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The cultural improvement theory and the social sciences' intellectual crisis

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Abstract

The concept of *culture* continues to be studied from many different approaches and fields. This investigation focuses on answering the following two research questions: (1) Can cultures be improved? and (2) Should cultures be improved? Interviews were conducted with families, high school and college students and with professional adults. The cultural improvement theory is offered as a more objective method to analyse reality than the ideas suggested by the oppression theory. Most participants were not able to identify the importance of culture for a society or its possible connections to social well-being, economic development or the thinking processes of the brain. The interviews conducted with four families and the historical cases analysed in this project suggested that culture can be improved in order to facilitate social well-being and economic development.

Keywords: Culture, well-being, mentality, brain, oppression.

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1. Culture and the thinking process

As suggested by Frounfelker, Assefa, Smith, Hussein and Betancourt (2017), cultures have the capacity to tell us who we are. Values, rituals, foods, traditions, behaviours, customs, institutions, religions and beliefs are some of the multiple elements that are part of this complex concept. However, and suggested by the cultural improvement theory, the most important component of culture and that is often left out of academic discussion and analysis is the intellectual process of culture; this is, the procedure of analysing our own culture. In the context of this study, we will refer to this process as *mentality*. The first assumption of this investigation is that culture cannot be separated from mentality. They always co-exist, connected with humans' feelings, regardless of the group's awareness of this phenomenon. Although all individuals inherit a culture (or cultures) from their environments, it is possible to explore and meditate on our own culture, both individually and as a group. Authors, such as Khisty (2010), call this thinking process *mindfulness*. This intentional cognitive practice can lead groups to improve their culture if it becomes a goal, and if led through a positive course (plan). Nonetheless, should cultures be improved? Are any ethical issues compromised in the process of cultural improvement? How important is it for humankind to think about their own culture? Currently, the concept of cultural improvement is not a topic highly discussed by governments and researchers, but culture is. There should not be major ethical implications if a group willingly and freely decides to improve its culture through a positive process that seeks the well-being and development of all its participants. An intentional cultural improvement process has the potential to enhance social well-being and can have a positive impact on the way groups and countries economically develop. It can also help a struggling family to set goals/plans in order to improve their group dynamics.

Figure 1 shows the main mechanisms identified in the literature regarding symbolic culture, in which mentality (the cognitive component of culture) is a key element for cultural improvement. The concept of determination is consistent with an important foundation of the psychological hope theory proposed by Snyder (2002), and that has also been studied by anthropological researchers such as Jansen (2016):
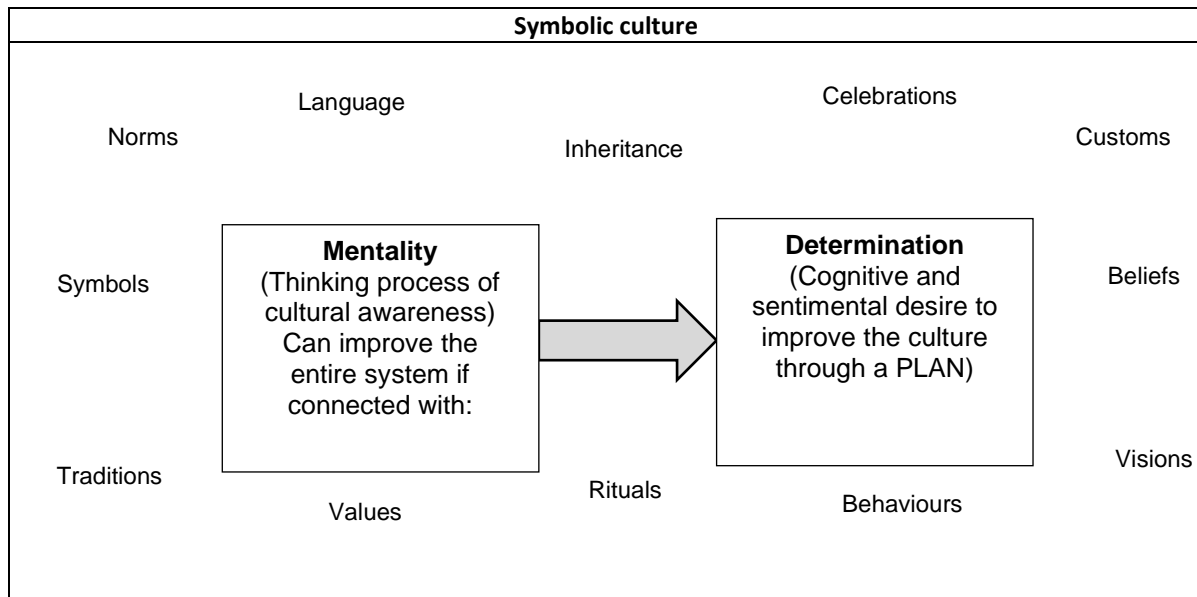

