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# Cultural Values and Minority People of Color

Doman Lum
*California State University, Sacramento*

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DOMAN LUM

California State University at Sacramento

*This article delineates various dimensions of culture, factors influencing acculturation, majority and minority values, and etic and emic dimensions of cultural values. It contributes to the debate about whether there are distinctive minority people of color values or whether these values are a function of migration and social class. It introduces the concepts of transcultural, cross cultural, paracultual, metacultural, and pancultural as well as cultural ethclass.*

## Introduction

According to Rokeach (1973), a value is a belief that a mode of conduct or end state is preferable to an opposite or converse one. Values are preferred or selected choices. Societal values refer to vested beliefs about people, preferred goals for people, means of achieving those goals, and conditions of life. They represent selected ideals as to how the world should be and people should normally act (Hepworth and Larsen, 1990). This understanding of values is translated into social work professional values toward clients such as respect for the dignity and uniqueness of the individual, client self-determination, and legal authority and self-determination. The value ideology of social work is humanistic and is concerned about democratic individualism and the welfare and protection of the client. It is further rooted in Judeo-Christian principles that emphasize justice, equality, and concern for others. As a result, societal and professional values have a high regard for persons and individual rights and freedom.

In contrast, cultural values are prescribed ways of behavior or norms which are passed from generation to generation

within a group of people. Cultural values are life patterns manifested in institutions language, religious ideals, habits of thinking, artistic expressions, and patterns of social and interpersonal relationships. Cultural pluralism is a reality confronting current society. It is the existence of multicultural communities which maintain and perpetuate their own styles, customs, language, and values (Pantoja and Perry, 1976). It is a composite of groups who have preserved their own cultural identities. Cultural diversity is maintained as long as there is a level of tolerance and no conflict with broader values patterns and legal norms. When there are different sets of cultural and societal values, an ethnic minority person of color is confronted with the task of reconciling his/her cultural values with the predominant societal values. Bicultural competency is a process of evaluation where a person integrates positive qualities of his/her culture of origin and the dominant society's culture. The outcome is a functional way of relating and surviving in both cultures.

The purpose of this article is to delineate various dimensions of culture, factors influencing acculturation, majority and minority values, and etic and emic dimensions of cultural values. An impetus to this article comes from a growing debate regarding whether there are distinctive minority people of color values or whether adherence to these values are a function of migration and social class. To attribute a common set of values to diverse people risks a negation of uniqueness, special needs, and stereotyping, according to ethnic sensitive advocates (Devore and Schlesinger, 1990). To claim that varied minority of color groups share spiritual values, vertical hierarchy of authority, or the importance of corporate collective structures is doubtful when specific group values are explored. Moreover, related values such as family and group solidarity are attributes held by many white ethnic groups such as Jewish and Italian people (Devore and Schlesinger, 1991). Hopefully this article will clarify these issues and will explore the relationship between cultural values and minority people of color.

## Dimensions of Culture

An appropriate starting point in our discussion of cultural values and people of color is an understanding of cultural

dimensions. Essential to this relationship are various notions of cultural interaction. There are at least five perspectives of culture which are related to the reality of cultural pluralism in American society: the transcultural perspective, the cross-cultural perspective, the paracultural perspective, the metacultural perspective, and the pancultural, perspective (Lum, 1992).

The transcultural perspective involves the transition from one culture to another The prefix TRANS means "across; over; on the other side of" and denotes a movement in one direction. In the case of values, the task is to move from understanding the values of the dominant culture to understanding the values of a minority culture. It involves learning at least one other culture—its values, beliefs, customs, language, and related practices. The objective of the transcultural perspective is to enable a person from the dominant culture to relate to a minority individual who is part of another particular culture. The presupposition is that there are differences between two cultures.

