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ERIC ALEXANDER HURLEY
Pomona College

Statement of Research and Scholarship

Professionally I am anchored by my personal commitment to doing work with implications for the educational and social outcomes of African Americans and other underrepresented minorities. This commitment leads me to pursue basic psychological research and other scholarship that stands to inform how the broader discipline understands and investigates the psychological experiences of diverse cultural groups. Beyond the field of psychology I am interested in doing this work toward informing related policy and practice. In terms of theory, my scholarship rooted in a contextualist sensibility about the nature of cognitive development. It is influenced by extensions of Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) by Michael Cole (1996), Barbara Rogoff (1995), A. Wade Boykin (1986), and others whose work explores the idea that cognition is inextricably linked with and shaped by the cultural context in which it develops.

Introduction and basic definitions

Recent empirical and theoretical advances have clarified the significance of culture *broadly writ* to educational, organizational and other practically oriented areas of psychology (Boykin, 1994; Early & Gibson, 1998). The relevance of culture to basic social and cognitive psychological phenomena is becoming more apparent (Bharucha, 2007; Kitayama, Duffy, Kawamura & Larsen, 2003; Lewis, Goto & Kong, 2008; Triandis, 2001). At the same time the application of cultural variables to some areas of research has been limited by ambiguity in the construct definitions and measurement. For that reason it will be useful to establish a definition of the term culture as I use it my work. Culture is commonly defined as the shared values, norms, beliefs and behavior (habits, traditions, rituals) that distinguish groups of people. Contemporary scholarship increasingly distinguishes what is known as deep structure culture from the more commonly known dimensions of functional, expressive and infrastructural culture (Miller, 2004; Moemeka, 1998). The deep structure of a culture can be defined as perceptual, cognitive, affective and behavioral predispositions that are common among members of cultural groups. It resides at the level of worldview, is relatively stable, and is formed and passed down over many generations. The functional, expressive, and infrastructural forms by contrast, are marked by fluidity and adaptability, and in many ways are the manifestations of cultural deep structure, shaped by local conditions, in the ritual and everyday activities in which groups of people engage.

My work to date has been focused on communalism and verve, two themes that have been identified as important in the deep structure of African American culture. Communalism is a term for the form of group orientation that has been observed among African Americans. It is characterized by a marked awareness of the fundamental interdependence among people that makes social bonds and interconnectedness with others a central priority (Hurley, Allen & Boykin, 2009). Verve refers to a person's receptiveness to comparatively high levels of dense and variable stimulation in their immediate and ambient environments (Boykin, Allen, Davis & Senior, 1997).

From these foundations and definitions my own scholarship pursues three main and interrelated questions. First I have focused on the question of whether peoples' culture based orientations can be relied upon to predict their attitudes and behavior. The second major question concerns process. It is one thing to document that cultural orientations predict attitudes and behavior and another to ascertain why and how

people's culture based orientations may influence them toward one outcome or another. My third major line of inquiry pursues what I have termed the continuity thesis. In that work I contend that there will be important similarities in the expression of a given cultural theme within global diasporas and that, even when the overarching concept is of similar importance to each, there will also be important differences in the expression of that theme between peoples of different Diasporas. I believe for example that is the case with group orientation in the Asian versus African Diasporas. In our work we seek to foreground that this simple idea has critical but often ignored implications for construct development and measurement.

Predicting Attitudes and Behavior

The culture of learning: Attitudes

My interest in the relationship between peoples' cultural orientations and their perceptions, attitudes and behavior emerged partly from my reviews of the cooperative learning literature (Slavin, Chamberlain & Hurley, 2001a; Slavin, Hurley & Chamberlain, 2001b; Slavin, Hurley & Chamberlain, 2003) and from my early work evaluating cooperative learning based school reform programs (Hurley, Chamberlain & Slavin, 2000; Hurley, Chamberlain, Slavin & Madden, 2000; Chambers, Chamberlain Hurley & Slavin, 2001). These all identified significant trends indicating that African American children can be particularly responsive to group learning. A few cooperative learning scholars had made post hoc suggestions that African American children might be socialized at home toward attitudes and behaviors congruent with group learning (Kagan, Zahn, Widaman, Schwarzwald, & Tyrrell, 1985; Slavin, 1983) and some cultural psychologists had made theoretical assertions about the relationship between African American culture and group learning (Boykin, 1986) however very little empirical work had been done examining the connection directly.