Figure 1. Main mechanisms identified within symbolic culture

2. The cultural improvement and the oppression theories

As demonstrated by Dubnewick, Hopper, Spence and McHugh (2018), belonging to a culture can bring pride to a community member. Being part of a culture can also instil joy and a sense of belonging to the larger group. The positive elements of a culture are the ones that improve the group's well-being. Most scholars across social science literature avoid referring to the positive and/or negative elements of cultures, but there is plenty of evidence that demonstrates that cultures do have positive and negative components that can impact their participants and their environment. Those positive aspects should always be honoured and passed down to generation after generation. The negative elements of cultures can be improved or eradicated if the group comes together to achieve that objective through a plan. Culture reflects who we are as a group, so when we look at our culture, we see us, or a reflection of who we are as indicated by Zhang et al. (2019). Therefore, many times, cultures are valued regardless of their harmful elements. Sometimes this valuation occurs unconsciously. Cultures have a sacred constituent because they have been passed to us from our ancestors and, consequently, some avoid addressing the negative aspects of cultures. A study carried outby Varol, Fraser, Ng, Jaldesa and Hall (2014) demonstrated that one of the main reasons why it has taken so long for female mutilation to stop in some countries is the lack of open communication between men and women about this sensitive issue. It seems like modern societies are not talking enough about the damaging aspects of their cultures, and they should. The intention of this proposal is to provide intellectual resources for families, communities, organisations and nations that wish to facilitate social well-being and economic development through cultural improvement. This is not an easy process to handle, as it takes profound determination and a deep collective mental effort to achieve it.

In the framework of this investigation, negative aspects of human culture refer to elements that are detrimental to human well-being, wildlife, the environment and healthy economic development. Economic development is defined as the growth that allows each participant of a group to achieve a dignified life and overall well-being.

Negative aspects of cultures can be devastating to people, animals, the economy and the environment. Consider the following cases: Spanish bullfighters in Europe continue killing bulls as part of their historical culture, a practice that is permitted and supported by many people, despite knowing that bulls suffer and die in the most horrible way. A second example is when men circumcise women mutilating their clitorises against their will and in contrast to medical advice as observed by Ogunsiji, Wilkes and Chok (2018). A third case to consider is when communities in Haiti dispose of trash in the ocean without regard for the environment or the animals that live in it, or even for the negative impact that this contamination can have on them. These practices are not only negative for the environment, wildlife and humans, but can also limit the groups' development as we will discuss in the following sections. As stated previously, culture is connected intrinsically to a group's mentality. The cases described are validated by its members' mentality, values and traditions. A similar phenomenon is observed in Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas Mexico, where some indigenous groups continue selling minor girls for marriage. The local government is now trying to stop this practice, which is perpetuated by parents who sell their daughters against their will. Some girls are as young as 13 years old. This is not a new practice; these actions are part of these groups' ancestral traditions. They are not related exclusively to poverty factors, but they are strongly associated with cultural elements. These human trafficking cases have gotten attention from the media and have been studied by authors such as Frias (2014). A similar situation occurs in Canada, where indigenous girls continue being sexually exploited as indicated by Louie (2018). These traditions break country laws and are part of what modern societies would consider abuse, human trafficking and oppression against women. What results interesting is that on many occasions the same groups that defend women's rights will advocate for these indigenous cultures, romanticising their subjective views of these groups and therefore valuing only the positive elements of their cultures, ignoring the foundations that are harmful to themselves. This study does not seek to criticise indigenous cultures but aims to reveal that an un objective

perception of some aboriginal groups has been perpetuated across social sciences. Edgerton (1992) states that many intellectuals continue defending the idea of some aboriginal groups as being peaceful and spiritual when scientific evidence shows that they are actually cruel. This is a highly discussed topic in the field of anthropology. Humanists are currently subjectively analysing some aboriginal and indigenous groups. Something similar happens when certain developed countries are analysed; some researchers only point out the positive elements of their economies and avoid discussing the aspects that are negative for their communities and for the environment. Any positive culture that facilitates reasoning will protect humankind, wildlife and the environment. A culture that has a positive mentality allows constructive values, logic, creativity, innovation, justice and reasoning to rule the foundations and structure of the group — either a family, an organisation or even an entire nation. A positive culture aims to achieve social well-being.

