The American Folk Model of the Mind

A cultural model is…
A cognitive schema that is intersubjectively shared by a social group.
A cognitive schema typically consists of a small number of conceptual objects and their relations to each other.

The “Buying” Schema (and cultural model)
• Parts:
  – Purchaser, seller, merchandise, price, sale, money.
• Relations:
  – Assumed sequences of events.
    • Seller communicates intention to sell
    • Buyer makes offer
    • Buyer gives money to seller
    • Seller gives merchandise to buyer

Hierarchical Organization of schemas

Intersubjective Sharing
• Everybody in the group knows the schema
• And everybody knows that everyone knows the schema
• And everybody knows that everyone knows that everyone knows the schema.

Using schemas to understand the world
• Instantiation of the schema means to connect specific things and events to the conceptual elements in the schema.
• The general “buying” schema has
  – Purchaser, seller, merchandise, price, sale, money and events linking these.
• An instantiation of the “buying” schema assigns particular people and events to the parts of the schema.
• E.G., John bought a hat at the bookstore.
Your sense of reality is grounded in cultural schemas

- When events are interpreted using cultural models (intersubjectively shared cognitive schemas) the interpretations are treated as if they are obvious facts about the world.

No need to be explicit about everything

- When a schema is intersubjectively shared, a partial instantiation will trigger “filling in” by listeners.
- In a typical discourse, you will find that a single cultural model may be partially instantiated with one set of elements, then partially instantiated with a different set of elements. Each time, the listener is expected to fill in the missing parts.

Our problem with cultural models

- They are invisible to us.
- But we can make them visible by shaping our domain of scrutiny in the correct way.

Outline of D’Andrade’s exposition of the folk model of the mind

- Identify the core parts and relations
  - Use the details of our language and the writing of philosophers.
- Check the model by doing focused interviews.
- Compare the current folk model to historical models (via novels and other writing).
- Compare the folk model to scientific models: academic psychology and psychoanalysis.
- Compare the American folk model to Ifaluk folk model.

The core model

Believe Know

Desires Intentions Actions

Feelings

Perception

Resolutions

Can be thought about

“Buying” exists because

- It is just a fact about the world.
- Evolution tuned the brain to perceive it.
- Everyone believes it exists.
- Everyone behaves as if it exists.
- Buying is brought into existence by the behaviors of people engaging in cultural practices.
### Santa Claus exists because
- That’s just a fact about the world.
- Evolution tuned the brain to perceive it.
- Everyone believes he exists.
- Everyone behaves as if he exists.
- Santa Claus is brought into existence by the behaviors of people engaging in cultural practices.

### Beliefs, Desires and Intentions exist because
- They are just facts about the world.
- Evolution tuned the brain to perceive them.
- Everyone believes they exist.
- Everyone behaves as if they exist.
- Beliefs, Desires and Intentions are brought into existence by the behaviors of people engaging in cultural practices.

### Our procedure
1. Use our knowledge of the culture to read (between the lines) the taken for granted assumptions that organize the representation. (This is how we identify the cultural model.)
2. Make these cultural models explicit. (This is how we make the model visible to ourselves and others)
3. Find other evidence on the location of the cultural model in the cognitive ecosystem. (This is where we show that the model is cultural.)

### Search:
- Look through your interview transcript for evidence of cultural models.
- It may be necessary to go back and listen to your whole interview again to find passages that contain clear cultural models.
- Choose a passage that makes it easy for you to find and document the cultural models involved.

### A procedure for finding cultural models
1. Examine the text word by word
2. Look for key words
   1. Logical connectives (but, because, if – then, so, or, not, must, have to, unless, except ...)
   2. Words that name schemas (Halloween, Romeo, Buy, ...)
3. Highlight key words
4. Explore the relations among the clauses
5. Choose interesting example(s)
6. Draw a diagram of the models and their relations. (Go to step 2 and continue)

### Your Cascade of Representations
- **Interview**
- **Audio Recording of Interview**
- **Transcript of Audio Recording of Interview**
- **Analysis of Transcript of Audio Recording of Interview**
Analysis:
• Describe the cultural models that are required to make sense of, or establish the meaning of, the passage.
  – Make sure that your description is accurate and clear.
  – You might consider expressing it in a diagram or some other notation.
• Show how these models are used in the passage and how the passage relies on the listener having access to these models.
• Describe any inferences that the passage suggests.
  – How is the listener expected to go beyond what is literally present in the passage? If possible, provide other evidence (beyond the inference or interpretation that is to be explained) in support of the claim that these models are cultural models.

