

2002
Y750032 V00000

Chapter 13

Cultural and Ethnic Differences

Res: g#15

Layers of Group Influence
History of Research on Personality and Culture

Contributions from Cultural Anthropology ■
Lewin's Experiments on Political Culture ■
Emic versus Etic Approaches ■ Collectivist versus Individualistic ■ Errors of Scientific Inference:
The Case of Race

Socioeconomic Influences on Personality
Karl Marx and Alienation

Language as a Cultural Influence
Language and Identity ■ Language and Thought ■ Gender and Language
Culture and Testing

Culture-Free Tests ■ Culture-Fair Tests
A More General Model of Personality and Culture

Incorporating Culture into Personality Theory ■
Some Current Research Developments
Summary and Conclusion

It is sometimes said that American psychology is the study of white college sophomores and white laboratory rats. This indictment of the failures of some psychologists to reach out to study other cultures and subcultures does not apply directly to personality psychology. Many influential personality theorists were born in Europe and were heavily affected by European culture. Europeans, with their close contact of many different nations and cultures (and their many ethnic wars), have tended to be quite sensitive to cultural influences on personality. For example, Freud thought deeply about the bases of culture, religion, and literature; Jung studied Far Eastern philosophy and mysticism; and Lewin

The poet John Donne told us that "No man is an island." He meant that the course of everyone's life is related to that of everyone else. Each person is embedded in a complex social system—families, friends, neighbors, communities, and societies.

The most direct and immediate influence on personality development is of course the family, which is why personality theorists give so much attention

Layers of Group Influence

Since culture is one key determinant of what it means to be a person, the systematic study of these cultural influences should be, as Allport noted, an essential part of personality psychology. Modern personality psychology should draw on its rich traditions of cultural awareness. These influences are the subject of this chapter.

experimented on intergroup relations. So, personality psychology has a rich tradition of cultural awareness, even though such matters are sometimes ignored in modern personality research.

Personality psychologists have been less attentive, however, to cultural and ethnic influences on personality in groups that have been the object of social and economic discrimination, such as Asian Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans. One important exception was Gordon Allport, who wrote extensively about anti-Semitism and about American racial prejudice and discrimination toward African Americans (then referred to as Negroes). Allport believed that the behavior of Americans could not be understood without knowledge of black-white relations in America. But Allport's (1954) insightful work in this area (from the 1950s) has been followed up only infrequently by other personality psychologists, even those who pursue other of Allport's ideas.

There are many reasons for this gap in knowledge about ethnic and cultural aspects of personality. In part it is because laboratory studies do not easily lend themselves to cross-cultural approaches; it is more convenient simply to study college students. It is also the case that American universities do not yet have large numbers of professors who were raised in certain minority group cultures, and so there is a lack of intimate familiarity. A final key source for the narrowness of certain areas of American psychology is simply tradition: that is, most young researchers study what their professors (advisors) have studied, and it can take a long time for nonmainstream orientations such as a cross-cultural emphasis to enter forcefully into the arena of ideas.

to the effects of our parents. But we are also heavily influenced by our peers. Harry Stack Sullivan emphasized the importance of "chums," especially around the time of adolescence, and the teen years also are important to forming an ethnic identity (Phinney, 1993). Yet even as adults, the ways we think about ourselves depend on our friends and associates. For example, imagine that we have a cocktail party to which we invite ten lawyers, ten surgeons, and ten psychology professors. Very likely, it would be relatively easy to pick out who is who (perhaps even before they congregate together) on the basis of mannerisms or politics or even shoe styles or other articles of apparel and aspects of appearance! In other words, each social (in this case occupational) grouping influences its members.

Beyond these direct social influences are the pressures of societal institutions. For most people, who they are is influenced by religious upbringing, the educational system, and government and nationality. A person raised in private Catholic schools in Boston is likely to have quite different patterns of responses than a person raised in communist schools in Beijing. These influences go beyond genetic differences and differences in family relations. They are **cultural effects**—the shared behaviors and customs we learn from the institutions in our society.

There are also dramatic differences within each culture that result from the effects of ethnicity and class. Even within the same city, within the same high school, individuals may develop strikingly different reaction patterns as a function of the history of their ethnic group (e.g., cultural traditions) and class (e.g., economic and educational status). For example, in the same Boston classroom, a middle-class African American will often have different experiences than an immigrant Latin American or a wealthy German American. This is not to minimize the fact that all are human beings and all are Americans. Rather, it is important to understand that cultural as well as biological and social influences profoundly shape personality.

History of Research on Personality and Culture

To a fish, the whole world is aquatic because that is the only world a fish can know. A similar problem challenges our knowledge of culture: it is difficult to see the peculiarities of our culture without an outside perspective. Things that seem natural and normal to us can often only be identified as culture-specific through comparison with other cultures. To many Americans, it is unusual and repulsive to eat insects; but to many Africans, insects are tasty but it is unusual and repulsive to eat pigs (ham, bacon). Even complex behaviors are culture-specific. For example, Europeans traditionally recorded their history in books, whereas Africans relied heavily on oral traditions; each method seems odd (and inadequate) to the other culture.

An ancient Olmec figure from Mexico. Culture influences what we find appealing versus ugly, as well as what we regard as acceptable for public display. In American culture, many men buy and enjoy pornography, and that behavior is seen as normal in many segments of our society—but it would generally be seen as deviant to display it on the coffee table or work desk.



All people have a biological sex drive. Yet culture and religion can influence people to refrain from premarital sex, to avoid adulterous relations during marriage, and even to refrain from sexual activity completely, as in the cases of monks, priests, and nuns. Preferred sexual positions vary cross-culturally, as do masturbation objects, homosexual practices, display of nudity, and bestiality (sexual relations with animals) (Kluckhohn, 1954). The habits—including prescriptions and proscriptions—of other cultures may often appear quite strange and even abhorrent to a native and unsophisticated observer. During the colonial era, Europeans often described other peoples as heathen, uncivilized, and perverse (and prescribed the "missionary position" for sex). Evaluating others from one's own point of view is termed **ethnocentrism**. It was not until the twentieth century that cultures began to be seriously studied and compared rather than degraded and dismissed.