The cross-cultural perspective concerns the mutual interaction and synthesis of two distinct cultures. The word CROSS means "to go from one side to the other; to pass across", and therefore cross-cultural means moving between two cultures. To achieve cross-cultural integration, a person moves back and forth between the dominant culture and the minority culture. In the process, a person sees relationships between distinctive similarities and differences of the two cultures. In the case of values, a cross-fertilization of conceptual and behavioral values patterns occurs in the process of mutuality. The cross-cultural perspective views each culture as a separate and equal entity, and a person endeavors to link essential traits between the two cultures.

The paracultural perspective examines the relationship between recent immigrants and multi-generational American-born minority descendants. The prefix PARA means "alongside; by the side of" and offers a side-by-side comparison of at least four generations of ethnic minority family structure. To apply this perspective, a person must be familiar with multigenerational family patterns that involve immigrant or refugee parents and first, second, and third generation American-born children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Each generation is involved in acculturation, Americanization, or rediscovery of the culture of origin.

There may be a minority family that consists of a father and mother who are recent immigrants or refugees and who are familiar with their culture of origin and foreign to the dominant culture. For them, the two cultures exist side by side without penetration. However, their first generation American-born children are in the midst of acculturation which involves a merger of both cultures. Misunderstanding and conflict may arise between parents and children over culture-related issues. Cultural value conflict is apparent in this instance.

In other cases there may be a different circumstance between second generation American-born parents and third generation American-born children. A father and mother of the second generation may be Americanized to the point where the culture of origin has minimal influence and residual effects with the values and beliefs of the dominant culture predominant At the same time, their third generation American-born children may be in the midst of rediscovering their great grandparents' culture of origin. This rediscovery could result from university ethnic studies courses and student ethnic group associations. Multigenerational cultural dynamics raise the issues of whether there are cultural value residuals, maintenance of culture, and cultural value rediscovery in culturally pluralistic America.

The metacultural perspective addresses the commonalities of people of color in terms of cultural values, beliefs and behavior. The term META has been traditionally understood as "beyond" in the sense of "transcendence". However, meta also means "between; among" and is used in this case to mean "between and among cultures". From a metacultural perspective, a person is concerned with common cultural linkages that bind the major ethnic minority groups. The focus is on acknowledgement of distinct differences between minorities and affirmation of common themes of people of color. Are there meta-cultural values, for example, which are common to people of color? Are there common experiences and concerns that are voiced by people of color? Criticism has been voiced regarding generalizing about minorities at the expense of making specific distinctions between particular minority groups or acknowledging that non-minority groups may have similar values, experiences, or concerns. However, a critical need exists to attempt to draw

together metacultural themes between and among minority cultures. Nevertheless, this area requires more concise refinement.

The pancultural perspective articulates universal cultural characteristics that are a part of people throughout the world. The prefix PAN means "universal, common to all" and reaffirms the notion of the common culture of humanity. It is important to offer a pancultural perspective in working with multicultural people which focuses on cultural and ethnic similarities yet recognizes distinct differences. What are common areas of culture which link panculturalism to multicultural groups who are part of the United States. The pancultural perspective is based on the conviction that culture and ethnicity of all people are important factors in the helping process. Panculturalism addresses the need to identify pancultural values which are universal and common to all cultures.

To identify a unique set of values for all ethnic minorities or to claim that all cultures have common values misidentifies the multidimensional levels of culture. Cultural values should be set in context of the particular cultural interaction. Thus, transcultural values are important when one seeks to learn about another distinctive culture than one's own. An understanding of cross-cultural values is appropriate when one is in process of integrating values from two separate cultures. Paracultural values are recognized when there are generational differences and relationships. Metacultural values are important to articulate when one searches for common concerns and linkages between various minority groups of color. Pancultural values underscore the need to identify universal common characteristics.

In brief, cultural values have various levels of purpose and interaction which must be acknowledged and differentiated in a number of settings. Thus, for example, the effort to identify metacultural values among minority people of color groups is a legitimate endeavor which recognizes that there may be unique values which are different from the majority culture. One must strive to differentiate the particular cultural context when addressing the broad theme of cultural values.

