiple cultures (Frijda et al., 1995; Mesquita, in preparation) have found that *action readiness* adds considerably to the variance explained by appraisals. In a study of Dutch, Indonesian, and Japanese emotions, Frijda and his colleagues (1995) found that 62% of the Dutch emotions were correctly predicted by appraisal and action readiness together (compared to 39% with appraisal only and 55% with action readiness only), 51% of the Indonesian emotions (39% with appraisal only, 40% with action readiness only), and 65% of the Japanese emotions (41% with appraisal only, 41% with action readiness only). Thus adding action tendencies to appraisals significantly increased the explained variance in emotions.

Although it may appear that the failure of appraisals to account for more of the variance on their own raises serious problems for the hypothesis of universal contingency, the issues are extremely complex, and it would be premature to reject the hypothesis. Disentangling the interacting elements of a continuous process that unfolds over time is a challenging task (see Lewis & Granic, 1999; Reisenzein, this volume; Reisenzein & Hoffman, 1993). All of the research to date on the role of appraisal and action readiness relies on retrospective analyses of remembered experience. Appraisals, action tendencies, and the quality of the emotional experience change over the course of an emotional episode, and often actual actions are part of the experience as well, leading to further changes in appraisals and action tendencies. Verbal

measures that ask for a single report of appraisals cannot capture this reciprocal fluidity, and it may well be that reports of action tendencies contribute to the variance explained because they capture a different stage of the sequence. If we could stop time at the precise moment the initial appraisal process was complete, or if we had continuous nonverbal indicators of appraisal, we might achieve a "pure" measure of the appraisal–emotion relationship, but lacking these, we rely on memories. When people are asked about their emotional experiences later on, both the emotions and the action tendencies may be more accessible to consciousness than the appraisals (Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000), thus diminishing the apparent role of appraisals in the overall experience. In fact, it may be more accurate to conceive of self-reported action readiness and emotion as the more subjectively accessible indicators of initial appraisal.

Finally, the intimate relationship between appraisals and action tendencies suggests that the distinction between the two may not always be clear. Frijda and colleagues suggest that the fact that appraisals and action tendencies are "inextricably linked" (1989, p. 225), combined with the experience of mixed emotions and imprecision in the terms for appraisals and action tendencies, may limit our ability to discriminate the contribution of one from the other. For example, the major action readiness factor to emerge in their research was the *sense of being in command*, a factor that is hard to distinguish from *control*, which is typically regarded as an appraisal. This raises problems even for research within a culture but much more so for cross-cultural research, both because of further imprecision introduced by translation problems and because of differences in the factor structures of appraisals and action tendencies (Frijda et al., 1995), which may blur the distinctions in different ways in different cultures.

Evidence for and against the Universal Contingency Hypothesis

The most obvious conclusion from the empirical literature regarding the universal contingency hypothesis is that there is scarcely any evidence, one way or the other. There are so few studies that conclusions can be no more than tentative at this point.

The available empirical evidence does suggest a cross-culturally important association between appraisals and emotions. First, understanding how people from other cultures interpret events makes their emotions more intelligible. Second, equivalent emotion words in different languages share a core of similar appraisals. Third, in one study, differences in appraisal have been shown to account for cultural differences in emotional experience. Fourth, the same set of appraisal dimensions appears to explain a considerable proportion of the variance in emotions crossculturally. Taken together, these findings provide consistent evidence that the dimensions identified by appraisal theorists are universally important in discriminating among emotions.

On the other hand, in the research conducted so far, an even greater proportion of the variance in emotions is left unexplained by appraisal. The percentage of explained variance is considerably improved by adding action readiness, and one very important problem for future research is to distinguish the contribution of appraisals from the contribution of action tendencies, both temporally and conceptually. Furthermore, there are some cultural differences in the association between appraisals

and emotions. Some appraisals seem less relevant in other cultures than in the Western cultures where the theories were developed. So far, appraisal theorists have concentrated on the hypothesis of cultural generality, and we have given little theoretical attention to how we might account for cultural differences or to how we might go about studying them. Our accounts of cultural differences have generally been post hoc, superficial, and justifiably tentative. In the remainder of this chapter we will review some possible ways of thinking about cultural differences in appraisal and emotion.