Contributions from Cultural Anthropology

Earlier this century, as the field of cultural anthropology began to develop, many insightful researchers such as Margaret Mead traveled to exotic locales and observed the native customs, families, and societies. In the 1920s, Mead visited expectations for educated young women in American society and took off to observe children and adolescents in Samoa (an island chain in the South Pacific). One particular focus of Mead's study was child-rearing. For example, Mead found that the difficulties of adolescence are not the same in all cultures. Although adolescence in the United States is a time of rebellion, in some cultures adolescents experience a smooth transition into adulthood. Of course all teenagers everywhere undergo the hormonal changes of puberty. But the effects of the biological (hormonal) changes can vary dramatically as a function of society's response. Modern-day American researchers are still concerned with the "problems" of adolescence—substance abuse, promiscuity, violence. Are these the result of innate processes of development? Not necessarily. It is important to remember Mead's pioneering point that the full story cannot be lo-

cared inside each individual; rather, the dramatic effects of society are equally relevant (Mead, 1929, 1939).

Cultural anthropologists Beatrice Whiting and John W. Whiting (1975) also extensively studied child-rearing in different societies. In some cultures, such as Mexican and Filipino societies, children must help care for their younger siblings and also must cooperate with many family chores. These children tend to grow up to be prosocial—in other words, they are helpful to others. In contrast, in the dominant American culture (and now in the Asian American subculture), most children grow up learning to achieve success, to fulfill their potential by participating in sports, artistic performances, academic endeavors; in sum, to become number one. Such children are often less altruistic and more competitive. These ideas, derived from cross-cultural research, are still quite important, as modern researchers endeavor to understand how children thrive or fail in public schools. For example, a student of Hispanic background might not thrive in a classroom in which cutthroat competition is the norm.

Other anthropological studies, in attempts to prove or disprove Freudian psychoanalytic notions, began to examine exposure of children to sexual behavior. For example, one analysis concluded that some societies do not hide sexual matters as Americans do. Children may have opportunities to see adults copulate (for example, where the whole family sleeps together in one room); or, they may receive explicit instruction at a young age (Ford & Beach, 1951). On the other hand, in the Victorian Europe of Freud's time (and in much of American society today), children may hear about sexual behavior as a dirty little secret, and they may be severely punished or humiliated for sexual curiosity. Because it is these negative encounters that may lead to repression, anthropological study suggested that key aspects of Freudian theory needed substantial modification or outright rejection. In other words, the Freudian idea of sexual repression probably cannot be directly applied to a society that encourages open sexual expression.

In 1945, the anthropologist Ralph Linton wrote an influential book called *The Cultural Background of Personality*. Linton pointed out that any boy from a hunting tribe who finds himself alone in the woods after dark will know how to build a shelter and survive the night, even if he has never been alone and done this before. Linton's point was that a person comes to situations armed with much knowledge derived from culture. We share many of our reactions with those who live in our culture (such as current American culture) or subculture (such as American teenagers of Hispanic background). For example, the daily behaviors of many American college students have much in common—awakening to a radio tuned to pop music, washing, brushing teeth, eating bagels or cereal, putting on jeans, greeting friends, visiting campus clubs or houses, and so on. It would be a mistake to try to show how the individual's personality explains all these behaviors. Rather, people are shaped by their cultures and sub-

cultures and so, in many ways, are like those in the same culture or subculture but different from those in other cultures.

Sometimes, when encountering people from a different cultural environment from our own, the culturally consistent aspects of their behavior are so salient to us that we are blind to the individual differences in personality among the members of the group. For example, anthropologist Bradd Shore (1996) found in his fieldwork in Samoa that it was only after becoming familiar with the culture of the community he studied that he was able to recognize personality differences among the Samoans he encountered. He was initially so overwhelmed by the striking *shared* (culturally determined) aspects of the Samoans' personalities that he was not initially able to detect that the individuals within that cultural differed from one another just as much as did individuals within his own culture (Shore, 1996).

Lewin's Experiments on Political Culture

In the late 1930s, as fascism spread through Europe and world war loomed, Kurt Lewin conducted a series of studies of different styles of leadership effectiveness. Lewin was a genius in capturing real-world psychological influences in a controlled laboratory setting. What he did was to create groups based either on democratic principles and leadership or on autocratic (fascist-like) ones (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939; Lewin, 1947). For example, in one study, leaders of a youth club led with either an autocratic or democratic style. The members of the democratic club liked the club more (had higher morale). But effects of leadership style on task performance were less clear. Similarly, Lewin argued that democratic group discussions were more effective than autocratic lectures in changing the shopping habits of American housewives and the work habits of American workers. Although subsequent studies have not always confirmed Lewin's findings, he had shown that cultural issues can and should be studied, even in rigorously controlled laboratory research.

Emic versus Etic Approaches

Cross-cultural personality psychologists often distinguish between emic and etic approaches. An **emic** approach is culture-specific; it focuses on a single culture, understood on its own terms—for example, the ways that Americans toilet train their children. An **etic** approach is cross-cultural; it searches for generalities across cultures—for example, all cultures have ways of saying hello and good-bye. By the way, the terms emic and etic derive from a distinction made in the field of linguistics between language-specific versus universal ways of describing speech sounds.

Why is this relevant to personality? Problems arise when concepts, measures, and methods developed in one culture are carelessly transferred to an-

other culture in an attempt to make cross-cultural generalizations about personality. For example, consider the F-scale, developed in Berkeley, California, to measure a person's proneness to being rigid and authoritarian. It works fairly well in detecting Americans prone to be prejudiced. But this scale cannot be validly and directly used in other cultures. In a study in South Africa, did not predict antiblack prejudiced behavior among white South Africans (Pettigrew, 1958). Does this mean that an analogous authoritarian personality cannot be isolated in other cultures? Not at all. Rather, various culture-specific variables must also be considered.

Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychoanalyst, searched mythology, religion, ancient rituals, and dreams for the roots of personality. As we mentioned in Chapter 4, Jung described a ~~collective unconscious~~, which is the depository of memories of human evolution. In other words, people evolved to share certain guiding thoughts and motivations. For example, take the case of the mother. All people throughout all generations had mothers. Jung (1959) suggests that just as it is clear that the infant has evolved to suck milk from the breast, it is also the case that all children have inborn tendencies to react in certain ways to their mothers. It is thus not surprising that all societies have myths and images that involve mothers. Jung termed these universal forms archetypes. ~~Archetypes~~ are the universal structures of the collective unconscious. All people are born expecting (psychologically) to have a mother. But the role of the mother varies from culture to culture in many respects. Jung thus pointed to ways that personality psychology must be universal while at the same time allow for important cultural variations.