I began to take up that question in studies that employ two different research paradigms. More generally I became interested in whether peoples' culture based orientations could be relied upon to predict their learning outcomes. Of course, nested within that question is whether people who differ on some dimension of culture will have predictably different attitudes and will exhibit predictably different patterns on these outcomes.

One of our methodological paradigms involves assessing children's attitudes toward various cultural themes manifested in brief descriptive vignettes. Sometimes called the perceptions of high achievers paradigm, our 2005 investigation illustrates the general methodology and findings of these works (Marryshow, Hurley, Allen & Boykin, 2005). African American grade school students were read scenarios describing the attitudes and behavioral strategies that four hypothetical peers employ toward academic success. After hearing the scenarios students responded to questions about the likelihood that they would seek out any of the four for social interaction. Those responses were then analyzed for patterns of acceptance and rejection for each peer.

The four hypothetical peers differed in the deep structure cultural themes underlying their achievement orientation. Two were described as exhibiting attitudes and behaviors consistent with one of two well documented themes in US mainstream culture; individualism or competition (Triandis, 2001). The two other students were described as exhibiting either communal or high-verve attitudes and behavior. As predicted, students rated the two peers who exhibited African American cultural values more *socially desirable* than the two mainstream oriented peers. In fact the students rejected those who achieved via individualistic and competitive orientations. A second study in this series which replicated that pattern also included a sample of European American students and found that Black students were more accepting of both Afro cultural high achievers than were White students and that White students were more accepting of the mainstream cultural high achievers than were Black students (Boykin, Albury, Tyler, Hurley, Bailey & Miller, 2005). A follow-up study found a similar pattern when students were asked questions about willingness to *work with* the hypothetical peers in academic settings (Sankofa, Hurley, Allen & Boykin, 2005). Another study in the series replicated the pattern of acceptance and rejection when students were asked about their preference for *exhibiting* the culturally themed behaviors themselves both at home and at school (Tyler, Boykin, Miller & Hurley, 2006). Students in these studies believed their own preferences would not match their teachers' wishes (despite that all scenarios described high achievers), but that their

parents and good friends would make choices similar to their own. In [Tyler, Boykin, Miller & Hurley, 2006](#) we also found that African American students believed they were more likely to be punished for communal and verve behaviors at school but for individualistic and competitive behaviors at home. We take this series of findings as indication that knowledge of students' cultural group does allow for prediction of their attitudes, and that many African American students' by their cultural group membership can be expected to endorse attitudes and behavior consistent with themes in African American culture. This pattern is distinct from the patterns observed for European American students. Surprisingly the one study in which Black and White *parents* responded to the scenarios found that ethnicity was not a significant predictor of endorsement for either the communal or verve scenarios ([Tyler, Dillihunt, Boykin, Coleman, Scott & Hurley, 2008](#)).

This series of studies are also useful in advancing our understanding of the subtleties related to Black children's perceptions of academic achievement. For some time now, John Ogbu's thesis that African American children reject learning and high achievement as "acting White" has become an accepted part of the discourse on their educational difficulties (1986). Our findings contradict the notion that African American children reject academic achievement in itself. We find that rather than reject all high achievers as Ogbu's model would predict, Black children expressed positive attitudes toward high achieving peers and behaviors consistent with their home and community cultural values.