Approaches to Conceptualizing Cultural Differences in Appraisals and Emotions

Traditionally, thinking of general theories for universal processes has come naturally to psychologists, while thinking of theories to explain cultural differences is a new and unfamiliar enterprise.[3]

Anything that is assumed to be true of the species as a whole is a plausible candidate for a universal explanation: our shared physical constitutions and shared experiences, such as danger, gratification, and loss, constrain variability. Biological and evolutionary theories are available for application to the study of emotions. Theories of cultural differences require more: they require hypotheses about particular domains of likely variability within the world of human emotions and, ultimately, hypotheses about particular cultural processes that might be responsible for these differences. For example, in the early days of anthropology, cultures were implicitly or explicitly ranked from simple (or "primitive") to complex (or "like us"), and one can imagine a hypothesis that the simple cultures would have emotions like fear, anger, and joy, while the complex societies would have a vastly elaborated emotional repertoire. This sort of evolutionary perspective on cultures has by now been completely rejected, and with few exceptions (Murdock, 1968; Whiting & Child, 1953), anthropologists have been extraordinarily reluctant even to group cultures together into any sort of larger categories. Instead they have engaged in intensive accounts of single cultures, emphasizing emotional responses that seem strange to people in the anthropologists' home culture and showing that these unfamiliar emotions "make sense" in relation to the culture's unique system of values, concerns, and meanings (see Manstead & Fischer, this volume).

Psychologists are trained to insist on comparison, and so, for them, the intensive single-culture study is not an intellectually congenial method for studying cultural differences. We must confront the task of considering what it is about emotions that is likely to be universal and what it is that is likely to vary across cultures. The basic hypothesis of universal contingencies between appraisals and emotions has nothing to say specifically about cultural differences. It predicts that if appraisals of the same event are different, emotions will also be predictably different; it suggests, somewhat vaguely, that needs and values may account for cultural differences; but it has not yet developed predictions about the kinds of appraisal patterns characteristic of different cultures (or different spatiotemporal regions of the world; see Shweder & Haidt, in press) and their correspondence to culturally specific emotional responses. Nonetheless, both the slim empirical record and the basic concepts of appraisal theory suggest some general ways cultures might differ. What follows is largely speculation, not

evidence: we hope these ideas will suggest new research directions that ultimately will provide the evidence.

"Simple" versus "Complex" Appraisals

The specific appraisals proposed by most theorists range from relatively simple, such as a sense of novelty or valence, to relatively complex, such as perceptions of agency or compatibility with personal or social values. The "simple" appraisals, according to some theorists (Leventhal & Scherer, 1987; Scherer, 1984a) are more likely to be immediate, automatic, and possibly subcortical, while the "complex" appraisals are more likely to be delayed, conscious, and cortical. The distinction is probabilistic, not absolute. First, complexity is not a dichotomy but a continuum. Second, the simpler appraisals are not *always* immediate and automatic, nor are the complex appraisals *always* delayed and "cognitive." Sometimes when we meet a new person we have an immediate sense of liking or disliking (Zajonc, 1984b), but sometimes we are not sure; an initial sense of curiosity may develop into a definite sense of attraction or distaste over the course of a conversation or even over a longer period of time. If someone shoves ahead of us in line, our negative feelings *and our attribution of agency* may be experienced immediately and simultaneously, as anger. We do not need to think about who caused the problem. The script has already been formed, either phylogenetically or ontogenetically (Frijda, 1993b; Lewis & Granic, 1999).

A related conception of the simplicity/complexity distinction is to distinguish between the appraisals that newborns can make (again, attention and valence) and those that develop later. A newborn can appraise a taste as good but cannot give credit to the person holding the spoon. In models like Scherer's (1984a), in which appraisals of an event occur in a fixed temporal sequence beginning with novelty and ending with compatibility with social norms, the simpler appraisals can be defined as the ones that occur earlier in the sequence.