Collectivist versus Individualistic

There have also been attempts to see how cultures differ from each other on dimensions relevant to personality. One key dimension involves the centrality of the autonomous individual versus the centrality of the collective. More individualistic themes tend to be found in Western cultures but more collectivist themes in Eastern cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1994). Americans admire the lone cowboy or the all-star athlete, whereas Asians may prefer a group leader or a winning team. Many Asian cultures have conceptions that insist on the fundamental relatedness of individuals; Americans, on the contrary, prize doing one's own thing. Visiting a seeming city like collectivist Calcutta, India, you might find great hospitality, but visiting New York City might leave you very conscious of the meaning of rugged individualism. It is not an accident that New York is a world center of capitalism. Thus, differences in behavior might be badly misjudged if the surrounding cultural milieu were not considered. Cultural effects, however, are not necessarily so simple. For example, one study compared decision-making strategies among 1,123 adolescents who

grew up in Finland experiencing Western, individualistic educational practices to 428 adolescents who grew up in Estonia during the period of Soviet collectivized culture. The teenagers were asked to solve problems about such matters as teasing and stealing. The researchers found that the (collectivist) Estonian adolescents were more aggressive and showed lower levels of social responsibility than their Finnish peers; they also tended more to withdraw from the problem. The researchers argue that personal responsibility is not likely to develop if a focus on collective identity interferes with the initial development of personal identity and responsibility. (Keltikangas-Jarvinen & Terav, 1996). Thus it is understandable that many Americans, who grow up in close-knit families that emphasize individual accomplishment but also justice and decency, mature into charitable, religious, and peace-minded adults, despite the strongly individualistic society.

Errors of Scientific Inference: The Case of Race

A chapter in this textbook on ethnic and cultural influences on personality is important as a means of helping us to be accurate and scientifically rigorous. We have seen throughout this book that an ignorance of social and cultural influences leads even the most brilliant scientists to errors of judgment. For example, Galton and many other ability and intelligence researchers convinced themselves that white males had the highest intelligence and thus it was only fitting that they occupied the leading positions in universities, businesses, and governments. Freud viewed a healthy woman as one who would be a good wife and mother, and who would be most satisfied sexually by sexual intercourse with her husband. Indeed, for many years, psychologists, like other leaders, rarely questioned the idea that a president, a senator, a surgeon, a corporate executive, a judge, or a professor should be a wealthy white male. It is important to understand that these were not the views of ignorant or malicious bigots. They were the views of many thoughtful, educated people. In an interesting book called *Joining the Club: A History of Jews and Yale*, the author documents the reactions of Yale College's leaders in the 1920s, as the numbers of Jewish immigrant students began increasing at top colleges (Oren, 1985). For example, the book describes the comment of a psychologist—and dean of freshman—who advised that, though the Jewish students were doing very well academically, they should be excluded from Yale because of personal flaws: "I feel they are in the nature of a foreign body in the class organism. They contribute very little to class life" (Oren, 1985, p. 43). In other words, they came from a different culture. Such prejudiced feelings led to exclusionary quotas that allowed only small numbers of nonmainstream students (and no women) to attend Yale College until the late 1960s. Most other elite colleges likewise limited or ex-

cluded many talented students (and most excluded all women) throughout most of the twentieth century. Subtle cultural prejudices and influences were distorting the judgments of even the most educated men in America.

Race as an Approach to Grouping People

Humans form groups based on many different sorts of criteria. Many groups are based on professed beliefs, such as political or religious beliefs. Political parties are examples. It is usually possible for a person to change between such groups (that is, convert) by adopting new beliefs.

Other groups are based primarily on cultural habits or customs, such as eating spaghetti or tacos, or dressing in kilts or beads or kaffiyehs (Arab head-dress), perhaps in addition to religious beliefs. These groupings are generally termed ethnic groups. Irish Catholics are an example.

Finally, some large groupings are based on physical characteristics tied to geographical origin, such as skin color or eye shape or height. Such groupings are often called races. But racial groupings are the source of much confusion and scientific misunderstanding because they are the most closely tied to biology. People can change religion or eating habits but cannot easily change skin color. Further, we can readily see if someone is "black," "white," or "yellow," but not if she is Catholic or Buddhist.

Because physical characteristics are so obvious, we often overgeneralize and overattribute personality characteristics based on them. An Arab man living in Saudi Arabia might have a large nose, dark hair, speak Arabic, wear a kaffiyeh, have conservative politics, follow traditional Arab customs, and, if a Muslim, not eat pork. But how about a grandson of such an Arab, who was born and grew up in Los Angeles and worked as an actor? He also might have a large nose and dark hair but otherwise might not be at all like his grandfather. It would not be logical to generalize on the basis of a few physical characteristics and assume that these two men would have similar behavior patterns. Yet this sort of confusion and overgeneralization is common, especially on the basis of skin color.

The Influence of Race in the United States

In America, black-white differences are the most significant such grouping, largely because of American history. The United States was founded on the principle that "All men are created equal," yet the U.S. Constitution allowed slavery (and counted slaves as three-fifths of a man for purposes of taxation and representation). Gunnar Myrdal (1944) called this problem the American Dilemma. How could we have a country in which all men are created equal but many were slaves (until the time of Lincoln)? How could we have a society in which all men are created equal but some cannot use restrooms or water fountains or sit at the front of the bus (until the civil rights legislation of

the 1960s? The theme is so deeply embedded in American history and culture that it remains a significant issue in the understanding of personality. In 1933, racial stereotyping was studied among male undergraduates at Princeton (Katz & Braly, 1933). The students were asked to select those traits that they believed most characterized ten so-called racial groups (such as Americans, Chinese, Irish, and so on). "Americans" like the students themselves were seen as industrious, intelligent, and progressive, but prejudiced judgments of other groups were pervasive. For example, "Negroes" were viewed as superstitious, lazy, happy-go-lucky, and musical. It is remarkable how illogical these distorted perceptions can be. For example, California imported Asian workers as manual laborers, forced them to live in segregated areas, and then often stereotyped them as ignorant and clannish. As we discussed in detail in Chapter 5 on biological aspects of personality, it is clear that genetic make-up can have an important influence on per-

Self-Understanding



THE BELGIAN

[illegible]

sonality, but it does so in complicated ways. Skin color is just one particular observable manifestation of genes, as are eye color, height, build, foot size, eye shape, nose shape, and on and on. As we have seen, such physical attributes are poor substitutes for a more sophisticated biological, social, cognitive, intentional, and cultural analysis of individuals. And a focus on skin color leads to needless controversial political conflict, which produces more heat than light (Klineberg, 1935; Yee, Fairchild, & Weizman, 1993; Spearman, 1925; Rush-ton, 1995). In the case of Nazi Germany, a focus on physical differences and so-called race differences led to mass murder of groups ranging from children in wheelchairs to Jews and Gypsies, all in the name of "scientific improvement" of society. In current American society, simplistic categorization into race ignores or distorts analysis of such more promising concepts such as temperament and development. (See Self-Understanding.)