The cultural improvement theory suggests that culture can be improved, and that it must be improved if a group is pursuing social well-being and economic development. Some cultures are in constant transformation, but not in constant improvement. If humans do not intentionally talk about their culture as they dialogue about other important topics, they cannot not create awareness of it, so their culture disappears in front of their eyes. Individuals can be immersed in a culture that can be negative to the group that they belong to in many ways, and many times they are not aware of it so they cannot improve it.

The cultural improvement theory proposes the idea that cultures can intentionally be improved in order to facilitate human well-being and economic development. Economic development refers to the process in which developing countries can find a way to accelerate their road to social and economic well-being for all. Unlike the oppression theory (or the theory of social oppression), the cultural improvement theory focuses on the positive aspects of cultures and systems first as resources to promote social well-being. It does identify weaknesses, negative components and oppressive elements of cultures and systems, but recommends improving them through a positive approach that emphasises reconciliation and unity. Its focus proposes objectiveness and realism, as it considers both the positive and negative aspects of cultures and systems. A social theory that does not consider both the positive and negative elements of a culture or a system cannot be objective or realist, especially if the analysis utilised is not based on the scientific method. The oppression theory, a model born in the field of sociology, only considers the negative aspects of humans, cultures and systems, so it became a pessimist and subjective theory. It does not reflect on the fact that systems also support people, and that sexual minorities are not only part of the oppressed groups but can also be a part of the so-called oppressive groups. Recent evidence suggests that the oppression theory has been used to facilitate division and hate against governments and companies, as it is the case of the worldwide popular song 'You are the rapist' composed by the Chilean social movement 'The Theses'. The composers of this single are connected to the field of social sciences. Through this song, its authors accuse all governments, presidents and police officers (along with other groups) of being rapists. How can a statement of this nature be based on logic, justice or science? The main reason the oppression theory is so hateful could be explained in part by the current intellectual crisis experienced by social sciences, humanities and philosophy.

One of the most challenging and complex tasks that exists on earth is to lead a country — any nation, in any part of the globe. Governments and their teams of experts must manage a wide variety of skills in multiple fields such as economics, health, education and technology, among many others in the context of a new, technological world (Kostakis, 2011). Many professionals and scholars — especially those not in power — ignore the difficulties and the complex challenges that most governments face when leading a macro group. Governments can face even greater challenges if they donot lead with experts, or if those experts do not base their knowledge and advice on science. The oppression theory assumes that all systems are oppressive within a country, and that all people are also oppressive. It does not consider the good intentions of many government officials, people in general, non-profit organisations, philanthropists and other community actors such as police officers. It only focuses on the oppressive aspects of systems which is, as I will try to demonstrate in this study,

an incorrect analysis of reality, as systems are also formed by positive elements. It is possible that, at the beginning, this theory was more objective than it is today. Currently, many activists and scholars from various social science fields have made it an extreme and ideological theory. Table 1 compares the main elements of the cultural improvement and oppression theories.

Table 1. Comparison between the cultural improvement and oppression theories

Cultural improvement theory	Oppression theory
Focuses on recognising and valuing the positive elements of social systems and individuals and uses them to promote social well-being, economic development and reconciliation.	Focuses on the historical, oppressive aspects of humans, cultures and social systems.
Recognises historical and present-day oppression in most systems, as well as in individuals, but suggests that systems can be improved, and that oppression can be terminated. The change starts with all individuals as their improvement impacts the systems (they are part of the systems and are responsible to improve them).	Recognises historical and present-day oppression in most systems, as well as in individuals (all individuals can be oppressive). Oppression can be terminated through awareness of oppression.
Its focus is positive (it focuses on the concepts of improvement and reconciliation, valuing the good in the systems).	Its focus is negative (it focuses on the concept of oppression).
Aims to reach unity, reconciliation, social well-being and economic development through cultural awareness.	Aims to prevent systems from being oppressive through awareness of oppression.
Suggests that systems have positive and negative elements.	Suggests that people and systems are always oppressive.