Whatever one's preferred definition of the simplicity/complexity distinction, it suggests a plausible hypothesis about cultural differences: the immediate, automatic, present-at-birth, *simple* appraisals are more likely candidates for universal appraisal–emotion relationships than the delayed, mindful, more mature, *complex* appraisals. The few relevant studies provide some support for this hypothesis. Both Mauro and colleagues (1992) and Scherer (1997b) found that the relationship between appraisals and emotions was crossculturally very similar for simple appraisals (attention, valence, coping ability, and goal conduciveness) but less so for complex appraisals. Mauro and colleagues (1992) found cultural variation in the role of control, responsibility, and anticipated effort; Scherer (1997b) found most differences on the dimensions of morality, fairness, and attribution of agency (which was coded as *self, close persons, other persons,* or *impersonal* agency and roughly corresponds to Mauro's dimensions of responsibility and control; see also Matsumoto, Kudoh, Scherer, & Wallbott, 1988; Wallbott & Scherer, 1988).

There are some noticeable differences between the findings of these two studies. Both found substantial cultural variation in attributions of agency (responsibility and control), generally considered a complex appraisal dimension. However, Mauro and colleagues found a surprisingly high level of similarity in the relationship between emotion and (1) perceived fairness, and (2) compatibility with norms or personal values, whereas Scherer found the expected large cultural differences in the "complex"

appraisals of fairness and morality. It is possible that this inconsistency is due to Scherer's use of a much larger range of cultures, allowing far more diversity in definitions of morality, and indeed the African and Latin American samples (not included in the research of Mauro et al.) represented the extremes on these dimensions. In any case, while the hypothesis that simpler appraisals will show more cross-cultural consistency than complex appraisals remains plausible, there is not yet much empirical evidence, and what there is is already mixed.

Cultural Salience

A rather different approach to cultural variability is to focus on what cultures define as important. First, some types of *events* may be seen as especially significant in some cultures but not others and so will be more likely to be noticed and appraised. Second, some kinds of *emotions* might be seen as especially significant, either because they are seen as defining self-worth (like happiness for many Americans) or because they are seen as fraught with danger (like anger for the Utku, Briggs, 1970), so that events potentially conducive to these emotions are especially likely to be noticed and appraised. Finally, some *appraisals* may be more easily evoked in some cultures than others. Matsumoto et al. (1988), for example, report that Japanese respondents frequently checked "not applicable" when asked to say who or what was responsible for an event (agency appraisals), whereas Americans had little trouble choosing among possible agents.

Culturally salient events, emotions, and appraisals are likely to be interrelated, and often embody culturally focal concerns or values (see Manstead and Fischer, this volume). Such interrelationships create difficulties in attempting to distinguish the role of appraisals. If self-agency is an important cultural theme, people in that culture may feel the emotions associated with self-agency (e.g., anger and pride) relatively frequently and may be especially sensitive to events that facilitate or impede self-agency (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Tiedens et al, 2000). If honor is of paramount importance, people will be alert to the compatibility of their role-related behavior to social norms, will notice tiny responses that may signal approval or ridicule, and will experience corresponding emotional fluctuations. Despite the difficulty in teasing salient events, emotions and appraisals apart, we will try to discuss each one separately.

Events

We will pass over the *actual* frequency of events within a culture as beyond the scope of a paper devoted to appraisals, but there is no question that chronic hunger or disease, persistent discrimination, violent intergroup conflict, or other inveterate stresses must influence the emotional lives of those who endure them.

Separate from the actual frequency of events, however, certain kinds of events may be more salient to members of some cultures than others. Frijda and Mesquita (1994) introduced the concept of *focal events*, events that "never remain unnoticed" in a culture, and that, when they occur, "the individual can hardly escape being emotionally affected" (p. 71). They give the example of cultures where honor is a predominant value; in such cultures (Bali [Keeler, 1983]; Japan [Lebra, 1983; Edwards, 1996]; and Arab cultures [Abu-Lughod, 1986] have been suggested as examples) people are extremely sensitive to events that may enhance or diminish their honor.