Most basically, we should be suspicious and even alarmed when someone tries to make policy conclusions based on ethnic group. Even if it were the case that such differences were biologically based, so what? There is tremendous variation within each group. When considering an individual applicant to a school or for a job, or what? The evidence is this: person's ethnicity or gender is of little or no use in predicting success. It is a waste of time to consider it. (Two Nobel prizes)

Are achievement and failure due primarily to allegedly "race-based" innate (in)ability? Many psychologists have countered these arguments by pointing out inaccuracies in the evidence and inconsistencies in the reasoning that nullify any conclusions about an inherited component of achievement. For example, it is known that high heritability values do not eliminate, or even often limit, the strong effects of environmental change on outcome (Wahlsten, 1995). This means that even to the extent that intelligence is highly inherited, a relatively minor environmental change (such as strong, well-educated parents) can still significantly change the achievement level of an individual with a particular IQ. Errors in *The Bell Curve* authors' use of statistics have also been criticized (Fancher, 1995; Fraser, 1995; Bateson, 1995; Krishnam, 1995). Because of cultural influences, IQ tests have frequently been demonstrated to be inaccurate if misused. Although they are accurate about certain skills for many people of similar backgrounds, they have routinely been found to lead to the mistaken placement of intelligent students in special (remedial) education classes (Sigel, 1995; Barrow, 1995). Thus, for some, *The Bell Curve* is simply a racist polemic. As we have emphasized throughout this textbook, personally theories bring with them assumptions about human nature, assumptions that can have the most dramatic implications.

Should personality psychologists study "race"? On the one hand, it certainly makes sense to take into account that personality is influenced by the reactions of others, and that others often react to us based on perceived physical characteristics. (In the United States, this is often skin color.) Relatedly, it sometimes makes sense to study narrow biological similarities (such as genetic proneness to certain diseases) among subgroups of people, although many Americans have mixed ancestry. On the other hand, there is no known scientific advantage in trying to categorize all Americans into one of several races. Rather, it is more fruitful to study the effects of ethnic identification, history, family, subculture, religion, and social class as they interact with temperament and affect personality. These classifications are more readily definable and less susceptible to scientific and social distortion.

Socioeconomic Influences on Personality

There is a fascinating phenomenon in public health called the **SES gradient**. This term refers to the fact that the higher a person's socioeconomic status is, the lower is that person's risk of getting sick and of dying prematurely. (Socioeconomic status is a measure of one's level of education and income.) This relation has been found in various times and places (Adler et al., 1994). It holds at all ages and at all income levels. For example, old women who are rich live longer than old women who are merely affluent. There are many sorts of explanations for this gradient, but none of them is fully adequate. For example, less educated people might be unable to earn as much and might also engage in more unhealthy behaviors like smoking, or people who are sickly might drift down to lower socioeconomic status; or, poor people might have poorer nutrition and poorer medical care; or, wealthier people may be able to live in healthier environments. All of these possibilities would account for a relationship between socioeconomic status and health. Each of these mechanisms surely operates in some cases, but the overall phenomenon is still not well understood. What is interesting about this phenomenon for personality psychologists is that social class can have such sweeping effects on individuals. The corresponding effects on personality are not yet as well documented. But if social class can affect one's likelihood of getting sick and how long one is likely to live, it probably also has significant effects on one's usual patterns of psychological reactions (e.g., Pearson, Lankshear, & Francis, 1989). In other words, class effects on personality are indisputable; even among the middle class, there are differences among the well-off middle class, the average middle class, and the working class (blue collar or lower middle class). Such issues are obvious to investigators in countries like India, which has a clear history of social classes or

castes (e.g., Dubey, 1987). But in American academic settings, studies of social structure and personality appear primarily in the field of sociology (House, 1990). Personality psychologists have had little to say.

Karl Marx and Alienation

In a related field of study, some scholars emphasize the effects of the economic system on individual behavior. This type of approach took formal shape with the work of the German social philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883). Marx, a student of history and economic oppression, concluded that many societal institutions (including religion) served mainly to maintain the economic power of the elite (1872). His ideas led to modern socialism and communism. Socialists believe in a society structured so that people work directly for the benefit of the society rather than for themselves. Communists believe in the use of revolutions by the working class to eliminate private property because property is thought to encourage a selfish and dehumanized society.

How is Marxist thought relevant to personality? Marx contended that psychosocial attributes such as alienation could be traced directly to the economic structure of a capitalist society. He thus saw strong socioeconomic influences on what it means to be a person. The socialist and communist revolutions of the twentieth century did not confirm Marxist predictions; the abolition of private property and the enforcement of economic equality did not lead to a workers' paradise of psychological fulfillment. However, the basic orientation of Marx and his followers—that socioeconomic class is a key concept in understanding human behavior—has indeed been adopted in many modern analyses in sociology, social psychology, and political science. In personality psychology, Marx's greatest influence was on Erich Fromm and his associates, as they thought deeply about existential alienation in modern society (discussed in Chapter 9).



Karl Marx thought that individual attributes such as alienation could be traced directly to the economic structure of a capitalist society rather than to biology or the unique history of the individual.

