33 Culture and personality
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In some cultures, I would be considered normal.
Bumper sticker, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2006

On 13 April 1769, Captain James Cook anchored his ship, H. M. Bark Endeavour, in a Tahitian harbour. His assignment was to build a small fort and an observatory in order to measure the transit of the moon, which would occur on 3 June. Within minutes of anchoring, the ship was swarming with local Tahitians, none of whom had ever seen a European, none of whom spoke English, and all of whom wanted to trade with the visitors. The trade was brisk and mutually beneficial. After a while, the British caught some Tahitians stealing. Cook reported them to their own authorities, and they were duly punished, much as Cook expected.

This historical anecdote presents grave problems for naïve cultural relativity. Specifically, the Cook anecdote shows that people from vastly different cultures are able to interact effectively with little difficulty. This speaks to the existence of an underlying human communality, an important starting point for any discussion of culture and personality. Not only are people all alike beneath the cultural trappings, but all cultures are alike, because they rest upon a shared human nature – see Carneiro (1970) for a discussion of the universal features of cultural evolution based on human nature.

The literature on culture and personality starts in the late nineteenth century with the beginnings of cultural anthropology. A trip through this literature resembles a visit to a museum of natural history. There are lots of interesting exhibits (e.g., DuBois 1960; Turnbull 1963) that appeal to our taste for the exotic, the arcane and the surprising, but they do not add up to a coherent story. The literature linking culture and personality is fragmentary and inconclusive, for at least two reasons.

First, it is based on the natural science model which assumes that virtually any phenomenon can be studied for its own sake, with no concern about practical applications; that is, the research on culture and personality was not intended to solve a well-defined question. Smith, Bond and Kagieibasi (2006, p. 127) suggest that the central question in cross-cultural personality psychology concerns ...‘the extent to which personality differences may account for the evident differences in behaviour around the world’; they remind us that, ‘it was the kaleidoscopic

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diversity in observable behaviours that led to our seeking explanations for cultural differences in the first place (ibid.). The second reason the culture and personality literature is so fragmentary is that, until very recently, there was no agreement among personality psychologists on the agenda for, or definition of, their subject matter (Hogan 2005). In this chapter, we deal with both issues.

We believe that three concepts are necessary to understand human behaviour: (1) personality, which concerns basic human needs; (2) social interaction, which functions to satisfy these basic needs; and (3) culture, which provides group-anchored rules for these social interactions. The rest of this chapter is organized in five sections based on these three concepts. In the first section, we define personality. In the second, we define culture. In the third section, we describe the structure of social interactions, through which personality becomes linked with culture. In the fourth section, we describe some personality-based, cultural universals. In the last section, we offer an agenda for future research in culture and personality.

**Defining personality**

In my beginning is my end. T. S. Eliot, *Four quartets*

Personality psychology concerns the nature of human nature. It answers two big questions: (1) in what ways are people all alike; and (2) in what ways is each person different? Biology and evolutionary theory provide the necessary framework for conceptualizing human nature, and the study of human origins leads to three useful generalizations. The first is that we evolved as group-living and culture-using animals, meaning that we are inherently social; our need for culture is built into our DNA through the processes of natural selection. The second generalization is that every human group has a status hierarchy. In some groups, e.g., Cistercian monks as opposed to the Masai, the hierarchies may be based on different criteria, e.g., knowledge, money, family background, athletic ability, etc. and may be hard to discern, but they are always there. Moreover, the hierarchies begin developing very early and they are quite powerful, although many people socialized into relatively egalitarian cultural systems try to ignore them, downplaying their existence and importance for orchestrating social life.

The third generalization is that every human group has a religion of some sort. By religion we mean a theory regarding a people’s relation to the physical and supernatural world, with an associated set of beliefs and practices involving fellow believers. Not only is religion a cultural universal, but religious observances also seem to be an ancient feature of human groups. Anthropologists report systematic burial practices 100,000 years ago. Such practices are probably older, but hard data are difficult to obtain. Nested within each group’s religious practices are prescribed and proscribed behaviours; e.g., husbands should not covet their mothers-in-law, wives should prepare foods in certain ways, the genders should be separated during religious ceremonies, believers should avoid contact with
non-believers, etc., which we moderns deem superstitions, while treasuring our own equally distinctive practices, such as separating religion from politics.

These three generalizations allow us to draw some inferences about the nature of human motivation, i.e., about how people are alike beneath the apparent surface variation. The fact that we evolved as group-living animals suggests that, at a deep and also perhaps unconscious level, we need ongoing social contact and acceptance; we find the prospects of being rejected aversive.