The most recent research in this line of work examined students' responses to the same four cultural themes as they might be operationalized by teachers in the structuring of classroom activities and in the physical arrangement of classroom spaces. In study 2 of [Hurley, Boykin, Tyler & Sankofa \(Invited resubmission\)](#) the four cultural themes were used to guide depictions of the physical layout of hypothetical classrooms. Students distinguished among classroom illustrations and showed the same pattern of preferences as in previous studies. This last finding adds a new dimension to our understanding in that it suggests young children can be sensitive to the impact that comparatively subtle environmental differences can have on their experiences in a space.

The perceptions of high achievers research paradigm has been useful in helping to determine whether and under what circumstances children's cultural group membership predicts their culture relevant attitudes but in using self-reports of attitudes and behavior preferences, the findings leave unanswered the question of whether membership can be used to predict their actual behavior. Our second research paradigm seeks to pose that question more directly.

The culture of learning: Behavior

A few studies have observed that African American students' task performance was predictable based on whether the learning contexts were configured to support communal (Dill & Boykin, 2000) and verve (Bailey & Boykin, 2001) orientations. Our work has sought to generalizing those findings to other task types and age groups, increase specificity about the parameters under which such prediction is possible, and to directly assess rather than rely on ethnicity to signal participants' cultural orientations.

Communalism studies. In [Hurley Allen & Boykin, \(2005\)](#) we sought to determine whether communalism among African American students would lead them to learn more in communally configured study sessions than in an individualized session with a criterion reward structure. Our prediction was based on the idea that communal socialization experiences should lead Black students to a facility with the modes of cognition needed there. As predicted the students who studied in communal groups with no promise for reward performed better at posttest than did those who participated in the individualized learning context. [Coleman, Hurley Tyler & Boykin \(In preparation\)](#) replicated that finding using a creative problem-solving task.

Conceptually, the distinction between communal and cooperative learning can be described as related to motivation. Cooperative learning is thought to benefit student procedurally (eg: by eliciting behaviors such as cognitive elaboration, and modeling). Motivation must be separately managed. For the communally oriented, the process of working in groups may itself be motivating because it evokes social responsibility, because it allows intrinsic motivation to be expressed and/or because it capitalizes on their existing capacities. In [Hurley, Allen & Boykin, \(2009\)](#), we decided to compare different configurations of

'group'. Though the overall performance of Black and White students in the study was similar, they performed best in different contexts. As predicted African American students who studied communally outperformed those who studied in groups with group competitive or group interpersonally competitive reward structures. European American students performed best where there was individual accountability and the promise of rewards. These two findings, the first to employ math tasks, are consistent with trends in the cooperative learning literature and support our contention that communalism may lead many Black children to a facility with modes of cognition and behavior that are useful during group work.

The most recent study in this series (Hurley & Pauletto, *In progress*) set out to generalize the previous findings to a new age group and to address a key shortcoming of earlier studies which typically operationalize culture as a group level variable, in effect using ethnicity as a proxy for culture. Because we advance a culture rather than an ethnicity argument, we believe that measuring group orientation directly should allow better prediction of the relevant outcomes. The research design was similar to Hurley, Allen & Boykin, 2005 but employed a college sample and age-appropriate task (complex fractions). Students were also grouped (high/low collectivism) according to their scores on prescreening. Our prediction that participants would perform best whose study session was matched with their collectivism category was only partly supported. Among African American participants, those high in collectivism performed better in the communal context and those who were low in collectivism performed best in the individual context. European participants who studied in the individualized context outperformed those in the communal context regardless of collectivism status. This finding while unexpected and in need of replication is nonetheless interesting and interpretable. It suggests either that the collectivism measure we employed or group orientation itself may function differently in these two populations.

Verve studies. In my own work, early indication of a relationship between verve orientation among African Americans and their behavior came in Marryshow, Hurley, Allen, Tyler & Boykin, 2005, in which students also responded to the Pathway preference measure (PPM) a measure of behavioral variability (Tuck & Boykin, 1989). The PPM is a line drawn maze with compartments (labeled as neighborhood places) that students can enter during a hypothetical walk between school and home. It is designed to measure the variability, defined by how much of the map the respondent covers on each hypothetical walk of 5-day week. Students' scores on the PPM were positively correlated with their positive attitudes toward the peer described as exhibiting high verve behaviors. A prior study, Boykin (1982), found that African American students who completed abstract cognitive tasks presented in a high-variability format outperformed their counterparts who worked in a low-variability format. Bailey and Boykin (2001) reported similar findings using academic tasks.

