

PSYCHOLOGY OF DIVERSITY

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Summary

During recent years there has been an ever more visible interest in taking diversity into account. Most frequently, when we talk of diversity reference is made to the need to bear in mind different contexts of the application of psychology (basically clinical, school, and work), particularly as regards differences in ethnicity/culture and differences between men and women.

But the psychology of diversity is much broader. It consists of the study of possible intraindividual differences (the way the different traits and differences that can be found in a subject are structured in each individual and the differences that can occur in a subject in the same situation at two different moments in time), interindividual differences (the place occupied by the subject in relation to others when comparing different traits), and intergroup differences (comparison of the findings of members of

different groups defined by one or several dimensions). This latter scope is particularly broad, since the classification of individuals into groups is practically infinite: it depends upon the variable or variables used in organizing the groups. This allows classifications of every type. Given the importance and breadth of intergroup differences, special reference is made to the need for caution when interpreting and applying the empirical data stemming from the study of these differences. The principal need is to avoid abusive generalization of the findings from the group to individuals.

Finally, two examples of the study of diversity are presented: the differential characteristics of bilingual and monolingual subjects, especially with regard to the cognitive and affective-motivational differential characteristics and differences in periodic variations in performance (chronopsychology), and with special reference to the interaction between person and situation to explain those differences.

In both examples the principles applied are those that have been developed in previous sections of the article as of significance in the study of diversity, to highlight in practice the characteristics and method of the psychology of diversity.

1. The Concept of Diversity

The basic characteristic of any form of life is its diversity. Human beings, naturally, could not be an exception to this general principle. Psychology, therefore, has no sense if it avoids the study of psychological diversity. In all areas of the study of human behavior and of its bases, the study of what is “general” and what is “different” is important. As a simple example, recent works on cerebral plasticity insist that although one of the reasons we know so much about the working of the human brain is that there are many constant elements in cerebral organization, the other fundamental reason is that change and variability are as basic as uniformity. Likewise, researchers into the evolutionary development of human beings also show that what is known about that psychological development is based on the constant elements in general studies of that development: but it is also based, and just as importantly, on what is known about change and existing variability. This is not a contradiction; it is a question of emphasis in interpreting the same data: constancy and variability are two sides of the same coin.

Fortunately, the time has passed when individual differences noticed in the study of human behavior were relegated (by some) to “variance error,” that is, to a random measuring error. On the contrary, the study of diversity attracts increasing interest, reflected in the number of studies, works, and research on this topic. It is not surprising, as was pointed out in 1949 by authors such as C. Kluckhorn and H.A. Murray, that the study of human behavior is marked by several guidelines:

- The behavior of one person is like the behavior of *all* human beings.
- The behavior of one person is like the behavior of *some* other human beings.
- The behavior of one person is *unique* and *different* from any other human being.

Thus, in the first statement it is claimed that all individuals insofar as they belong to the same species, to a population with a common genetic background, behave like other individuals. The object of study is the whole of conduct characterizing the human species as such. In the second, the accent falls on diversity. The object of study, according to this claim, is interindividual and group differences. In the third, stress is

given to an individual's behavior always being idiosyncratic, despite similarities with other people. The object of study is intraindividual differences, that is variability and intraindividual change.

That means that it is not enough to study general laws determining human behavior, it is necessary also to tackle the regular nature of differences and the exceptionality of idiosyncrasy.

When the object of study is human behavior and, particularly, the diversity of that behavior, a *multivariate approach* must be used, that is, an analysis that enables researchers to study the simultaneous relationship between three or more variables, not just between pairs of variables two by two. The multivariate approach is concerned with an analysis of all possible sources of variation in conduct. The alternative to the multivariate approach is the bivariate, which claims to analyze the relationships existing between variables when taken two by two. It is true that the bivariate approach enables us to mark the area of the study of areas of human behavior and, in that sense, it is useful for particular problems; but when the study of human behavior is dealt with, nearly always the need arises to contemplate multiple variables that appear to have a relationship among themselves. The study would remain incomplete if we used *only* this bivariate approach. An application will be seen for this approach when mention is made of one of the practical examples—bilingualism.

Sensitivity towards diversity is growing. Analysis of psychological publications reveals that in many recent works differences between subjects according to their ethnic group and/or culture are identified under this heading. Also, to a lesser extent, studies of women and equal opportunity are included. The concern shown by the authors is how to use the existence of that type of diversity in educational programs, in mental health programs, and in the workplace.

Using this latter case as an example, the growth in sensitivity towards diversity is due to the need to take it into account, given the changing nature of the workforce, the globalization of work and markets, and the characteristics of modern organizations, which very often entails linking different business cultures. Big corporations have international diversity, different business cultures and cultural, ethnic, and lifestyle differences. Some of them have begun to react and evaluate and adjust policies that were designed for a more homogenous workforce.

This growing sensibility is positive, and is producing excellent practical fruit in adapting programs and treatment to the differential characteristics of subjects and groups. The awareness of what diversity consists of and what its area of study is may contribute to good intentions also being effective. Thus, this article will end with the application of the general principles of the study of diversity to two specific practical examples. Firstly, the differential characteristics of bilingual subjects, which will include an outline sketch of their differential characteristics in cognition and affect and, secondly, the diversity in the periodic variations of performance (chronopsychology), in which stress will be laid on the interaction between person and situation when seeking causes for the differences being produced.

2. The Scope of the Psychology of Diversity

The object of study of the psychology of diversity is the differences between individuals and/or groups, with the aim of finding out the regularities of those differences that might enable us to describe, comprehend, predict, and give a better explanation of human behavior. As a consequence, it centers on three types of differences.