The fact that every human group is organized in terms of a status hierarchy suggests that, at a deep and again perhaps unconscious level, we need a ranking system to organize ourselves and distribute resources. So, we reflect on our place in the various hierarchies of our daily rounds and try to advance our positions when we can. It also suggests that we will find the loss of status threatening, if not traumatic.

The fact that every human culture has a religion and a network of rules designed to regulate conduct suggests that, at a deep and yet again perhaps unconscious level, we need structure, predictability and meaning in our lives. We create myths, religious systems and moralities to provide ourselves with those reassuring structures and regularities. We then legitimize and justify the belief system that provides us with that order and meaning (Berger 1967; Jost and Hunyady 2005), and become poised to reject others who disagree with our ‘way of life’.

We end this discussion of motivation with four observations: first, there are numerous motives at play in life; for example, we share with reptiles the needs for food, water, territory, sex and the desire to protect our young, and we share with chimpanzees the needs for social contact, status and the social ordering it provides. The motivational model we have described here is, with the religious dimension however, distinctly human. Secondly, the needs for social contact, status and belief structure are biologically mandated; those who can successfully negotiate more respect and status in their community are better able to provide for themselves and their offspring. Thirdly, we use as shorthand terms for these three motive patterns the phrases ‘getting along’, ‘getting ahead’ and ‘finding meaning’. Our needs for social contact lead to behaviours designed to survive and get along; our needs for status result in behaviours designed to acquire more resources and get ahead; and our needs for predictability and order lead to efforts to regulate our life with others and find meaning and purpose in our daily activities. Finally, there will be individual differences in peoples’ desire and ability to get along, to get ahead and to find meaning, and these differences lead to differences in life outcomes, both intrapsychically and socially. These differences arise from genetic differences in temperament (Thomas and Chess 1977) and intelligence (Eysenck 1998) which confer from birth differential advantages for playing the game of life and flourishing.

In everyday language the word personality has two meanings. These meanings serve very different purposes and it is important to keep them distinct. On the one hand, there is ‘the actor’s view’ of personality and it concerns ‘the you that you know’: your hopes, beliefs, values, fears and theories about how to get along, get ahead and find meaning. On the other hand, there is ‘the observer’s view’ of
personality and it concerns ‘the you that others know’: the person others think you are, based on their judgements of your overt behaviours.

There are several points to be noted about these two aspects of personality: first, the actor’s view of personality is your identity; whereas the observer’s view of personality is your reputation. Your identity is the story you tell yourself and others about your self in diary entries, during conversations and on self-report measures of personality. Your reputation is the summary evaluation of your past performances as shared by the members of your proximal social communities.

Secondly, the concepts of identity and reputation serve very different functions for psychologists: we, and people who interact with you, use your reputation to describe your past performance or to predict your future performance; we use your identity to explain your behaviour. Reputation concerns what you do; identity concerns why you do it.

A third point concerns the relative verifiability of these concepts. Identity concerns your self view, and Sigmund Freud would say that it is largely a fantasy created out of the interplay of unconscious needs and defensive processes. Identity is hard to study because it is so subject to self-deception and strategies of impression management. Implicit measures of personality are often used to evade these biases, though they, too, present challenges in capturing your ‘true’ identity (Hofer and Bond 2008). In contrast, reputation is easy to study: we simply ask your peers to describe you using a standardized reporting format. Such descriptions typically show high agreement across observers, and the descriptions tend to be stable over long periods of time (Roberts and DelVecchio 2000). Moreover, because the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour, and because reputations reflect past behaviour, a person’s reputation is the best single predictor of his/her future behaviour (Dunnette 1966).

Finally, research over the past 100 years shows that reputation, on however many dimensions it is assessed, has a stable (e.g., Funder, Kolar and Blackman 1995) and universal structure (e.g., McCrae, Terracciano et al. 2005). Regardless of the culture in which a person lives or the language that the community speaks, reputations can be characterized in terms of at least five broad themes: (1) Adjustment (fearfulness versus courage; Neuroticism); (2) Ascendance (shyness versus social boldness; Extraversion); (3) Agreeableness (rudeness versus tact); (4) Conscientiousness (recklessness versus prudence); and (5) Intellect/Opness (narrow-mindedness versus open-mindedness). Despite the various labels given to these factors, personality psychologists refer to this as the Five Factor Model (FFM) (Wiggins 1996) whose development has transformed personality research since about 1990.