I recently decided to pose, of the verve construct, questions parallel to those I have been pursuing related to communalism. The first involves examining verve performance effects in ways that allow for consideration of within group differences in cultural orientation. Like many of the communalism studies, verve studies typically use ethnicity as a proxy for culture. Given that African Americans *will* vary in Afro cultural socialization it seems important for the research to approach this issue. In Hurley, Clendenin and Weeks (*In progress*) we had African American and European American college students perform a series of cognitive tasks in either a high variability or low variability format. The high variability format involved participants switching among task types (card sort, digit span, fractions & verbal fluency) at 1-minute intervals, doing each task for a total of 5 minutes. In the low variability condition, participants worked on each task type for 5 consecutive minutes. To control for the wider range of socialization experiences likely among African Americans college students, only students high in cultural-group identity salience (African American or European American) were retained for analyses. Our findings were consistent with the assertion that African American culture can be characterized as comparatively higher in verve orientation. Among African Americans who were high in cultural group identity salience, those in the high-verve condition performed better than those in the low-verve condition. By contrast, among European American participants high in identification with *their* cultural group, those in the low verve condition performed better than did those in the high verve condition. As in Hurley & Pauletto (*In progress*) participants' orientations mediated the basic performance effects found in previous studies. Because both of these

employed college rather than the more typical grade school samples, the inclusion of orientation measures may have been critical in our finding support for the basic principle that culture is a meaningful predictor of behavior.

Processes: Asking the how questions

Both the perceptions and the performance work help to establish that people's cultural group membership and/or orientations can meaningfully predict behavior on outcomes that are of consequence, but leave unanswered (and unasked) questions of *how* (descriptively and functionally) culture affects those outcomes. To advance our understanding of these phenomena, we are attempting to operationalize those processes as observable variables. We are working toward that goal in two different ways. Concerning communalism we have sought to observe and measure what we term micro-behaviors that should inform the outcomes we have observed. Regarding *verve* we have begun to scrutinize physiological markers of stress that should be sensitive to people's experience of environment stimulation, but which might manifest differently depending on their *verve* orientation.

In [Hurley & Allen, 2007](#), we began to pursue the question: What exactly does a communal orientation lead African American children to do more of (or less of) in learning groups that yields enhanced performance? I began to speculate that so-oriented children might exhibit fewer of what Steiner, (1962) termed process loss behaviors (behaviors that undermine or hinder group productivity). To test this prediction we created a protocol for quantifying specific behaviors. After coding from videotapes of students studying together, we used factor analysis to guide the creation of three outcome variables which we termed PLV-Out (behavior directed outside the group), PLV-In (behaviors directed into the group) and PGV (process gain). The resulting variables were all appropriately intercorrelated and two of them were significantly correlated with participants' scores on a post study quiz. Unpublished secondary analyses of the data found that African Americans exhibited fewer process loss behaviors than did our European American participants (Hurley, In preparation-c). The results support our approach to quantifying group processes and could open a window into the processes driving communal learning effects. We are currently processing another set of videos using a refined version of the protocol and I hope that this work will ultimately produce a measure of value for a variety of academic, educational and even industry purposes.

The newest strand of my research concerning the processes that inform culture effects seeks to merge work on the *verve* construct with what is known about physiological manifestations of arousal and stress. I wondered whether people who perform better when cognitive tasks are presented in high versus low variability formats might either a) find the elevated stimulation less arousing/stressful, or b) find it similarly arousing, but are better able to cope with the stress. This question seems answerable given what is known about cortisol and salivary α -amylase reactivity to stress. In ([Hurley, Clendenin & Weekes, In progress](#)) described earlier, participants' gave saliva samples at regular intervals before and during the task presentation. Analyses of those samples are ongoing but early returns suggest that cortisol expression was sensitive to our manipulation. We hope that this line of work will yield useful information about the processes by which *verve* orientation influences peoples' cognition and behavior to influence outcomes.