Like Marx, Fromm struggled to determine what is the basic nature of a human being and what kind of culture best promotes human fulfillment. Interestingly, Fromm accepted and extended the idea that the socioeconomic basis of society will shape its culture, but he was not deterministic or pessimistic. Fromm believed that capitalist societies must create, by their nature, a culture of consumption. If people are not shaped to crave and constantly consume newer and fancier products, then the capitalist society cannot function. (For example, think of the businesses that would collapse if most people most valued study, neighborhood sports, and good conversation, and were satisfied with simple clothes, simple foods, and simple means of transportation). On the other hand, Fromm believed that societies could be created that promoted self-fulfillment through an emphasis on community, love, and mutuality.

Language as a Cultural Influence

Language is one of the most central and influential features of any culture. In Canada, the French speakers of Quebec have had many cultural clashes with the English speakers of the rest of the country in their push toward complete political independence. In the United States, people from Spanish-speaking cultures, such as Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, and Puerto Ricans, have been remarkably successful in maintaining key aspects of their subculture by maintaining their culture's language. Many other American subcultures also strive to treasure and preserve the original language of their culture. Speaking and listening—that is, language in its oral form—are a pervasive mode of interpersonal interaction in all human societies, and a central part of who we are. Every natural human language ever studied is remarkably complex but, at the same time, has many features in common (referred to as “linguistic universals”) with all other known languages, regardless of the level of technological development of the social group that uses it (Hockett, 1966). Thus, language makes us human, and particular characteristics of a particular language make us a particular type of human.

Language and Identity

Language is one of the defining features of a person's identity—you are what you speak. In the words of Martiniquan psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (1952/1967). This role of language is a double-edged sword in its effects on social identity, keeping out those who do not proficiently speak a group's defining language, and reinforcing the ties among those who do.

Idiots and Dialects

Because we each have different experiences, each individual speaks a unique version of his or her native language, called an *idiolect* (with the prefix *idio* referring to the "self"). The idiolect is a form of self-expression and thus a part of personality (Johnstone & Bean, 1997). This peculiarity has allowed historians and literary critics to attempt to determine whether all the Shakespearean plays were written by the same person and which books of the Bible come from one voice. Of course, the greater the similarities between any two people in terms of factors such as where they have lived, where they were educated, their social class, religion, and interests, the greater the similarity is likely to be between their idiolects. Variations between groups of people who share regional characteristics or cultural characteristics create distinct *dialects*. When two groups speak related but distinguishable dialects, dialect can be an important aspect of group identity. Within some African American communities, for example, group identity is supported by speaking Black English—and members who "talk white" are viewed as abandoning their roots.

Regional variation in the way people speak, which nonlinguists ordinarily consider a variation in accent, is more accurately viewed as an example of variation in dialects. The everyday concept of "accent" focuses on pronunciation, but the concept of dialect is much more comprehensive, encompassing variations in vocabulary and unique syntactic forms as well. For example, there are many subcultural differences in slang terms. Certain dialecticians are as skilled as the fictitious Professor Henry Higgins (from *My Fair Lady*/Pygmalion) who could listen to someone speak and pinpoint that person's neighborhood or tiny village, and thus know something important about personal identity.

The question of how much difference is enough difference to merit calling two regional variants separate dialects can be viewed as analogous to the question of how much difference there must be between two dialects to merit calling them separate languages. In practice, determining whether two variants are different dialects versus different languages is not just a linguistic issue. Some languages are so similar that people who know one language can, to a degree anyway, understand someone speaking the other. Examples of such pairs are Spanish and Portuguese, and Swedish and Danish. In other cases, some dialects of one language are so different as to allow no mutual intelligibility (such as variants of Chinese). Why are the pairs in the first case considered different languages and in the second case considered different dialects of the same language? Because nonlinguistic features are influencing the determination. National identity is a major determinant (Spaniards are not Portuguese, but all Chinese are Chinese), as are historical relationships (in the United States, we think of the language most of us speak as English, but many Britons would charge that we speak American).

In any case, language allows people to maintain a strong identification with their group; the dialect of a subcultural group like a street gang serves many of the same social functions as the technical jargon used within a narrow scientific specialty. In both cases, members of the group use words and expressions that are unique to the group or have special meanings within the group; language can therefore be used both to assert the speaker's membership in the group and to prevent outsiders from understanding communications among members.

Creating a Culture through Shared Language

An interesting example of the importance of shared language in creating a culture comes from the deaf community. There is a culture of the deaf to a much greater extent than there is a culture of the blind, at least partially because deafness seriously interferes with the ability of most deaf individuals to communicate with the larger society (that is, with those who cannot communicate in sign). People who are blind also face many extra difficulties in everyday life, but they are not especially impaired in using the common language of the community at large. This difference can account for the necessity and appropriateness of a strong deaf culture and community. Like any other group that shares a language within the group but not outside it, these people become a linguistic and social community. This community differs from the more common ethnic and regional social and linguistic communities because often the hearing families of the deaf community's members are not fully part of the same community.

Language as Politics: The "English Only" Movement

The "English Only" movement in the United States provides striking evidence of the psychological importance that most people attach to the idea of their mother tongue as part of who they are. Consider first those people who favor limiting all governmental communication to English (including government documents, election materials, and all information provided over the phone by government employees). One interpretation of their position is that they believe that immigrants and their children cannot become full participants and contributors to the society at large unless they are forced to become proficient in the language of the majority. An alternative interpretation of their position is that this country was established by speakers of English and that the English language thus embodies the essence of public life here. Out of respect for the heritage of this nation, they believe, English must remain the only "official" language. People on the other side of the dispute want the government to continue to offer services in the languages preferred by the recipients of the services. Many of them view the "English Only" movement as a racist, exclusivist, big-

oed attempt to undermine the cultures of minority-language groups—a movement intended to take away the rights of non-English-speaking people to live their lives and conduct their public business in their own native languages. What is clear from looking at both positions is how deeply people care about what language is used in the public sphere, and how important they think this issue is in defining the nature of public life and national identity.

Language and Thought

Why should it matter what language people speak, as long as all the parties to a conversation can understand and express themselves? As noted, the issue of identity is central, with language functioning as an expression of cultural solidarity. But language also functions as an influence on how people communicate and, to some extent, as an expression of the world view of their culture. What can be easily expressed, and what must be included in an utterance, varies among languages. For example, the Swedish language has a limited vocabulary for emotion words (relative to English). Hebrew, the oldest language revived for modern use, makes relatively little use of abstract terms, requiring its speakers to use concrete ones. In some Native American languages, the form (shape) of an object being acted on changes the form of the verb used. In all of these cases, the requirements of the language become part of how the speaker casts an intended communication into words, as well as how those words are interpreted by the listener. Anyone who has ever tried to translate a prose passage (or, worse yet, a poem) from one language to another soon becomes aware of how enormously difficult it is to preserve the meaning while shifting the language. Words in different languages rarely have identical meanings, and their degree of overlap (in both denotation and connotation) varies.