The FFM argues that individual differences in social behaviour, as reflected in their reputations and the structure of personality assessment, can be adequately described in terms of these five dimensions. Adjustment is important because the low end of the dimension concerns maladaptive thought and self-defeating behaviour, e.g., anxiety, hostility and depression. Ascendance is related to status seeking, e.g., achieving power by accumulating resources and building coalitions, i.e, by using intimidation and the various self-enhancement tactics (Jones
Agreeableness concerns seeking social acceptance by the conscious or unconscious use of ingratiating and relationship-building tactics. Prudence concerns achieving social acceptance by following the rules and obeying established authority, i.e., by using exemplification tactics. Intellect/Openness concerns exploration, creativity and imagination. The FFM provides an agreed-upon taxonomy of the major dimensions of personality, although there is some recent debate about whether additional dimensions are needed for cross-cultural comprehensiveness (Cheung et al. 2001). Moreover, an overwhelming body of research shows that all (thousands of them) current measures of personality assess these same five dimensions with varying degrees of adequacy and efficiency. In addition, the FFM has been replicated in languages and cultures all over the world (McCrae et al. 1998). The evidence also suggests that scores on measures of the FFM are (a) heritable, and (b) stable over time (Costa and McCrae 1994). Finally, the FFM provides a common and generally agreed-upon and apparently universal vocabulary for talking about personality – defined as reputation and as rated by other people.

**Culture**

Culture is simply how one lives and is connected to history by habit. Le Roi Jones, *The legacy of Malcolm X*

Culture is defined by the patterns of thought and behaviour shared by a group of people. Bond (2004, p. 63) provided a psychological definition of culture consistent with this description:

A shared system of beliefs (what is true), values (what is important), expectations, especially about scripted behavioural sequences, and behaviour meanings (what is implied by engaging in a given action) developed by a group over time to provide the requirements of living (food and water, protection against the elements, security, social belonging, appreciation and respect from others, and the exercise of one’s skills in realizing one’s life purpose) in a particular geographical niche.

There are five points about culture that should be remembered. First, it is learned, and must be learned anew by each generation. The process of inculcating the rules of culture is called socialization, and the dynamics of socialization are a human universal, because people evolved as group-living and culture-using animals (cf. Keller 2007).

Secondly, the specific contents of any culture are somewhat accidental. They result from the interplay of historical events in an ecological niche that afforded differing survival possibilities (cf., Diamond 1998). The socialization process insures that members of each culture can survive in their specific ecology (rain forest, savannah, coast-line, etc.) and adapt to a changing world.

The third point is that cultures vary independently of race or ethnicity. Members of all races acquire the cultural patterns that are inculcated by their socializing
agents. Children are first taught by their families, then by the social institutions – schools, religious groups and political agencies – of their wider society. They in their turn become the culture-teachers of their own and others’ children.

Fourthly, cultures exist in two forms, objective and subjective. They exist ‘out there’ in society in the form of architecture, modes of transportation and eating utensils, as well as written rules and informal customs. But, they also exist inside peoples’ heads in the form of judgements regarding what is important, what is true and what counts as correct social behaviour. Each member of a culture will internalize his/her external culture in varying degrees, a socialization process that Berger (1967, p. 17) described as, “…the reabsorption into consciousness of the objectivated world in such a way that the structures of this world come to determine the subjective structures of consciousness itself”.

Finally, our definition of personality stipulates that people are inherently social and meet their primary needs during social interaction. Culture provides the rules for those interactions: ‘This shared system enhances communication of meaning and coordination of actions among a culture’s members by reducing uncertainty and anxiety through making its members’ behaviour predictable, understandable, and valued’ (Bond 2004, p. 63). Thus, culture provides the rules for social interaction and the methods for enforcing those rules, legitimizing both.

Social interaction

The mutual and universal dependence of individuals who remain indifferent to one another constitutes the social network that binds them together.

Karl Marx, Das Kapital

Much human behaviour takes place during social interaction. Even in private, we spend time reviewing past interactions and planning future encounters that will advance our personal agendas. It is useful to reflect on what is needed for an interaction. Every interaction has three essential components. The first is an agenda, a reason or pretext for the interaction. Agendas range from the casual and informal (‘Let’s get together sometime and have a beer’) to the consequential and formal (members of the Security Council at the United Nations debate sending a peace-keeping force to Rwanda). Persons with position power and/or social skills are better able to control the agenda for interactions, and are often required to do so by the roles they occupy in the interaction.

The second major component of an interaction is roles being played; we can only interact with others in the context of roles which provide the essential goal orientation, structure and predictability for the interaction. Consider the game of jump rope: the game can only take place if there is some desire to play physically, agreement about how to play (the rules), and if children are available to fill the required roles of rope turner or rope jumper. Roles range from informal and loosely scripted (guest at a cocktail party) to formal and tightly scripted (bride
in a wedding ceremony). As Sarbin and Allen (1968) point out, people differ in their ability to learn and play roles so that some people are more successful in more types of social interaction than others.