Between and Within Diasporas

The ways in which ethnicity and culture have interacted in unexpected ways to predict behavior in some of our work has lead me to an interest in measurement and construct issues related to the study of culture. In particular, that the measure of group orientation we administered in [Hurley & Pauletto \(In progress\)](#) seemed to function differently in the two populations we sampled raises obvious questions about measurement and less obvious questions about how we as cultural and cross cultural psychologists form and validate the constructs that inform our measures. Although the data from that study do not allow us to determine the source of differences, the question is intriguing.

The collectivism/individualism distinction has come to be viewed as making a universally relevant cultural distinction (Cooper & Denner, 1998) however, in the 30 years since the distinction began to

generate significant scholarship, surprisingly little attention has been paid to people of African descent (just 49 peer reviewed studies of 1719), or to African Americans (18 of the 23 total have been published since 2000). Meanwhile, as the empirical research has begun to make its way around the globe, more and more inconsistencies are being noted in how measures of collectivism perform when administered to people outside the Asian and European descended groups in and for whom they were developed (Oyserman, 2002). The findings there have been mixed concerning African Americans and collectivism, with some studies concluding that African Americans are highly individualistic, a few reporting elevated collectivism among African Americans, while others have reported finding that African Americans score high on measures of both collectivism and individualism (I review this literature in [Hurley, Under review](#)).

The near complete lack of overlap between the collectivism and communalism literatures makes it difficult to interpret their contrasting findings and conclusions. Though it is probably best that the communalism construct and measures were developed in independent ethnographic research, now that the construct and measures have gained credibility as predictors of group related attitudes and behavior among African Americans, much could be gained from systematic comparisons between it and other group orientation constructs. Some have argued convincingly that communalism and collectivism are related but distinct (Moemeka, 1998). The contrasting findings of the two literatures give indirect empirical support for the idea that African American and for example, Asian American cultures are group oriented in ways that manifest differently.

The third strand of my empirical research takes up these questions. It is aimed at examining the extent to which the expression of a single cultural theme ‘group-orientation’ may vary among groups that have significantly different cultural origins, histories and traditions. This work is premised on the hypothesis that the measures perform differently across groups because a) self-report measures always assess the *expression* of deep structure culture in attitudes and behavior, b) such expression is always shaped both by historical antecedents *and* proximal environmental demands and is therefore by definition, group and time and place specific. Thus, c) even within the category “group-oriented” to the extent that their historical and environmental backgrounds and or immediate circumstances are different, groups can be expected to differ systematically in their expression of that orientation. This line of research seeks to examine the performance of various measures of ‘group orientation’ across samples of varying cultural distances from the groups on whose repertoires of attitudes and behaviors their items were based.

My own research includes two studies in which I have attempted to examine these ideas more directly. In [Hurley, \(In preparation-b\)](#), I found that two measures of group orientation performed differently, both in their psychometric properties and in predictive utility, among African, Asian and European descended college students. In a sample of 251 adults of mostly European American heritage, 69 people scored above the mean on the communalism scale or on a measure of collectivism but not both ([Hurley & Gullet, 2009](#)). Members of those two groups differed significantly in their endorsement of strategies for coping with negative life events. These exploratory studies lend some support for the suggestion that communalism and collectivism are related but distinct constructs. I am currently involved in work that pursues this idea in more systematic fashion and on a larger scale. In 2008 with a group of colleagues around the nation I began, a multisite, multi year investigation in which so far over 1500 college students (including significant numbers who are African and Asian descended) have completed various measures of group orientation including measures of communalism, collectivism, familism, and self construal. Early returns indicate only moderate correlations between communalism and other measures of group orientation (from .34 to .54) and that the correlation among measures varies by ethnicity ([Hurley, Gullet & Schwartz, In progress](#)).