An even stronger role can be afforded to specific features of individual languages in shaping communication: Our language influences not only how we say things, but even how we think about and understand and perceive the world. That is, the specifics of your language not only determine how your thought is transformed into words, but also shape the very nature of the thoughts you can think. One well-known statement of this idea is often referred to as the Whorfian hypothesis or the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (after anthropologists Benjamin Lee Whorf, who promoted it in the 1950s, and Edward Sapir, who had promulgated it ten years earlier). Their idea, often termed *linguistic relativity*, claims that our interpretation of the world is to a large extent dependent on the linguistic system by which we classify it. Imagine, for example, that your language has many, many words for different types of clouds (terms like "nimbus" and "cumulus") but lacks a generic word for "cloud." The linguistic relativity hypothesis claims that you would then think about clouds very differently from the way a native speaker of English (who has the generic term "cloud") does.

The empirical data on this question are mixed, though. The methodological complexity of operationalizing the linguistic relativity hypothesis into an actual experiment makes it difficult to do research on this question. Still, there is scattered evidence about the relevance of language-influenced thought processes to personality. For example, one study found that people who tend to use active verbs also tend to have field-independent personalities (Dool, 1958); their perceptions are less passive. Other evidence can be found in literature: as Roger Brown pointed out (1970), one of the most powerful features in George Orwell's fictional totalitarian civilization in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is that Newspeak—the language invented by the dictatorship—makes it impossible to express or even to think rebellious thoughts (Orwell, 1949). There is little doubt that some aspects of who we are derive from the words and phrases we use to understand and communicate about things and ideas.

Language and Social Interaction

Imagine a world in which, before you can speak to another person, you first have to determine where that person stands relative to you in the social hierarchy. If you determine that you are lower in the "pecking order," you will speak differently than if you are higher, and differently again if you are equals. For such a system to work smoothly, of course, the social ranking has to be unambiguous—you have to be able to tell where each of you stands. What makes for high rank varies somewhat among societies but frequently includes factors of wealth, age, sex, occupation, family or clan, ethnicity, and education. In many traditional societies, social rank is obvious from visible signs (such as tattoos, hairstyles, or clothing). In a society like the present-day United States, the hierarchy can sometimes be more difficult to determine. Fortunately for us, though, American English doesn't require us to have as finely calibrated a gauge of status as many other languages do. You probably do make some adjustments, though, in both style and content when you talk to a peer versus a social superior (for example, your roommate as opposed to the president of your school).

The situation is quite different in many other language communities. One very clear example of this phenomenon is in the use of personal pronouns (Brown, 1970). In languages originally derived from Latin (e.g., French, Italian, Spanish) as well as in German, there is no generic "you." Instead, one form is used toward intimates and subordinates, and a different form for those to whom respect is due. In French, one says *tu* or *vous*; in Spanish, *tú* or *usted*; in German, *du* or *Sie*. While there is some variation among languages in exactly who receives the familiar versus the polite form (and under what circumstances), making the distinction correctly is always extremely important. English uses a generic "you," and without even the option of different forms. So,

The same behavior or attribute can be seen very differently from differing cultural perspectives. Business negotiations in Japan involve communication that is more indirect (in both verbal content and nonverbal style) than most Americans are accustomed to. Conversational statements that Americans view as appropriately bold, frank, and direct may be viewed by their Japanese hosts as pushy, tactless, and rude.



for many monolingual English speakers, incorporating this distinction when learning another language requires substantial effort. But look out if you address a superior with the wrong pronoun, such as addressing your Spanish father-in-law with the subordinate *tu*. Further, you had better not address your Japanese boss by his first name. Each language community enforces norms of politeness that are reflective of its view on proper conversational interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Gender and Language

Gender is a very important domain where many of these issues of status, power, and identity profoundly influence how we use language. Many languages include distinctions between word forms that are used by females versus males (and *about* females versus males). We have male and female pronouns for the third person singular (he and she), with their associated forms (his/hers and him/her). Other than that, I am just "I" whether I am male or female, you are just "you" of either sex, or status or even number, and so on. Many other languages have different pronouns for each sex for first, second, and third person (e.g., we, you, they) and also put distinctive endings on many words that denote gender. A cousin in French is either *un cousin* (male) or *une cousine* (female); your professor in Spanish is either *un profesor* (male) or *una profesora* (female). The psychological impact of being forced to make this distinction is probably substantial. If I say "I am an American," my statement is the same whether I am male or female, and perhaps what it means (to speaker and lis-

ter) refers to a truly gender-neutral concept. Compare that to a French person, who must say either *Je suis Français* or *Je suis Française*; these are two different terms, and they may denote rather different underlying concepts—different types of personalities.

In recent years, most of the formal guidelines about English usage (for example, the *New York Times* style book, the APA manual) have required gender-neutral reference unless only one group is included in the reference. That is, we shouldn't say, "Each Senator should vote according to his own conscience" or "Scientists and their wives" For centuries though, the formal guidelines promoted the use of he/him/his for both all-male and mixed groups. Thus, it was considered proper to say "Each student should print his name at the top and sign his name at the bottom" as long as the instruction was not given at a girls' school. This notion of the male pronoun as the default or generic has sometimes led to almost comical phrasing, such as the biology textbook statement, "Like all mammals, the human bears his young alive."

From a psychological perspective, the masculine pronoun is (not surprisingly) closely linked to males. Thus, the politically and ethically motivated move toward more inclusive language is supported by evidence that the male as a generic pronoun is not generic at all. Experiments have demonstrated (in a variety of ways) that when people hear "he" and "his," they are not likely to think of female examples (e.g., Gastil, 1990; McConnell & Fazio, 1996). But most of the people who have had significant influence in the codification of language rules (especially rules for written language) over the centuries have been male and have reflected the male experience. Going back to the linguistic relativity hypothesis, it is informative to note that even for writers and speakers committed to egalitarian language, it can be a challenge to phrase certain ideas

Given what is known about the psychology of language, it is clear that terms such as "freshman," which is often used to refer to a first-year college student of either sex, are not truly gender-neutral.



in ways that are gender-neutral but not awkward. The absence of a gender-neutral third person singular pronoun (for "he or she") in English makes some things hard to say gracefully. Feminist critic Andrea Dworkin (1981) put it this way: "Male supremacy is fused into the language, so that every sentence both heralds and affirms it" (p. 17). While this statement is more extreme than most would endorse, it does capture the resistance of the English language to comfortable gender-neutrality. The language we use reflects and influences how we think and behave.