## Factors Influencing Acculturation

Acculturation is an ethnic minority person's adoption of the dominant culture in which he or she is immersed. There are several degrees of acculturation; a person can maintain his or her own traditional cultural beliefs, values, and customs from the country of origin to a greater or a lesser extent. The term, Americanization, has been associated with the popular notion that people living in the United States gave up former cultural practices and adopted the American way of life.

Bogardus (1949) has identified three types of overlapping acculturation. *Accidental acculturation* occurs when individuals of various cultures in close proximity to each other exchange goods and services and incidentally adopt cultural patterns from each other in a hit-or-miss fashion. In the process, these people influence each other to the degree that they acquire certain cultural practices that serve a functional purpose (food dishes or cultural beliefs, for example) from the other group.

*Forced acculturation* imposes cultural patterns, behavior, or beliefs upon ethnic minorities and immigrants The dominant cultural group tends to believe that their own beliefs, behavior patterns, and customs are superior to other cultural systems which are less desirable. An example of forced acculturation is the strong move toward Americanization which stresses the exclusive use of English, the relinquishment of foreign ideas and customs, and the adoption of certain forms of Christianity.

*Democratic acculturation* respects the history and strengths of differing cultures and demonstrates the equivalency of social and psychological patterns of all cultures. People from a particular culture are not forced to accept cultural patterns different from their own. Rather, a person can choose either to adopt cultural patterns of other groups over time or to retain the patterns of his or her culture of origin. The prevailing approach to democratic acculturation is cultural pluralism, which recognizes the reality of a multicultural society and the individual's ability to construct a combination of cultural patterns.

Longres (1991) has recently criticized the limitation of the cultural model of practice which emphasizes the importance of culture and cultural differences. He argues that an ethnic sensitive approach cannot rely solely on the concepts of cultural

norms and values. He believes that the cultural model best fits helping newly arrived refugees and immigrants and less fits helping minority individuals and families whose groups have been in the United States for many generation.

Longres (1991) is not an assimilationist and endorses the ideal of biculturation. However, he believes that the longer people and their families are in a society, the more their thinking, affect, and behavior are influenced by the dominant cultural norms. Ethnicity then becomes an identity, an allegiance to a group and its history rather than holding on to a unique set of beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral inclinations. Furthermore, Longres asserts that these people accept the fact of their Americanization and their place as minority status.

Longres (1991) holds that the cultural model is less useful, particularly for American blacks, Native, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and to some extent, Japanese and Chinese Americans who have been in the United States for generations. Longres reasons that these groups were born and raised within the context of American institutions and that their "private troubles" do not stem from a lack of knowledge of the dominant norms and expectations or from a commitment to values and beliefs at odds with the dominant norms and expectations. Longres seems to imply that these groups are relatively free of cultural conflict and strongly affected and influenced by the norms and expectations of the larger American society.

Instead of the cultural model, Longres advocates the status model which emphasizes positions in a social hierarchy or stratification system. Social hierarchy stems from systems of inequality, while stratification systems emerge from social conflict. Ethnic and racial stratification systems are a type of status hierarchy in the United States and have been a part of the oppressive history of the dominant culture against minority people of color. He believes that the "private troubles" of minority people of color are related to the public issues of racial and ethnic inequality, and as a result, there is ethnic and racial conflict in social, relationships between whites and minorities, particularly blacks and Native Americans.

The term, ethclass, was introduced by Gordon (1964) and highlighted by Devore and Schlesinger Ethclass picks up the thrust of Longres' arguments for the social status model. Devore

and Schlesinger (1991, p. 20) explain: "Gordon used this concept to explain the role that social class membership plays in determining the basic conditions of life, while at the same time accounting for differences between groups at the same social class level. These differences are, in large measure, explained by ethnic group membership." On the whole, there is less emphasis and attention given to culture and more given to ethnicity and social class (Devore and Schlesinger, 1991).

