Culture and Cognition: DiMaggio (1997)

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Aim:
To analyze the recent researches done in cognitive science into the works done in the sociological study of culture with the hopes to understanding the latter through using the former as a tool and a viewpoint.

To discover the cognitive presuppositions in the study of culture, discover the implications of these cognitive discoveries in elements of the sociological study of culture and identify the key problems with the study of cognition and culture.

Research Method: Meta Analysis

Procedure: DiMaggio collected 136 cited sources of studies previously conducted by other authors in the field relating to cognition (more specifically cognitive psychology and social cognition) and culture (sociology) He then analyzed the studies in hopes of discovering a recurring trend or generalization.

Main Results: (In regards directly to culture and cognition)
1. People are exposed to bits information that are present or stored in the memory in an unorganized, indiscriminate form.

Both cognitive research in the attribution of accuracy and plausibility in statements of fact or opinion, as well as in the formation of memory (storage) suggests that information passes into our brains without being tagged with either a source or a truth value, (by default assume its correct and plausible) and their rejection (evaluations of its accuracy) can only occur afterwards through active inference, which can lead to misattributions.

Implications to culture:
- People do not just absorb a culture (and not any other method) through socialization. We absorb all information the same way, so structures must be present to make some information more easy to access than others, which can form our norms and actions.
- People capable of retaining almost every idea they come in contact with, thus explaining inconsistent behaviour and expression of attitude.
- People are capable to participating in multiple traditions, even inconsistent ones.
- People can retain inconsistent action frames
- Socialization (learning of social standards) is dependent on each source of information equally (experience more no than media messages)

Culture is more of a “toolkit” than a coherent, underlying, omnipotent variable that affects every element equally.

2. In order to process the information stored in our minds, two different mechanisms or modes of cognition have been proposed to be capable of organizing and processing the information to be meaningful. Since information is stored in our memory as bits of unorganized information, there has to be some organizational structure that allows one to process the information, and make some information more influential than others, which can give insight on how culture can act to constrain and enable individual behaviour.

The two processes are:
- Automatic Cognition: The implicit, unverbalized, rapid, and automatic method of cognition that rely on schemata (knowledge structures) which “dominates other material in accurate recall, in intruded recall, in recognition confidence, in recall clustering and in resistance to disconfirmation. It also facilitate accurate recall when the information is schema consistent”
  - People more likely to perceive information that is germane to existing schemata
  - People recall schematically embedded information more quickly
  - People may falsely recall schematically embedded events that did not occur
  - People recall schematically embedded information more accurately

- Deliberative Cognition: “explicit, verbalized, slow and deliberate” form of cognition that can reevaluate the processing of schemas in a more critical and reflexive manner. It is highly inefficient, but there are conditions when they are used.
  - When the attention of the individual is given to the problem or situation at hand. To think carefully

Culture is fragmented rather than coherent and it exists in the interactions between the information received by an individual (the information that is in focus), the mental schematic networks that organize the information, and the environmental elements that select the proper schemata within the individual.

Strengths:
- Data Triangulation: The data collected originated from many different sources and researchers
- Methodological Triangulation: The data collected originated from many research methods. There were different types of experiments, correlational studies as well as qualitative studies (descriptive studies) that were referenced.
- Theoretical Triangulation: different theoretical viewpoints were applied onto one topic of findings, from both the cognitive studies as well as the cultural studies.
- Cross Cultural Validity: the study referenced studies from across the world, and considered the differences across cultures in the analysis.
- Theoretical Generalization: The study provides an analysis of many different studies conducted in the field, and drew similar elements from each of the studies that were supported by others to support theories.

Limitations:
- Publication Bias: studies that are showing neutral or unfavourable results are generally neglected for publication. Thus, the studies “out there” may not represent all the research done. This can bias the data towards one side.
- Confirmation Bias: anything piece of analytical work would require the judgement of the researcher. Evidence against his opinions and views can be left out. The information presented by other researchers might be partially taken or incorrectly interpreted due to this bias.

Further evokes a question of ethical considerations in the processing of information, of whether or not all the information was presented.
- The internal validity of the study depends on the internal validity of the individual studies analyzed.
- Lack of reflexivity as the researcher did not reflect upon his work and his analysis for biases. Reflexivity is key in meta analysis.

Some of his points were only supported by one or two studies, which can threaten the validity of the point.

Applications: The researcher presented, along with his findings, certain areas of cultural studies that can benefit from the cognitive perspective. Applications in the areas of identity, collective memory, social classification, logic of action and framing are presented.

Further Questions:
- How can schemata aggregate to form more complex social concepts of styles, stories, logics, paradigms and ideologies?
- How does culture change? How can individuals switch between institutional logics?
- What conditions allow schemata to be generalized from one domain to another?

Learning Outcomes:
1. Evaluate Schema Theory with reference to research studies.
2. Discuss how social and cultural factors affect one cognitive process.