The final ingredient needed for an interaction is the rules for the game, ritual or ceremony in which a person is involved. These rules are usually understood by the participants prior to the interaction, although they can be negotiated and some interactions allow for greater negotiability on the rules governing their interpersonal exchanges. The socialization process, which begins in infancy and continues thereafter, is largely about teaching people the requirements for playing various roles, including the rules that apply for instantiating such an interaction in that cultural setting. People who ignore the rules, or will not honour the requirements of their roles, risk ruining the game and may be forced to leave the interaction. Their reputation as bad players will quickly spread, and in more extreme cases they may be denied access to normal social life by being imprisoned.

As an example, consider the interaction that is called a college lecture. The major agenda concerns students learning something from a teacher in a conducive setting. Persons playing the role of the lecturer are supposed to act in an organized, knowledgeable and wise manner; persons playing the role of student are supposed to act interested in the lecture. Even small deviations from the norms (a male instructor wearing a red evening gown, a student talking on a cell phone) will threaten to disrupt the proceedings, requiring its renegotiation. This example shows how we require and invent rituals and roles to regulate our interactions so that we can meet our needs for social contact, status and meaning or purpose.

Finally, every interaction may be considered a competitive game, and as Wiggins (1996) notes, after every interaction, people gain or lose a certain amount of status and acceptance. A person’s reputation, as defined by the FFM, reflects the current outcome of the ongoing accounting process that occurs among the people who form the actor’s social network. There is high consensus among these people regarding the character of the actor, i.e., his or her reputation (see e.g., Funder and West 1993), which may not agree with the actor’s own view of himself or herself. In these cases, the actor is said ‘not to know his (or her) place’, and pressure may be applied so that the actor accepts the social consensus.

**Cultural universals**

Every man is in certain respects (a) like all other men, (b) like some other men, (c) like no other man. Kluckholn and Murray, *Personality in nature, society and culture*

Peoples’ public behaviour changes substantially from culture to culture. Anthropologists have traditionally argued that culture determines behaviour and explains the differences that occur across cultures. In this chapter, we argue that: (1) there is a universal core to human nature defined by the needs for social acceptance, status and meaning; (2) these needs are met during interaction;
(3) culture provides the rules for interaction; and (4) the contents of culture reflect the imprint of local ecologies and history. We believe that peoples’ behaviour differs from culture to culture, not because the people are differently endowed by nature, but because the rules for social interaction are different in their proximal social environments. Although the rules may vary, peoples’ need for culture is universal.

Although people’s behaviour varies from culture to culture, there are, nonetheless, some important cultural universals to be noted. These universals exist because ultimately culture reflects human nature. We will mention six such universals, although it is possible to identify more (cf., Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1989).

First, every culture is organized around the family, and family bonds are a defining feature of every culture. If food supplies are sufficient, families will aggregate into larger human groups, tribes and even societies. Under pressure, societies will devolve back into tribes, and tribes will devolve into family units. When families fall apart, human groups have failed utterly, and ‘mere anarchy is loosed upon the world’, as Yeats observed. Every society understands the concept of the family and its importance. Confucian philosophy explicitly defines family harmony as the foundation of a viable social system.

Secondly, in every culture, human development proceeds through the same stages (Erikson 1963). The first stage concerns forming secure attachment bonds with a child’s primary care-takers. A failure here leads to major dysfunction in adulthood (Bowlby 1982; Rohner 1975). The second stage concerns adjusting to adult authority, and internalizing the rules of the culture, a process that Freud identified with resolving the Oedipus complex. Learning language, for example, depends on being exposed to and accepting adult instruction. The third stage involves learning to interact in the peer group, a process facilitated by the development of role-taking ability (Mead 1934) or imaginative empathy (Sarbin and Allen 1968). Finally, at the end of adolescence, every young person must learn to become a productive member of his/her society within the limits imposed by his/her intelligence, skills and temperamental dispositions (Erikson 1963). Cultures will vary in terms of their timing and methods for easing children through these transitions, but every culture must deal with these same universals of human development.

Thirdly, every culture will devise rituals and design settings to encourage social interaction: harvest feasts; birth ceremonies; seasonal festivals, like Christmas; rites of transition, like confirmation ceremonies in religious groups. People need to socialize and every society will meet this need by establishing recognized gathering places: pubs in rural Ireland, community centres in Western China, trade shows in Chicago, the island church in Tristan da Cunha, and so forth.