This author recognizes the importance of social class and its implications for social stratification and social/economic/political oppression based on race. However, this author believes that Longres and, to some extent, Devore and Schlesinger have underplayed the important influence that culture, particularly cultural values, play in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral lives of minority people of color who have been in the United States for many generations.

For example, Longres ignores the reality of maintenance of culture in the lives and practices of people of color. Maintenance of culture is a minority practice that employs the use of cultural beliefs, customs, celebrations, and rituals as means of overcoming social problems. Culture is a source of strength and renewal. Ethnic minority people rediscover their past heritage and use it to cope with present and future life problems. Cultural practices based on ethnic heritage can be documented in minority people of color's community churches, social organizations, political advocacy groups, ethnic oriented language and cultural schools, and related group institutions.

Lewis (1977) documents the case of Ben Dancewell, a 34 year old full-blooded Cheyenne-Arapahoe, who was medically diagnosed as an alcoholic. He is married, has four children, and is an excellent Indian ceremonial dancer. The cultural ceremonial dances helped Mr. Dancewell to ventilate his feelings, give him a unique sense of identity and pride in his culture, impart a great sense of belonging through being with other Native Americans (experiencing a unique support system), enhance his altruistic feelings, and make him uniquely ready for therapy. Based on this cultural strength, he began to ventilate about his pride at being an Indian and his feelings of inferiority in the majority culture. He used his extended family as a support system. Based

on these helping components, his drinking diminished and he was able to told a job. Similar cultural case studies could be reiterated from the lives of various people of color who have been in the United States for many generations.

Regarding cultural maintenance research, Hayes-Bautista (Midaus, 1991) reports on a three year study of Hispanic cultural attitudes sponsored by the Chicano Studies Research Center at the University of California, Los Angeles. Based on a sample size of over 1,000 participants, the study focused on language, culture, and self-identification. Among his research findings are the following conclusions:

Hispanic people are evolving into a bilingual, bicultural group;

Latinos do not assimilate in the classic sense; rather, they still have a sense of being Latinos;

Mexican-Americans have stronger cultural ties to their ancestral, country than many other immigrant groups over the years based on the history of seasonal or temporary migration from Mexico;

Hispanic history should be taught in schools and children should maintain their family's Hispanic culture;

Strong cultural attitudes along with a working knowledge of Spanish were maintained to a significant degree through the third generation and beyond;

Spanish language television stations form an important language and cultural link for the Hispanic population across the United States;

Hispanic people frequently travel to Mexico from their homes in the American Southwest for family gatherings and social/recreational activities;

Mexican communities (e.g. East Los Angeles) are self-contained to the point that Spanish is regularly spoken and that the total population remains minority.

The Haynes-Bautista study and findings tend to refute the position taken by Longres in his arguments against the influence

of culture upon ethnic minorities of color who are multigenerational. This is not to minimize the importance of social stratification and its effect on racism and oppression. However, it does reaffirm the primary role of culture maintenance, cultural values, and resistance to acculturation. Cultural values, beliefs, and practices are still influential components in the lives and behavior of multicultural and multigenerational minority people of color in the United States.

## Majority and Minority Values

There is a strong case for distinctive minority values, allowing for exceptions among acculturated ethnic minorities and for similar parallels among many ethnic cultures which historically are traced to European and Middle Eastern countries. Pedersen (1979) reminds us that Euro-American cultural values have dominated the social sciences and have been accepted as universal. In turn, these values have been imposed on non-Western cultures. Recently, an interest has arisen in examining non-Western value assumptions that offer alternatives to the dominant cultural value system. For example, Higginbotham (1979) points out that psychotherapy is determined by culture-specific values. As a result, the emphasis of psychoanalysis on individual growth is in contradistinction to kinship and group-centered cultures. It is important to make a case for minority cultural differences rather than to acquiesce to dominant cultural values.