3. Seven stages of cultural awareness and improvement

According to the cultural improvement theory, the first stage to facilitate *cultural improvement* is to intentionally dialog about our own culture in the same way we talk about other important topics, such as education, family, future plans, finances, etc. This communication process seeks to create *awareness* about our own culture and about other cultures as well. Understanding the concept of culture is vital in this initial stage (what is culture, its components and its influence in social well-being and economic development) Comprehending the positive and negative impact of cultures in families, societies and countries is also crucial.

The second phase consists of thinking strictly about *our own culture*, concerning what is *positive and negative* (analysis and evaluation of our own culture). According to the theory of cultural improvement, the most important components of culture are a) intelligence (mentality; our capacity to think, to reason logically) and b) creativity and innovation. When humans are able to examine their own culture individually or as a group and experience the process of evaluating it, they can distinguish which elements of their culture are promoting well-being and which ones are harming them. They are also promoting *thinking processes.* If these rational processes are cognitively deep, objective, positive and logical, they could eventually help the human group to efficiently improve its culture. Without a logical and objective thinking process, that procedure cannot be optimal. After experiencing feelings of frustration but also of pride for the positive elements recognised in its culture, the group can decide to improve it. This decision must be made intentionally and freely. The first pathway to reach this improvement process is *creativity*. On the mezzo level (for example, a family or a small business), the

entire group should participate in this improvement process. One individual can start the procedure, but this individual will not succeed if the other members of the group do not participate willingly and intentionally. Group participants should not point to others' contributions to a negative element of a culture, as this process should always remain positive. This method includes everyone: *We are all part of this culture, so we will improve it together*. The group values the positive cultural elements first, and then it identifies the possible harmful components.

The third stage comprises thinking about the group's goals, *how it wants its culture to look like*. This stage does not focus only on improving the negative features of a culture, but also on creating or integrating aspects that the culture does not possess. The group must be creative and envision the best culture for it. If this process is being led by a government, then different group leaders should participate; individuals such as government officials, historians, intellectuals, representatives of social organisations, company leaders, economists, teachers, indigenous leaders, firemen, disabled individuals, etc. Governments can also obtain feedback from citizens through online surveys. It is imperative that all members of the group are able to participate in this process, preventing extremist groups from influencing a plan that represents the larger group, as has occurred in countries such as Venezuela and Argentina. The process of envisioning a group's culture is a positive procedure of *balance*. Radical and extremist ideas should not be part of this project.

The fourth stage considers the elaboration of a long-term plan to improve the group's culture. This step includes a responsible member of the group who will lead this process. In family therapy, it can be the father, the mother or an older sibling. In a school setting, it can be a teacher, a principal or a student's parent. For a nation, it can be a government's minister or a scientist.

The fifth stage comprehends the implementation of the long-term *plan* created and agreed upon by the group. This plan must be visible to all. In a school context, a colourful poster with a diagram of this project can be produced and placed in spaces where it is visible to the entire school community. The language used in this plan must be encouraging and respectful, ideally using few words. When we talk about culture, we are talking about ourselves; so, we must be cautious and professional when making cultural plans. An example of a cultural project for a family that is facing communication difficulties could be:

'Our family cares for one another, so at the table we listen attentively to the person talking.'

'When I talk, my family respectfully listens to me.'

Plans/goals should be concise, always using positive language that can bring pride and joy to the group. An example of a plan/goal for a school that deals with high rates of bulling could be:

'We value diversity and respect people as they are, no matter how different we are from each other.'

'In our school we protect each other.'

A plan for a nation could be:

'We care for the environment, so we proudly recycle in this recycling bin.'

'In our country we care for native wildlife, so we protect it.'

A plan for a company that is struggling with poor management and negative work environment could look like this:

'We think, design and work together as a team.'

'We proudly treat each other with respect.'

The sixth stage in this cultural improvement process consists of evaluating the initial plan. This step should be repeated many times. The earliest a plan should be evaluated by a group is 3 weeks. The longest is 3 months. Is the group positively changing? Are desired elements being incorporated into the culture? Does the group perceive improvements? Once an element is incorporated into a culture it becomes a part of the people, of their mentality, of who they are. Some cultural components become part of a culture unintentionally and without the members of the group noticing it. Consequently, this step is very relevant. Most individuals will notreflect on cultural components in a daily basis as they have become a part of them.