Culture and Testing

Like any intellectual endeavor, psychological testing rests on a number of assumptions. To the extent that the assumptions are met, the test may yield valuable information. However, when the assumptions are not met and the tester does not recognize the problem, then the testing can prove not only unhelpful but quite harmful.

One assumption of much psychological testing is that certain (high) scores are somehow better than other (low) scores; that is, they indicate better psychological adjustment or better intellectual understanding or better abilities to deal with other people (see Chapter 2). This is often true. For example, people with mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder (manic-depressive illness) cannot cope well, are in personal pain, and score "poorly" on psychological tests of adjustment.

The problem arises when the assumptions underlying the test are culturally biased. Most obviously, the item content of a test may not adequately capture some cultural experiences. For example, someone growing up on a farm will have different experiences than someone growing up in an inner city, and so certain general knowledge questions or psychological reaction questions could be appropriate for one group but totally inappropriate for the other group. Similarly, "hearing the voices of angels" may be seen as a valuable religious experience in some cultures but as a sign of psychopathology (schizophrenia) in another culture. Test scores are also known to be affected by such things as motivation, previous test-taking experience, the qualities of the examiner (test administrator), and socioeconomic status.

Culture-Free Tests

One attempt to deal with such problems was the development of what were called culture-free tests. For example, in an intelligence test called the Raven Progressive Matrices test (Raven, 1938), people analyze geometric figures. The test-taker has to identify recurring patterns in drawings. Since all children develop perceptual abilities—learn to see the world—it is hoped that such tests

are not dependent on culture. However, more sophisticated analysis of this issue makes it clear that some cultural assumptions creep into every such test. (For example, children in some cultures have more experience in taking tests.) So, researchers turned to trying to develop tests that are culture-fair.

Culture-Fair Tests

Culture-fair tests attempt to control for or rule out effects that result from culture rather than from individual differences. So, for example, an intelligence test might see how quickly individuals respond to presentation of a stimulus such as a sound or a picture. The idea is that response time is more biological than influenced by environment. However, we have seen that all biological processes unfold in some environment. Some cultures value quick responses and others encourage slower, more deliberate responses. And, frankly, some cultures are more motivated regarding test-taking.

Another way to approach the issue is to include some subscales that are known to be culturally biased and other subscales that are thought to be more culture-fair (Cattell's Culture Fair Intelligence Test takes this approach). Then, if an individual scores differently on the two types of subscales, we have an indication that standard testing may be inappropriate for this individual. This is, of course, what teachers do naturally when they observe that a student of an unusual background performs well on most tasks but has trouble on others. Some tests now try explicitly to take culture into account. For example, the *System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment* (SOMPA) developed by Jane Mercer (1979) assumes that test results cannot be divorced from the culture. Therefore, the focus of comparisons is among individuals within a cultural group rather than between cultural groups. Such ideas have been mostly applied to ability and intelligence testing because of a concern about misclassification of disadvantaged minority students as having less intellectual potential. Matters of fairness are often obvious when issues of education and jobs are at stake. There has been much less attention to such matters in the assessment of personality constructs like conscientiousness and extroversion, but the same sorts of errors will be made if cultural matters are not deliberately considered.

When tests are constructed, the thorny issue arises as to which items are culturally biased and which indicate valid cultural differences. For example, let us say that Group A scores higher than Group B on an item thought to indicate tendency toward depression. Should this item be included in the scale? If Group A is truly more prone to depression, then it should be. If the groups are not truly different in this way, then the item is the result of a cultural bias and should be excluded. Note that the only way to resolve such an issue is to look at the validating criterion—that is, to look at other sources of information about the two groups. This is almost always true: tests have no value outside

the contexts in which they are created, but they may be quite useful when the context is well understood.

Consider now this more practical issue: Suppose a paper-and-pencil problem-solving test is used as an employment test to choose firefighters. Such a test is certainly not predictive of courage, or stamina, or of ability to carry a 150-pound person down a rescue ladder. However, this test might be relevant to the directing of a firefighting team's strategy or to making the correct split-second decision. In short, there are no simple rules that can be developed to ensure the complete validity of all tests.

One of the main problems with testing is not that the tests are culturally biased but rather that they are used inappropriately. For example, it does not matter if a Japanese psychologist develops a test that shows that Americans are "too extroverted." What matters is what is done with this conclusion. Is an attempt made by the Japanese psychologist to change Americans because of their "deficiency"? Is an attempt made to exclude Americans from visiting Japan or from buying Japanese products or from reading Japanese scientific journals?

Even the testing situation, with its accompanying social expectations, can be relevant. Psychologist Claude Steele (1997) has shown that people faced with a difficult evaluative challenge such as an SAT test may react poorly if they see themselves as identified with a group that is expected to do poorly. For example, a woman taking an advanced math test and an African American taking a GRE test before graduate school may become anxious and do poorly if they believe that "women don't do as well as men on advanced math" or "blacks don't do as well as whites in graduate school." This is termed **stereotype threat**—



the threat that others' judgments or their own actions will negatively stereotype them. If, however, they come to believe that the test or evaluation is not relevant to these characteristics (that the test is not gender-relevant or race-relevant), then their performance improves. In other words, this theory combines ego approaches, cognitive approaches, and interactionist ap-

An additional factor when considering cultural issues in testing goes beyond the content of the test to the context of the testing: the relationship between the test administrator and the test-taker can also play a role in test performance.

Spanish actor Antonio Banderas. Despite the international dominance of the United States in cinema, sometimes people from other cultures can break the cultural barriers and achieve success.



proaches, in which the individual's identity in a specific situation depends on how he or she construes that challenge and affects behavior in predictable ways.

What about more general implications?