2.1. Intraindividual Differences

The center of comparison is the individual herself, but the term has two meanings:

(a) The way the different traits and different personality characteristics are structured in each subject in such a way as to form a personal and individual profile. (The term personality is used in its broad sense, that is, covering both the cognitive and affective-motivational sense, thus including two large systems of intraindividual variation.) These traits are ordered, organized, and combined in a particular way in each subject, constituting his *personality structure*. We speak of differences, because the individual may, for example, have a greater spatial capacity and a lesser numerical capacity, may be not very authoritarian, be very introverted, and relatively conservative. That is, differences exist between their different traits.

(b) The differences that may occur in a subject facing the same situation at two different moments in time. The time elapsing between those two moments may vary. The periods of *very long duration* correspond to the stages of human life. Naturally, the responses of a small child in a situation may be different from those produced by an adolescent, an adult, or an older person faced with the same situation.

In periods of very short duration there may occur passing modifications of response, produced by an external agent, such as fatigue, drugs, learning, etc. The modifications produced when an *intermediate period* has elapsed are the most interesting from the viewpoint of the study of diversity; they also raise the large-scale problem of the constancy and stability of personality characteristics.

2.2. Interindividual Differences

Interindividual differences refer to the position occupied by the subject in relation to others when compared to the different traits. That is, it starts from the basis that different people have different degrees of performance in the tasks they carry out, in general, to achieve adaptation to the medium they live in. There are those with great verbal capacity, and others with medium verbal capacity; more introverted people and less introverted people; those interested in activities entailing a relationship with others and those interested in handling instruments, etc. When we talk of interindividual differences, always the comparative situation of the individual with regard to the group she belongs to is expressed.

2.3. Intergroup Differences

We talk of *intergroup differences* when the findings of different groups defined by one or more dimensions are compared. The concept of group is never a static concept. The same individual may belong at different times to different groups, depending upon the

chosen criterion for forming the group; in the same way, individuals do not belong to just one group, but rather to a wide and even an infinite number, since the number of classification variables may be huge, depending on the interests of research and/or classification.

The most traditional classification uses basically two criteria when making up the groups.

(a) The type of *basic variable* making up the group. There are two types of groupings according to this criterion. One is a grouping based on *real variables*, that is, those that have a precise, independent existence regardless of the researchers (they are generally physical or social and give rise to a group of individuals drawn up *a priori*, such as by sex or age); the other grouping is based on *theoretical variables*, that is, latent or construct ones. Having these variables as a reference, it is the researchers who construct these groups, giving rise to a grouping of individuals drawn up *a posteriori*, for example, groups characterized by having high creativity compared to those based on low creativity.

(b) Whether or not these groups exist in nature, this criterion is useful for distinguishing, for example, among groups made up of the *inhabitants of a country* and groups made up of variables such as *age, sex, political ideology*, etc. that, even though their training may be based on real variables, do not exist as such in what we consider to be the real world.

The confluence of these two criteria gives rise to two types of groups:

(a) **Natural groups:** These exist in nature and their constitution is marked out on the basis of variables also existing there, whether physical or social. For example, the group of pupils that at a particular time meet in a classroom.

(b) **Theoretical groups:** These do not exist as such in nature, but they can be constituted by natural or theoretical variables. For example, men, the intelligent, extroverts, etc.

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Biographical Sketch

Dr. M. del Pilar Sánchez is a professor of differential psychology and director of the Department of Differential Psychology and the Psychology of Work in the Universidad Complutense, Madrid, (UCM) Spain. Her basic lines of research are the evaluation of personality styles and their relationships with psychological and demographic variables; bilingualism; and chronopsychology, performance, and health. She has taken part in 13 research projects sponsored by public bodies in Spain that have run from 1981 to the present, and was research director of most of them. Since 1978, she has made 52 contributions to national and international congresses, presenting the findings of the various research projects carried out or summarizing in invited lectures the existing state of affairs. She has organized 16 congresses or seminars on scientific-technological topics, in one case as president of the congress.

Since 1975, Dr. Sánchez has appeared as the author or co-author of 43 articles in Spanish and international specialist journals. She has published eight books since 1992 and nine book chapters since 1984. In 2001, TEA Editorial published the adaptation to a Spanish-speaking population of the MIPS (Millon Index of Personality Styles), which has been adapted under Dr. Sánchez' direction.

She has received the Extraordinary Doctorate prize (1980) from the UCM and the José Germain prize given by the Sociedad Española de Psicología (Spanish Society of Psychology).

She was a corresponding member of the Centre Internationale de Recherche sur le Bilinguisme of the Université Laval (Quebec, Canada) in 1984 and 1985. She was a member of the editorial board of the magazines *Infancia y Aprendizaje* (1984–1993), *Investigaciones Psicológicas* (1988–1992), and *Ansiedad y Estrés* (since 1999), *Revista Iberoamericana de Diagnóstico y Evaluación Psicológica* (since 1998), *Psicodebate* (since 1999), *Anales de Psicología* (since 2000), and *Revista de Psicología* (since 2002).

Dr. Sánchez created and directed the Seminario de Bilingüismo within the Chair of Differential Psychology in the UCM, including the Bilingualism Library. She was president elect of the Sociedad Española para la Investigación de las Diferencias Individuales (SEIDI) from its creation in 1985 until 1998. At present she is technical advisor to the psychology collection of the Editorial Ramón Areces, Madrid. She has spent periods of time in the Universidad Autónoma, Mexico (1977), in McGill University, Montreal, and Université de Laval, Quebec (Canada, 1984), in the Universities of Stockholm

and Uppsala (Sweden, 1988), in Paris V (France, 1990), in the Universidad Católica de Cuyo (Argentina, 1999), Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Lima, Peru, 2002), and Université Lyon 2 (France, 2003) as visiting professor.

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