Write it up
• Focus on the cultural models and the connections between the data and the models.
• Include a link to the portion of the transcript that you use to the end of the paper.
• When you make a claim about the presence of a model, you may wish to include brief excerpts from the transcripts in the body of the paper in support of your claims.

Three Questions about Cultural Models
And some surprising answers

Is this a good scientific model?

Three Questions
1. Is the folk model of the mind a good scientific model of mind?
2. Are the things that the FMOTM describes actually internal processes?
3. Are the cultural models we, as cognitive scientists, observe things that are inside the heads of our informants?

• NO. Warmth of room and p(believe in global warming). Relations of belief and emotions. Unconscious processes. Why emotions blend and beliefs do not (in the American Folk model of the mind.)
• FMOTM is a necessarily simple construct. It’s a set of discursive practices that everybody can use. You don’t need to be smart to use it. The categories are approximations at best. They are approximate descriptions of something that is taken to be mental. Like Neisser’s skepticism about the construct of memory, we should ask, are belief, emotion, intention, resolution and so on really individuating scientifically useful classes of phenomena?
Is this model really about internal processes?

- When used by us as FOLK, the FMOTM purports to be talking about the internal workings of our own minds and the minds of others. Is that likely? Are the things that the FMOTM describes (even if they are approximate or simplified) actually internal processes?
- NO. Where could it come from? Observing your own internal states or observing regularities in the behavior of others. Relation to speech acts. Ifaluk has different speech acts and different model of the mind. FMOTM actually describes communication among people, not processes inside people.

The model of internal states mirrors speech act categories

- **Speech Act Category**
  - Representatives
    - I state
  - Directives, requests
    - I order
  - Commissives
    - I promise, I will
  - Expressives
    - I apologize

- **Mental Process**
  - Thoughts
    - I think, believe
  - Wishes, desires
    - I want, need…
  - Intentions
    - I aim to, plan to
  - Feelings
    - I feel sorry, proud

Do people have a model like this in their heads?

- No. We should not. The FMOTM points to patterns in the accounts our informants give of mental phenomena. Like every other cultural model it is a simplified description of patterns that are observed in the discourse people produce. We OBSERVE cultural models as repeating patterns in that discourse. It might be the case that there are internal structures that look just like the patterns we observe in behavior. That would be a case of a ‘seed’ giving rise to something that looks just like it. More likely, some very complex interactions among as yet unknown internal processes interact with elements of the environment to give rise to the patterns we see. We have no idea what internal processes support these practices.
- We can observe the cultural/discursive practices of seeing the world in terms of FMOTM. Or the cultural/discursive practices of seeing the world in terms of any other identifiable model.

Historically, cognitive anthropologists and other cognitive scientists took Schemas, Cultural models, mental models, etc to be psychological constructs that describe structures that are inside people. When we, as cognitive scientists consider the FMOTM do we imagine it is something that is (along with other cultural models) inside the heads of our informants?
Three Questions:

Short Answers

1. Is the folk model of the mind a good scientific model of mind?
   1. No. It is at best approximate and simplified.

2. Are the things that the FMOTM describes actually internal processes?
   1. Probably not. More likely those things are imagined proxies for observable speech act types.

3. Consider the cultural models that we cognitive scientists discover. Are these things that are inside the heads of our informants?
   1. No. They are descriptions of patterns that occur frequently in discourse. These patterns almost certainly emerge from complex interactions among some (unspecified) internal processes and the conditions of production on culturally meaningful behavior.