Minority extended family and kinship networks function on the principles of interdependence, group orientation, and reliance on others. For example, the Puerto Rican family has the institution of compadres: people are designated as "companion parents" and become godparents of the child. They feel free to advise or correct and are expected to be responsive to the needs of the other person. Among African Americans, there is an extensive reliance on kinship networks which include blood relatives and close friends called "kinsmen". These networks arise from mutual need of such things as financial aid, child care, advice, and emotional support. Furthermore, elderly grandparents take young African American children into their households in informal adoption (Staples, 1981).

Minority families generally operate within parental authority structures. Jenkins (1981) states that ethnic minority parents, particularly fathers, value obedience to parental authority. Minority children, however, may be at odds with this hierarchy due to the influence of the dominant society. Rothman, Gant, and Hnat (1985) share their findings regarding the Mexican American family. They state: "Mexican American culture highly values the family as the primary source of identity and of support in times of crisis. Mexican Americans are highly family-centered, with the predominant family structure consisting of the traditional nuclear patriarchy" ( Rothman, Gant, and Hnat, 1985, p. 201) Elsewhere they report: "Familism is perhaps the single most striking and consistent feature of Chicano culture noted in the literature. Studies have indicated that Mexican Americans are more firmly rooted in the family as a source of identification than either blacks or Anglos, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic locale (i.e. urban-rural, or state of residence). However, it should be noted that within the context of the traditional nuclear patriarchy, Mexican American families are not structurally distinguishable from any other ethnic group with a similar family orientation. Chicano familism seems to be distinguishable by its degree of family cohesiveness and by its extended definition of family membership." (Rothman, Gant, and Hnat, 1985, pp. 201., 202) Not only is a case made for the family as a cultural value, but there is an argument given for the uniqueness of the Chicano family system. Therefore it is not enough to argue that familism is a universal rather than a minority value. Rothman, Gant, and Hnat point out that within the familistic system, the Chicano family minority group is distinguished by family cohesiveness and extended family membership. In this sense, this type of family is unique to this minority group.

Familism is one example of people of color values which are a major part of a case for minority cultural values. Related to this is research on differences between American Indian and Anglo-American values. DuBray (1985) cites empirical background studies to show value differences between American Indians and non-Indians. Trimble (1976) found that Oklahoma Indian high school students had a different value system (non-competitive, present-time orientation) from non-Indians, in spite

of their exposure to the dominant culture. Culbertson (1977) found that Indian subjects showed greater inclination toward role conformity, while non-Indian subjects showed a greater inclination toward individualism. Lewis and Ginerich (1980) conducted a comparative study on attitudes toward leadership with 37 American Indian and 40 non-Indian social work graduate students. They found that 76% of Indians believed that personal qualities of a leader were more important than skills and knowledge. However, 66% of the non-Indians reported the opposite. Moreover, American Indian students tend to suppress authoritarian and aggressive leadership behavior in contrast to Anglo-American students.

Schusky (1970) also found that Anglo-Americans were more aggressive and individualistic than Lower Brule Sioux. Honigmann (1961) found a set of common value characteristics comprising the behavior of the American Indian: nondemonstrative emotionality, the autonomy of the individual, an ability to endure deprivation, bravery, a proclivity for practical joking. and a dependence on supernatural powers.

DuBray (1985) studied the value orientation differences of 36 American Indian and 36 Anglo-American female professional mental health workers, ages 30–45, The Kluckholn Value Schedule was used in this study There were significant differences between American Indian and Anglo-American workers on relational, time, and man/nature orientations. The American Indian group revealed a more collateral value orientation than the Anglo-American group which preferred a relatively individualistic orientation. The American Indian workers were oriented toward present values, while the Anglo-American group moved midway between present and future orientations. The relative preference of American Indian workers was toward harmony with nature, while Anglo-American subjects tended toward mastery over nature.

In her discussion of these findings, DuBray (1985) reiterated the following conclusions:

Activity Orientation: American Indian workers tend to choose being over doing which implies that intrinsic worth is more important than education, status, power, or wealth.