As it has been already stated in previous segments, it is central to constantly improve cultures from a positive perspective, especially when wanting to reach reconciliation. Most countries have experienced historical oppression at certain time, either due to colonisation or because of unique factors that separated groups and brought oppression to some. A positive view of each other and the valorisation of the constructive aspects of systems can accelerate reconciliation. This is a crucial component that differentiates the cultural improvement and oppression theories; the primary focus must be on the positive elements of systems. For example, instead of trying to teach students not to bully others, schools should incorporate the element of *respect and appreciation for others who are different than me.* If the culture of the students and their families is respectful and appreciative, bully rates should be minimal. This is exactly what happens in countries such as South Korea. South Korean society developed a more positive culture towards diversity than other nations, so its school bullying rates are some of the lowest compared to most countries that are part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2017). In this case, culture is the main factor that explains such phenomenon. Schools should not only focus on the adverse aspects of their cultures, but also on what they hope to become as a school community. This perspective includes viewing students, teachers, principals, parents and other school professionals as equal participants of the school culture. If students become aware that their school culture contains a harmful component, such as bulling, only then they can work together to become a more respectful, inclusive and friendly school.

The last and seventh stage involves an indefinite stage of improvement in which the initial goals were met, and the group goes back to stage 1. No matter how satisfied the group is with its achievements, members should continue evaluating their culture and creating new plans as the factors that propitiated the initial negative elements might still be present. In the same way cultures can be improved, they can also unintentionally deteriorate. These seven stages of improvement can be applied to an array of different settings, such as family therapy, couples' counselling, improvement of school environments, company settings, non-profit organisations and nationwide projects.

Every family within a country will always have its own and distinctive culture. Different groups that cohabitate within a macro group will also have their own unique cultural characteristics. In this way, the process of thinking about our own culture and being willing to improve it will be a key on facilitating social well-being for the macro system. It does not matter how different cultures are among each other if they promote social well-being. There is not a specific and sole *model* to build an ideal culture. Each group, family or country should improve or create their own according to their distinctive characteristics and needs. The cultural improvement theory suggests facilitating cultural awareness and improvement in pursuit of a constructive approach to the concept of culture that will bring social welfare and eventually will help developing countries attain a greater level of economic success. Table 2 shows a summary of the seven stages of cultural improvement suggested by the cultural improvement theory.

Table 2. Seven stages of cultural improvement

Stages	Key concept	Description
1	Awareness	Intentionally dialogue about the concept of culture.
2	Analysis	Analysis of our culture: positive aspects first, negative components last.
3	Envision	Goals: What type of culture do we visualise for our group?
4	Plan	Development of a long-term plan to improve our culture.
5	Implementation	Implementation of the plan.
6	Evaluation	Evaluation of the initial plan (this step should be repeated many times)
7	Indefinite stage of improvement	The goals have been met; the group goes back to stage 1 to create a new plan.

How can these seven stages be applied to real scenarios? Visualise a couple whose relationship is violent. Think for a moment on how positive it would be if they could envision the type of relationship culture they want to develop, and they work together towards that goal, through a plan that they develop together. This includes what type of mindset they will build and the way in which they will see and treat each other. Therefore, it is crucial to talk about mindset when improving a culture. A positive process of improving a culture is always cognitive and creative. Consider a school where students, parents, teachers and other members of the community come together to analyse the school culture and to develop a description of what positive school culture should look like according to their own context, history and traditions. Envision that school motivating each family to create their own plan as well — a positive plan, aligned with what they desire for their school and for their community. Reflect on a company where employees, managers and owners get together to research what type of culture will help them create a better work environment for all members of the organisation and that will facilitate growth and profit. Now imagine a larger group at the macro level, such as an entire nation. Most countries are aware of the different cultures that live within their territories, but they usually do not develop specific plans to improve them. Formal education is typically the field that takes care of these types of projects, but if the concept of positive culture and its components is not explicitly and intentionally present, these projects will never have a strong direction. Imagine the leaders and intellectuals of a nation — the businessmen, politicians and directors of social organisations — coming together to evaluate their own culture, and to describe goals to improve it, to design the optimal culture for that specific country —everyone coming together to discuss and think about their values, traditions, beliefs, etc. Unlike the oppression theory, the members of that community will not perceive each other as oppressive, as it is currently being taught in numerous social sciences faculties around the world. From this perspective, every member of the group is oppressive. Through a positive approach, the cultural improvement theory motivates individuals to first value the constructive qualities in one another in order to come together on behalf of social well-being and reconciliation.