Finally, I have also initiated work on what I have termed the *continuity thesis*. The continuity thesis uses the same reasoning as the work just described but approaches from the other end of the spectrum (in fact we will ultimately merge data collection for these two lines of work), seeking to assess within-Diaspora continuity. Much of the scholarship concerning African American culture is premised on the notion that African American culture is a legacy of African origins but there has been essentially no attempt to document that relationship. Since the way people express deep structure cultural orientations are shaped and passed across generations among members of cultural groups who share tradition and history etc, it is

likely that members of global diasporas, though dispersed, will express, for example, group orientation more similarly to one another than they will with members of different Diasporas. This line of research examines the responses of various members of the African Diaspora on measures designed to assess culture among African Americans. We seek to capitalize on the fact that the communalism scale and other measures of African American culture although not strictly emic may be comparatively more suitable for other members of the African Diaspora than will be related measures developed for other groups. Observed similarities and differences in the psychometric performance and patterns of response on these measures should help to inform discussion of this issue.

The pilot study in the series ([Hurley, Under review](#)) compared the responses of Black and Coloured South African primary school students on the communalism scale and the culturally themed scenarios we have used in other work. Of all the possibilities; the overall pattern across measures was identifiably similar across groups. As a group, participants' scores on the communalism scale and ratings for the communal and verve learning context scenarios individually were indistinguishable in magnitude from those established for African Americans. Differences we observed between Black and Coloured South Africans were in degree rather than of vector. These observations support and extend the anthropological and empirical evidence of a strong group orientation in continental African cultures. This is not new. However, in using a measure designed within the Diaspora this investigation opens up the discussion of its continuity with communalism in African American culture. This investigation is also noteworthy in that that it is the first documentation of a high-verve orientation among continental Africans. We found evidence of a co-occurrence that may prove to common across cultures of the Diaspora.

Our future efforts in this line of research will be directed at collecting data wherever people of African heritage are located around the globe¹. In the summer of 2009 we were able to collect data in this line of work in Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa. We have secured cooperation from contacts in Barbados, and Zambia and are negotiating with contacts in Nigeria and Namibia. This work hopes to demonstrate that Diasporic distance from the originating groups will affect the performance of any measure of culture. It hopes to make the point that for a measure of culture to be useful across groups, representatives of the groups of interest should be included during conceptual development and item generation rather than in post hoc validation studies.

My interests related to the study of culture are in some ways wide-ranging but cohere around three key questions. I am interested first in whether peoples' culture based orientations can be relied upon to predict their attitudes and behavior and, second, in the processes by which cultural orientations influence thinking and behavior toward outcomes. My third major interest in issues of within Diaspora continuity and between Diaspora differences ultimately boils down to a question of measurement and has the same ultimate goal as my other work. With sufficient progress on these three key issues I believe the study of culture may ultimately become integral to how psychologists examine the human psychological experience. Concerning my commitment to conducting research that has implications for how we as a field and as a society understand and investigate the psychological and educational experiences of African Americans, I believe that working to articulate the structure and functioning of African American culture is a good strategy for challenging the negative stereotypes and victim blaming narratives that still dominate the academic and public discourse ([Hurley, 2009](#); [Hurley, in preparation-a](#)). For example, much of my work relates directly to the question of whether solving Black children's educational difficulties should best involve changing something about the children (their attitude and behaviors) or something about schools (the modes of thinking and behavior valued and reinforced in the service of learning). My work contributes to the mounting evidence that the current widespread preoccupation with changing Black children is misguided.

¹ Although we expect this line of work will make a significant contribution, we must acknowledge that by design this research paradigm teaches us more about the measures themselves and about African American culture than it does about the groups we will assess. I believe that locally developed measures will always outperform ones developed elsewhere. For that reason with South African colleagues I have begun developing a genuinely local measure of group orientation as it has been observed in South Africa under the name Ubhuntu (sometimes translated as I am because we are, we are because I am). Pilot testing for a first draft of the measure is currently underway.

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