Relational Orientation: American Indian workers showed a collateral orientation which placed the welfare of the group (i.e. extended family, family loyalty) over the individual.

Time Orientation: American Indian workers showed a preference for a present time orientation which focuses on living from day to day as best as one can and enjoying life as it comes (the here and now) rather than a concern for materialistic goals or accumulation of wealth which usually motivates persons with a future time orientation.

Man/Nature Orientation: American Indian workers showed a preference for harmony or balance with nature. Indians understand that they are linked intimately with the earth in a network of rights and responsibilities.

DuBray's study (1985) demonstrates that there are quantitative and qualitative differences between Anglo-American majority values and American Indian minority values, even among professional mental health workers who have been educated and have lived in the United States for many generations. Related literature and studies (Ryan, 1976; Nobles, 1979; Bachtold and Eckwall, 1978) support the thrust of DuBray's research. Thus, there is empirical research evidence that there are cultural value distinctions between majority and minority groups.

## Etic and Emic Dimensions of Cultural Values

Above all, a discussion of cultural values would not be complete without consideration of etic and emic dimensions. The term *etic* comes from the linguistic study of sounds and refers to the categorization of all the sounds in a particular language. The term *emic* refers to all the meaningful sounds in a particular language. From a cross-cultural perspective, these two concepts have been used to describe behavior in cultures and have implications for our discussion of cultural values.

The etic goal documents principles valid in all cultures and establishes theoretical bases for comparing human behavior and values. The emic goal documents behavioral and value principles within a culture and focuses on what the people themselves value as important and familiar to them (Brislin, 1981). It is

important to maintain both emphasis in practice with people—that is, to focus on culture-common characteristics of minorities and non-minorities and on culture-specific traits of particular ethnic groups.

Draguns (1981) poses emic and etic questions about the way to begin cross-cultural research or planning. The emic approach inquires, "Shall we start from within the unique and different culture which we have set out to study?" The etic approach asks: "Shall we proceed on the basis that all human beings are, in some important respects, alike?" (Draguns, 1981, pp. 3–4) Whether to focus on the different and distinctive values of a particular people or on the generally human universal values of people in general is the choice of the investigator studying cultural value in our particular case. The continual shift between discovering what is humanly universal and what is particular to the client's culture makes cross-cultural studies of values such a challenging field.

The cultural value investigator should have an orientation toward both etic and emic perspectives. The investigator should discover the etic and emic characteristics of cultural background. In a real sense, all human beings in cultural contexts have basic values (etic perspective) and are also a part of particular cultural and ethnic groups which express unique values (emic perspectives). Moving between these two points of reference is a creative experience for the cultural value investigator.

## Summary

This article on cultural values and people of color has sought to define the concept of value, distinguishing the distinctions between societal, professional and cultural values. It has raised the debate over distinctive minority people of color values vs. universal values in various minority and non-minority cultures. It has sought to differentiate the various levels of culture in order to make the point that one must address specific cultural interaction settings. The trans, cross, para, meta, and pan cultural perspectives each presuppose a unique context for understanding culture. It has categorized acculturation, presented the cultural and status models of Longres, and proposed that the

ethclass concept include the cultural dimension. Cultural ethclass may be a more inclusive term rather than strictly ethclass.

It has introduced the theme of maintenance of culture (or culture maintenance) in response to Longres' arguments against the cultural model of practice. It has cited a case study and research examples from current Hispanic and Native American samples who have lived in the United States for generations. The two research studies point to cultural differences in cognitive, affective, and behavioral areas of people of color.

Cultural value differences and similarities must be recognized and appreciated among people of color and people of all cultures. The etic universal and emic particular perspectives remind us of the value homeostasis which is required in this discussion. A balance of cultural, ethnicity, and social class is in order for ethnic minority studies and practice approaches. The debate over these issues is a health sign that ethnic sensitive and minority people of color theory and practice are progressing toward maturity of purpose and development.

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