4. Race, culture and evolution

The focus of the cultural improvement theory encompasses mostly the invisible elements that are part of a group (nonmaterial culture, also known as symbolic culture) as shown previously in Figure 1. These elements can be observed through the way humans behave and create. Human creations (clothing, buildings, software, etc.) are part of what is known as material culture. The focus of this theory is on what is inside humans, in their mentality, components that exist inside their minds, such as ideas, values and their capacity to think in an autonomous and free manner. This theory opposes the notion of culture being related to humans' races, as race is part of the biological component of humankind. Although every race has a culture that has been inherited (given to the group by its environment and ancestors), there is no scientific evidence that can prove that specific races will develop specific cultures. On the contrary, the theory of cultural improvement emphasises the freedom of humans; that is, although they have inherited a specific culture, humans have the capacity to think about their own present culture and are able to transform it or improve it regardless of their race or historical past. This approach opposes the work developed by Maturana, Davila Yanez and

Ramirez Munoz (2016), which suggests that our cultural and our biological manners of existences can be distinguished but not separated. The cultures that different groups around the earth manifest today have been inherited and shaped for thousands of years, and that is the reason why for some researchers it is so difficult to separate culture from human biology. Also, from the viewpoint of the cultural improvement theory, culture just does not evolve in its own. This means that time will not allow humans to reach perfection, or an ideal culture and mentality. If that was the case, after thousands of years inhabiting planet Earth, humans would have ended poverty, oppression and wars, and would take care of the environment as part of a cultural evolution. Historical evidence shows otherwise. If humans do not improve their culture through an intentional thinking process, culture will not evolve in its own; at least not on behalf of human well-being. Such is the case of some regions of the world where cruel millenary practices are still oppressing women and children. Culture changes and transforms, but if a positive improvement process is desired it must be guided intentionally.

5. Methods

A literature review regarding the topic of cultural improvement was conducted. Four Hispanic families were interviewed; families that overcame poverty and dysfunction. They were consulted regarding what they did in terms of actions and mentality to rise above poverty and difficult situations. Two families were from Santiago, Chile, and two from Tulsa, Oklahoma, United States. The first Chilean family comprised a single mother with three children. The second one from Tulsa comprised a widow mother with four children. The third family from Chile and the fourth family from Tulsa comprised a father, a mother and five children, respectively. These families were chosen because they had the following elements in common: (a) one of the parents in each family had suffered some type of abuse/trauma as a child, (b) at least one parent came from a dysfunctional family, (c) all families overcame poverty or were on the road to overcome poverty at the time of the interview, (d) they were all able to formally educate their children and (e) they were all *thankful* of the systems around them. A brief interview was conducted with 20 high school students, 20 college students and 20professional adults from Tulsa, Oklahoma. They were all asked to define the *concept of culture* and were asked whether they thought this concept was associated with social well-being and economic development. Historical cases of countries and one empire were studied.

6. Results

A literature review showed that few researchers in the international arena are focusing their efforts towards the specific topic of *cultural improvement* for groups, organisations, and macro groups, such as countries. A study conducted by Naum (2018) considered a civilisation trying to improve the culture of an indigenous group, action contrary to the *cultural improvement process*, as the cultural improvement theory suggests that each group should improve its own culture.

All adults from the four families interviewed stated that although life was hard and the past had been tough on them, they were able to overcome difficulties. They stated that they had a *positive attitude* towards life. All parents/adults gave similar answers that have been grouped in the following four categories:

1. 'We did not want to continue living the way our parents lived, the way we were raised, so we came up with our own way'*(they created their own way, that is, their own family culture).*
2. 'We used all of the resources available in the community, given both by the government and by other local organisations, including churches, social organisations, etc.' *(in order to succeed, they focused on the positive aspects of the systems and not only on the negative or oppressive aspects of those systems).*
3. 'We are thankful for the support we have received from those in our environment' *(although the road to where they are now was very difficult, they are thankful for the support they*

received. That gratitude was probably one of the factors that gave them mental strength to overcome challenging situations, as studied by Wong et al., 2018).