Another example might be the sensitivity of members of interdependent collectivistic cultures to the nuances of social situations and to subtle communications from group members. Smith (1997) argues that Asians are more likely to seek out situations that call for other-focused emotions, and it is plausible that they may also be more alert to the reactions of others in any particular situation. Peng, Ellsworth, and Fu-xi (1999) found that although Chinese and American subjects were equally comfortable answering questions about the feelings of an individual, Americans showed much higher variability in answering the question, "What is the group feeling?" and found it difficult to think of a collectivity as having a single feeling, while the Chinese had no trouble. Shweder suggests that a strong concern with morality, as in the Oriya Brahmans or perhaps Victorian England, might also make certain events particularly likely to attract attention, to become focal. Shweder (1991) also makes the important point that focal events may be extremely *rare* in a culture: if certain kinds of events are seen as unacceptable, the culture may devise ways to assure that they hardly ever happen. Their infrequency is a sign of their significance rather than their insignificance. A plausible hypothesis is that events that are related to a culture's core values (Schwartz, 1992; Triandis, 1994) will be focal events in it (see Manstead & Fischer, this volume).

Focal events are likely to have culturally assigned meanings. Whenever members of the culture encounter these focal events, they are likely to appraise them in culturally preconceived ways. Therefore, the cultural focality of an event is likely to affect appraisals.

Emotions

Cultures may also admire or despise certain emotions. Both Shaver, Wu, and Schwartz (1992) and Russell (1991) have found that most languages have words—words that are in fairly common use—for the "basic" emotions of fear, anger, sorrow, and some version of happiness. Still, although cultures may be equally familiar with these emotions, some may be seen as particularly worthy or unworthy. An example is Americans' conflation of happiness with success, attractiveness, morality, and even health: to be unhappy in America is to be a failure (D'Andrade, 1984). Briggs's (1970) work on the Utku taboo on anger is the most commonly cited example.

Thus, even when cultures share the same emotions, there may be considerable variation in the relative emphasis placed on them. There may also be emotions that are *not* shared; the highly valued shame or modesty described by the Hindu term *lajya* (Shweder, 1991) is not (or no longer) an easy concept for Americans to grasp. To be seen as self-effacing, or worse yet, *shy,* is seen as a mild character flaw or even as a pathology. If we envision the emotional universe as a multidimensional space, some regions may be densely occupied in some cultures but nearly empty in others.[4] The Japanese concept of *amae,* a sense of passive dependency that is not unpleasant, is a difficult one for Americans to imagine in adults; for independent Americans, all emotions are more positive when the individual feels personal control over the situation (Roseman, 1984; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Other foreign emotion concepts, like *amok,* may be easily assimilated, implying that the concept is recognizable even though the language had no term for it.

The cultural scheme of an emotion may guide the appraisal process of an individual within that culture, thereby making certain patterns of appraisal more likely than others.

Appraisals

If different cultures emphasize some emotions more than others (see also Wierzbicka, 1994a), it follows that the relative importance of different appraisals will also vary across cultures. Ellsworth and Smith (1988a, 1988b) found that appraisals of agency were far more important in discriminating among negative emotions than among positive emotions. The prevalence of negative emotions, due to culture or circumstances, might be one of the reasons that people are especially likely to notice who or what caused a misfortune. In a culture such as Hindu India, where concerns with purity and pollution are pervasive, the appraisal of the violation of a moral norm may be much more available and more broadly elicited than in cultures that emphasize individual rights (Shweder & Haidt, in press).

Cultural differences in appraisal may take the form of differential emphasis on the appraisal dimensions that have already been identified, or there could be other dimensions of appraisal that are important determinants of emotions in some cultures but barely recognized in others. An example of the first type of difference is the finding that the dimensions of agency and control seem less similar across cultures than other appraisal dimensions. Control may be an appraisal that is never left out of consideration in countries where independence is highly valued—a focal appraisal, as it were, while it simply doesn't matter as much in other cultures. Consistent with this idea, a recent experience-sampling study yielded that the appraisal of being in control was more predictive of pleasantness among American students than among Japanese (Mesquita & Karasawa, 2000).

