

## Foreword

The frontispiece of Geert Hofstede's influential book, *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (Hofstede, 2001) includes the following quote: "Vérité en-deça des pyrénées, erreur au-delà". Written about 350 years ago by the French mathematician and physicist Blaise Pascal and included in his *Pensées*, Hofstede's translation is "There are truths on this side of the Pyrenees that are falsehoods on the other." One can find hundreds of similar phrases in world literature. They are all variations of the axiom that what is true or valid in one's neighborhood, region or nation is not necessarily true or valid elsewhere. The quote, however, is not given here because it is clever or cute, or made more important because of the immense status of Pascal, but because it says something quite important about the seemingly eternal tendency of inquisitive humans to try and understand the differences in the psychological makeup among people, as well as to comprehend their similarities. Centuries earlier, Theophrastus, primarily a botanist and taxonomist, and apparently Aristotle's favorite student, was reported to have said the following in 319 B.C.:

*I have often applied my thoughts to the perplexing question – which will probably puzzle me forever – why, while all Greece lies under the same sky and all Greeks are educated alike, we have different personalities. I have been a student of human nature for a long time, and have observed the different composition of men. I thought I would write a book about it.*

A century earlier, another Greek scholar by the name of Protagoras, said that "Man is the measure of all things: of things that are, that they are; of things that they are not, that they are not."

Fast forward to 1990 and we find a similar sentiment expressed by the cultural psychologist Richard Shweder:

*(What) is truly true (beautiful, good) within one intentional world – is not necessarily true (beautiful, good) in every intentional world; and what is true (beautiful, good) in every intentional world may be truly true (beautiful, good) in this one or that one.*

Humans, in other words, have been curious about differences among and between people since the dawn of time. Indeed, these differences have led to any number of wars and have been the source of ridicule, prejudice, and many misunderstandings, both large

and small. They have also been the source of fawning admiration, myths, and benign envies. Fortunately, however, many scholars throughout the ages have, like Theophrastus, sought to understand them by using various scientific methods and modes of inquiry. For many years, psychologists and other social scientists have shown considerable interest in the phenomenon of individual differences in a wide range of human characteristics. If one were to examine the psychological (and surely the anthropological) literature during the past 150 years, reams of material would be found in a quest to find and explain differences, and similarities, between human beings on all sorts of human capacities, qualities, abilities, beliefs, emotions, languages, and so forth.

Because this edited book has a focus on stress and coping, my brief comments will be limited to the field of psychology and, perhaps tangentially or by implication, to a few neighboring fields. Stress and coping, as well as numerous related concepts such as anxiety, emotionality, and adjustment, have been part of the psychological literature since psychology became a modern and respected field. The same concepts or constructs, when considered against the background of culture, have been heavily studied. This is also true of many other aspects of interest to psychologists. Thus, studying the various ways in which stress and coping come into play in different cultures or ethnic groups is not at all new. What is new, however, is the relatively recent emphasis that cross-cultural and cultural psychologists have placed on these areas in terms of intensity, sophistication, and international cooperation in scholarship and research. This Handbook is an example of this recent heightened interest. To explain, at least partially, how this came about requires a little background information.

It is generally agreed, among psychologists who identify themselves as cross-cultural psychologists, that the “modern movement” in cross-cultural psychology began in the mid-to-late 1960s. While this foreword is not the place to give the details about these beginnings, a small number of independent efforts converged to form the nucleus of a concerted and growing effort to understand, more than ever before, the nature and scope of human differences and similarities across cultures. The coalescing factors led, for instance, to the inauguration in 1972 of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology. This effort spawned an ever-increasing sophistication of both scholarship, collegiality in sharing and designing studies, organization, and the dissemination of research findings in such publications as the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *Culture and Psychology*, *Transcultural Psychiatry*, and the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*.

A critical factor, and one that is a clear measure of the growing sophistication of this area, has been the appearance of a small number of influential handbooks. Specifically, the seminal six-volume *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, published in 1980, signaled that cross-cultural psychology had finally “come of age.” Volume 6 in the *HCCP*, subtitled *Psychopathology*, included chapters of major concern to researchers who studied a wide range of phenomena within the context of other cultures. The *HCCP* was revised in 1997, but contained only three volumes (many of the previous chapters were archived). The revised Handbook contained several chapters of interest to those who study stress and coping. The *Handbook of Intercultural Training* appeared in 1996 and it contained some material relevant to the content of the present handbook. A related work, the *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication* appeared in 2001. It, too, has chapters that are relevant in the understanding of stress and coping within and across cultures. Finally, the *Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, also published in 2001, con-

tained several chapters of interest to those whose career orientations fall within the domain of stress, coping, and its various components. One chapter, concerned with the large area of research on acculturation, is especially relevant in this context.

And now we have a most welcome newcomer, the *Handbook of Multicultural Perspectives on Stress and Coping*. A sure sign of increasing interest in this important area, the HMPSC, as it will become known among the cognoscenti, will take its place among the growing collections of work that will contribute in numerous important ways to an understanding of the ways in which the complexities of culture interact with equally complex concepts of stress and coping. I congratulate Paul and Lilian Wong for their diligent efforts in this important project. To provide such a compendium of perspectives and challenges is a remarkable service to those who wish to contribute to an understanding of the various ways that culture interacts with stress and coping. They and the approximately 50 contributing authors merit applause for this effort. I am nearly certain the HMPSC will be revised within the next decade. The work that is done between now and then will inform an even better Handbook. The revision will likely be more expansive and more inclusive. Whatever shape it takes, those who are involved will have benefited greatly from the present energetic effort.

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## REFERENCE

- Hofstede, G. H. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

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