4. 'We focused on what we wanted and worked really hard to achieve it' *(they had a plan and worked hard and together to achieve their goals. That determination to achieve their plan was key to reach their goals. They made big efforts to achieve their objectives. A culture cannot be improved without the group putting effort toward the goal).*

These families' answers were consistent with the theory of cultural improvement. They improved their families' cultures inherited by their parents or came up with a new/better one; they focused on the positive aspects of the systems and not only on the oppressive aspects as the oppression theory suggests. They were *thankful* for the good in their lives, and they developed a plan and worked hard and together towards achieving that plan, putting a lot of *effort* into it. The answers were very similar considering that the families were from two different countries and cultures. *Determination* and *group effort* were keys to reach the goals they were trying to achieve.

Regarding the survey conducted with high school students, college students and professional adults, only 20% was able to define correctly the concept of culture and to associate it with social well-being and economic development. The rest were not able to provide an integral definition of culture, or to state its relationships to communities' well-being and economic development. All of them recognised that cultures could have harmful elements for some societies, but they did not indicate that culture could be improved or the importance of improving a culture. Overall, most of these individuals did not conceptually understand the concept of culture and its importance for social well-being and its possible implications for economic development. This was my assumption, a reason that explains why the concept of culture is not as present in society as it should be: because most people do not understand its importance for social well-being or its definition. In their responses, it was noted that culture was not one of the main concepts participants thought about regularly as part of their education or daily routines.

A pattern was observed in the answers given by the families. When individuals and groups value the positive aspects of the systems that they are part of, they develop *gratitude* for what they have or for what support is offered to them. This mental state could facilitate positive mental health as suggested by Wong et al. (2018). The cultural improvement theory aims to develop *a thankful individual* who works to improve the oppressive aspects of a system, valuing the positive aspects of those systems first.

As observed by the study made by Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs (2001), it seems that humans have the tendency to place great significance on negative elements of reality. This could explain in part the birth of the oppression theory. There are multiple cases in the American continent in which only one police officer out of a very large group committed an oppressive act, but it still impacted people's perception about an entire police department in a very negative way. This phenomenon can be observed in multiple scenarios in which people's perception differs from reality (evidence). One would think that with the current advances of technology and the tremendous knowledge available online most individuals would search for trustable facts and would perceive reality through their research. On the contrary, social media has been a very efficient platform to feed perceptions of reality that are sometimes hateful, unrealistic and subjective.

7. The Inca empire's case

According to Jenkins (2001), and unlike many other indigenous groups in the South American region, the Incas developed advanced techniques to create networks that connected them within a vast area and with multiple indigenous groups. Studies made by Schmidt and Dos Santos (2017) demonstrated the use of original and creative techniques by the Incas to collect taxes. Allowing creativity and innovation to become an important part of their culture let Incas grow faster than other groups in that part of the American continent. The Inca empire also developed complex architectural

and agricultural systems connected to advanced knowledge of astronomy (not astrology) as indicated by Saintenoy, Gonzalez-Garcia and Fernandez (2019), investing time and resources in creating a different and more innovative mentality than the groups around them. They allowed deep-thinking processes to guide their development. Prior to colonisation in America, native groups that incorporated science into their culture developed better and stronger than those that did not. That correlation has not changed much today in that region.

8. The Israeli case

Israel is a case that proves that the theory of cultural improvement functions well at a macro level. When this young country was founded, its citizens faced the dramatic reality of being located in a desert region where it would be very difficult to develop quality agriculture because of the lack of sweet water available for this purpose. With great determination, creativity and unity, Israelis built wells and discovered that the water from these sources had high amounts of salt. However, the secitizens did not focus on the salty water, but in the water that they had available. They considered *what they had* instead of what they did not have. Using original scientific methods, Israel was able to separate most of the salt from the water in order to irrigate its fruits, vegetables and vineyards. This country now supplies food to all its regions and even exports highly competitive produce, such as wine and dates. Israel has contributed to other developing nations with this type of knowledge and science through MASHAV, Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation, which is part of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This nation continues developing ways to desalinate its agricultural water. What happened in Israel is what occurs when a large group focuses on the positive components of its systems, and not only on the negative or oppressive elements as the oppression theory suggests. Innovation and problem-solving have become cornerstones of Israeli culture.

8.1. Limitations

Because of the complexity of reality, some of the cases presented in this publication involved more factors that influenced each case. However, *culture* was a key factor in each one of them.

Conflict of interest

At the time of publication, the author of this article was not associated with any political party or government or with any of the organisations and/or companies studied in this work.

Informed consent

All individuals interviewed in this study consented to participate.

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