It may also be that some of the proposed appraisal dimensions are too simple to capture the experiences of people in other cultures or subcultures. The appraisal of agency, defined by Smith and Ellsworth (1985) as "self," "someone else," or "no one," is an example. Shweder (1991) points out that in many cultures, supernatural agents are seen as significant players in daily life, and they might elicit emotions that are different from those caused by "someone else" or "no one." Tiedens et al. (2000) have found that one's relative power affects the likelihood of seeing oneself as an agent, and consequently one's emotions, even within a culture. A strong sense of the presence of powerful supernatural beings may reduce one's own sense of agency. At the other extreme, for Americans, being independent and "agentic," the appraisal that events are caused by "no one" may be less available than to people in more fatalistic cultures.

We have discussed the cultural salience of appraisals and emotions in separate sections, but of course they are inseparable in practice. If members of a culture are quick to appraise their circumstances on a particular appraisal dimension, the emotions for which that dimension matters will be more probable; for example, in a culture where human agency attributions are especially frequent, anger may be a common emotion. Emotions can also heighten the availability of their constituent appraisals (Frijda, 1993b; Keltner, Ellsworth, & Edwards, 1993; Lewis & Granic, 1999). Appraisal and emotion (and action readiness) are mutually influential components of a process that develops in time; a change in one implies a change in the others.

Cultural Specificity of Appraisal Dimensions

Finally, in addition to appraisal dimensions that are general across cultures, there may be some appraisal dimensions that exist in some cultures but not others. Culture-spe-

cific appraisal dimensions may be as diagnostic of emotional experience as the culturally general ones proposed by current appraisal theories, and they may add to the explained variance in emotions in the cultures concerned. For example, Kitayama and Markus (1990; cited in Markus & Kitayama, 1991) found that adding Japanese emotion terms "that presuppose the presence of others" (p. 238) to a standard sample of emotions resulted in an appraisal dimension of interpersonal engagement, with ego-focused emotions such as pride and anger at one pole and other-focused emotions such as shame, and the Japanese sense of "*fureai*" (feeling of connection with someone), at the other pole. Whether interpersonal engagement is a dimension of appraisal unique to Japanese culture is an important empirical question.

There is some initial evidence that culture-specific dimensions may account for additional variance in emotions. Mesquita (in press) added an appraisal dimension of esteem by others (respectability, status) to the commonly asked self-esteem questions and found that it was an important feature of the Surinamese and the Turkish emotions but not of the Dutch.

The appraisal dimensions that have been suggested as culture-specific, interpersonal engagement and esteem by others, are interpersonal. A plausible hypothesis is that appraisals and emotions related to physical events are less likely to vary across cultures than appraisals and emotions related to social events. This idea is implicit in various writings and is expressed most explicitly by Levenson's biocultural theory (1994). It is a plausible hypothesis and an interesting avenue for future research, but at present there is next to no evidence. There is good evidence for universal expressions of some highly social emotions such as anger, contempt (Ekman & Heider, 1988), and embarrassment (Keltner, 1995), so for these the likely variation would be in appraisal of eliciting circumstances. Researchers have only begun to emphasize the distinction between impersonal and interpersonal and have paid little attention to the actual unfolding of emotions in social interactions on the one hand or to purely impersonal stimuli on the other. To complicate matters further, the same event, for example, getting the top score on a college entrance exam, may be seen as impersonal in some cultures but highly interpersonal in others.

Systematic research on culture-specific appraisal dimensions and their relative weight in the appraisal process is as yet lacking. Without such research, it is hard to evaluate the reach of universal contingency. A conceptual problem with many conceivable culture-specific appraisal dimensions is that it is not always clear whether what is involved is a new appraisal dimension (or dimensions) or something else, such as a culturally important value (Manstead and Fischer, this volume). Perhaps the Japanese concern with "emotions that presuppose the presence of others" is a reflection of a heightened cultural concern about the risk of social discord; and perhaps the Surinamese and Turkish appraisals of esteem by others are best understood as an effect of culturally salient concerns with respectability and status (Mesquita, in press).