Fourthly, every culture will be characterized by the status-striving of individuals and their families. There are substantial cultural differences in achievement motivation (McClelland 1967), with some people (the gypsies of Eastern Europe, the untouchables of India) making little or no effort to advance, probably due to discriminatory practices in their host societies, and other people striving mightily to gain and/or maintain status (the oligarchs of modern Russia). The principal
dynamic in every society is the individual search for power. What varies are the acceptable means for doing so. Even so, as Balzac noted, behind every great fortune is a great crime, usually perpetrated against one’s fellow citizens.

Fifthly, as noted earlier, every culture will have a religious system. Although academic psychologists have tended to avoid the subject (but note Argyle 1958), religion is the most powerful force in human affairs. Ironically, religion and the quest for power often go hand in hand; powerful people everywhere have used religion to justify their privileged positions and extend it to their families and descendants, e.g., ‘the divine right of kings’. Religious beliefs constitute part of the personality domain called ‘worldviews’ (Koltko-Rivera 2004) and are often used to legitimate ‘the ideologies of antagonism’ (Staub 1989) that fuel collective violence against outgroups (Bond 2007).

Finally, every culture will be characterized by periodic warfare. Sometimes cultures attack neighbouring cultures because the resources of their own land are exhausted or have been depleted by natural disaster (Ember and Ember 1992); an example would be the Viking excursions into Western and Central Europe in the ninth century A.D. But, many times cultural groups invade neighbouring territories in order to enrich themselves, and they justify their actions, often on religious grounds (the Christian Crusades of the Middle Ages). The methods of warfare will vary by culture, but the motivation to protect or enhance one’s cultural group will always be the same. Growing awareness across cultural groups about the costs of engaging in collective violence may modify this calculus in the twenty-first century, however (Bond 2007).

This is only a partial list of the cultural universals that are driven by human nature. Every culture will contain these six themes; although they will be expressed in differing ways, they will always be apparent by examining the rules for individual and group interaction devised by each cultural group to meet these universal human needs.

A research agenda for culture and personality

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future in time past.

T. S. Eliot, Four quartets

The foregoing discussion suggests two over-arching research agendas for the field of culture and personality, agendas that have generally been neglected in the past. The first is a basic agenda; the second, an applied agenda. With regard to the basic agenda, the model outlined in this chapter can be easily tested by seeing if high status people in different cultures have the same personality profiles (as defined by some universal personality structure, like the FFM) relative to persons of lower status. Our hypothesis is that, controlling for such variables as age and gender, higher status people across cultures will be characterized by high scores on all five
dimensions of the FFM; that is, relative to their peers, higher status people will be more confident, ascendant, charming, conscientious and visionary or imaginative. Conversely, lower status people will be characterized by low scores on all five dimensions. The more that status is assigned by achievement rather than ascription due to family background, caste, ethnicity, religion or the like, the greater these differences will be.

A second basic agenda for culture and personality research involves comparing the way social rules are used across cultural groups. People are rule-following animals (Peters, 1960), but what rules does each person perceive to be important in what social situations, and is the person able and willing to observe them? This analysis depends on having an available taxonomy for situations, and some work has already been done on this topic within and across cultures (Marwell and Hage 1970; McAuley, Bond and Kashima 2002). For example, recent cross-cultural research on the rules for emotional expression suggests that the distinction between public and private situations is quite important in shaping the expression of one’s feelings (Matsumoto, Nezlek and Koopmann 2007).

This applied agenda is driven by the fact of globalization. The 24 June 2006 issue of The Economist makes the following two points: first, multinational firms hire and deploy people all over the world; for example, HSBC has 284,000 employees worldwide, including 800 senior managers as expatriates with 1,600 backups; other multinationals face the same problem of workforce integration across cultures. How are their people going to work together across the cultural divide created by different methods of socialization (see e.g., Friedman, Chi and Liu 2006 on resolving interpersonal conflict)? Secondly, the methods used to select people for expatriate jobs are arbitrary; there is little or no science involved in these selection decisions. Measures of social competence are essential, especially measures of intercultural adaptability and resourcefulness. Work on this topic has begun (e.g., Thomas and Inkson 2004), but more needs to be done within a framework that links cultural processes to personality development and socially appropriate ways to meet fundamental human concerns. Perhaps the enraged Captain Cook need not have been murdered by ‘thieving’ Hawaiians some ten years after the first episode of ‘theft’ in Tahiti had he come to understood the Polynesian worldview regarding relationship obligations in the interim.

The individual does not exist apart from cultural influence, but is born into – and can only develop within – particular worlds that come culturally configured. Adams and Markus 2004, p. 346

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