Conclusion

Our first conclusion must be that it is premature to draw any firm conclusions about the validity of the hypothesis of universal contingency. The large-scale cross-cultural questionnaire studies of emotion and appraisal, as well as studies comparing fewer

cultures, have generally found more evidence for similarity than for difference, but there is considerable evidence of difference as well. These studies, with the exception of Roseman et al. (1995), have focused on the search for similarities, and the authors have had little to say about the differences they found. An important direction for future research is to examine the mediation of cultural differences in emotions by differences in patterns of appraisal.

The existence of culture-specific emotions and their relation to possible culturally specific appraisals also merits further research. The fact that Kitayama and Markus found a dimension of interpersonal engagement in Japan does not mean that that dimension is unique to Japan. It may exist in other cultures; it may even exist in *most* cultures. Cultural differences may be due to the absence of an appraisal dimension or to the absence of certain combinations of appraisals in the same multidimensional space. We haven't even begun to address these questions.

Cultural differences in appraisal and emotion may also be due to differences in the salience or accessibility of particular appraisal dimensions. It is possible that differences in emotions more often reflect differences in the accessibility of appraisal dimensions than in their existence. Thus, even if there are hardly any culture-specific appraisal dimensions, the dimensions *typically* used in different cultures may vary greatly. One avenue for future research on cultural differences in appraisal would be to focus on differences in the most typical or focal appraisals across cultures. This research would touch on the more general question of how certain appraisals and certain emotions come to be favored over others. Appraisal research so far has not addressed the conditions and processes of appraisal *selection* at all, and the study of cultural differences would greatly profit from such research.

Finally, intelligent research on cultural differences in emotions and appraisals requires collaboration. Appraisal theories in themselves do not include the necessary ingredients for predicting cultural differences. The fundamental crosscultural prediction of appraisal theories *is* the prediction of universal continency: if a situation is appraised the same way in two different cultures, the emotional experience will be the same; if the emotional experience is the same in two different cultures, that means that the situation has been appraised in the same way. Cultural differences in emotion result in part from *differences* in the way people in two different cultures see the "same" situation—in one culture honor is threatened, in another it is not; in one culture misfortune is due to one's own shortcomings, in another it is due to fate; and so on and on. Specific hypotheses about cultural differences in appraisal must come from other bodies of theory, or from knowledge of specific cultures, not from appraisal theory. Appraisal theories are theories of process—they cannot supply the cultural content.

Notes

We are grateful for the helpful suggestions of Alexandra Gross, Marc Lewis, and Klaus Scherer, and for the skill and good humor of Barbara Zezulka Brown and Teresa Hill, who handled the technical aspects of our long-distance collaboration.

1. Scherer (1997a) also argues that "one should set a desired level of accuracy for the classification of outcome emotions on the basis of a set of appraisal dimensions" (p. 116). He proposes that this accuracy level should be set at 65–70%, because this is the percentage of

emotions that respondents in other research recognized accurately on the basis of full antecedent descriptions. We do not think that judging *other* people's emotions from antecedent descriptions necessarily represents the maximum accuracy. Adopting appraisal theory's own notions, one's own appraisals of an antecedent event should be a more accurate predictor of the consequent emotion than another person's description of an antecedent event.

2. All numbers in this chapter have been rounded up to the closest whole number.

3. There are exceptions. Harry Triandis and Michael Bond have been carrying out cross-cultural research for decades, and encouraging others to join them. But not until the late 1980s did interest in cultural questions begin to spread across the field.

4. Lewis and Granic (1999) refer to the densely populated, easily available emotional states as "attractors." Due to language and/or socialization they are like magnetic regions within multidimensional space, assimilating ill-defined nearby emotional states to the culturally coherent prototypes.