Imperialism is the extension of one's own rule to other countries, and cultural imperialism is extending one's own cultural approaches over those of another culture or sub-

culture. Some have condemned American schools as imperialistic in teaching the history of minority groups; for example, the cultures of Native Americans have often been disparaged or ignored. More recently, there have been countercharges that so-called multiculturalism (which, for example, might insist on non-Western books in literature and philosophy courses) has gone too far in attacking traditional Western forms of scholarship.

As a social science, psychology has an interesting role in this debate. In physical sciences such as chemistry, there can be no sincere debate: the laws of molecular structure are the same in all cultures. Conversely, in the humanities, no scientific standards can be applied: literature and philosophy operate in a different sphere of discourse. But a social science such as personality psychology is subject to cultural distortions while at the same time it is held to the standard of scientific methods. A fully valid personality psychology must take into account cultural variations, but must simultaneously construct theories that are verifiable through the collection of data. This is a significant challenge for the future of personality psychology.

A More General Model of Personality and Culture

Imagine a case in which the police in San Francisco picked up a five-year-old boy wandering in the park. When the officers questioned him, he refused to respond. When they served him food, he refused utensils and ate with his fingers. When they went out for a walk, he stopped and urinated behind a tree. For a child raised in San Francisco, this would indicate a very unusual personality. But suppose you discovered that the child had just immigrated with his

refugee mother from a poverty-stricken, war-torn region of the world? Our judgments about his personality would change—and soften—dramatically. The point is that ideas of personality and predictable behavior are meaningless outside of a framework—a cultural context—in which they are to be understood (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993).

Some of the saddest examples of the results of failures to understand the role of culture in personality arose from relations between representatives of the U.S. government and Native Americans. In addition to the unsavory history of wars, betrayals, and misunderstandings, even twentieth-century relations have often been characterized by misinformation because Indian cultural assumptions are often so radically different. Interest was spurred in such matters when Erik Erikson (1950) undertook a study of the Sioux in South Dakota. He found that white teachers viewed the Indians as having a fundamental personality "flaw." In other words, the Indians didn't cooperate with or do well in traditional American classrooms.

Erikson traced the problem to a long history of contradictory government policies: Independent Indian reservations were established, but the inhabitants were made dependent on the government for their livelihood. Trust and cooperation were preached, but agreements were often broken. Indian culture was conceded to be distinct, yet government policies often tried to force the norms of the dominant culture onto the reservations. Not surprisingly, the children did not behave like white Americans. However, only in recent years have such matters of cultural clashes and personality begun to be explicitly studied. To fully understand personality stability and change as people age, it seems wise to consider their early predispositions, their developmental stage, and the culture in which this unfolds (Whitbourne et al., 1992).

Incorporating Culture into Personality Theory

One solution to the problems of cultural ignorance in approaches to personality is not to try to eliminate culture (or "control for" culture) but rather to bring culture into key consideration as a basic element of personality. Every one grows up in some culture. And culture is certainly part of what it means to be a person—there are no people without cultures. So it makes sense to incorporate culture into personality theories and personality research.

When Gordon Allport (1954) studied prejudice, he saw that it was a mistake to locate prejudice totally inside an individual's personality. Which social-cultural conditions foster prejudice? Allport proposed a mix of societal, economic, historical, and communication factors as complementary to internal personality dynamics. For example, prejudice was more likely during times of social change, when economic rivalries exist (such as for jobs), when govern-

ment authorities sanction scapegoating, when societal traditions support hostility, and when the society has unfavorable attitudes toward assimilation and pluralism. In this century, such conditions occurred when the First World War swept away many of the socioeconomic and geographic divisions of the late nineteenth century, and again when the Great Depression (beginning in 1929) produced worldwide economic hardship and chaos. Indeed, fascism grew in power and popularity in the 1930s, especially in countries that did not have a long history of democracy and freedom.

Culture and Humanness

It has been noted that culture provides the individual with basic information about what it means to be a human being, even though the specific content may vary (Shweder, 1990). Things that no child is born knowing but all cultures teach include answers to these fundamental questions: What does society value and expect of me? Who is like me, on my side, in my family? What should a man do versus what should a woman do? What is mature, rational behavior, and what is childish, impulsive behavior? It is interesting to recall that these are the same questions that Sigmund Freud asked a century ago. Personality psychology has come full circle in the understanding of the importance of culture.

Some of the most modern approaches to personality and culture focus on roles and cognitive sets. Culture, by influencing what roles we are likely to assume, likewise influences our behavior. For example, in modern American culture, success in competitive sports is highly valued for boys, and so the attributes of a successful competitive athlete are adopted by many. Furthermore, culture helps the growing child determine the ways or dimensions in which to think about the world. For example, if an adolescent girl is socialized to think primarily in terms of families and children and domestic chores, she may be more likely to leave school and start a family at a young age (Caspi, Bem, & Elder, 1989). Culture thus helps us set our goals. With a knowledge of cultural influences on personality, we are more hesitant to accept universal proclamations about, and more willing to look for socioenvironmental influences on, the nature of human beings (Shweder & Sullivan, 1990).

Modern approaches also understand that historical and socioeconomic influences on personality make it unwise to overgeneralize the concepts that emerge from the dominant or mainstream culture (Dubois, 1969; Gaines & Reed, 1995). As noted, a white, Italian American child growing up in a Catholic suburban school may have dramatically different experiences from a black child attending an inner-city school that emphasizes African culture. It may be difficult to compare the personalities of these students without taking culture directly into account. This does not mean that there cannot be universal theo-

ries of personality; it only means that the theories must not ignore these cultural, historical, and socioeconomic factors.

Culture is also important for understanding personality's effects on applied fields such as physical health. The Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) church is a group of individuals whose doctrines center around their beliefs in the seventh-day sabbath (Saturday, not Sunday) and the physical return (advent) of Jesus. Interestingly, they are one of the healthiest groups of Americans. Since the earliest days of the SDA church, their "health message" has been of paramount importance. This message directs church members to abstain from smoking, drinking, and the eating of flesh (although in recent years, more SDA's have begun to eat meat). Because Seventh-Day Adventists believe their bodies to be sacred and dedicated to God, church members also are encouraged to pursue good health in other ways, such as through regular exercise and a wholesome diet. Their supportive social structure may also be health promoting. Furthermore, Adventists believe in abstaining from premarital sex, although the reasons for this are primarily moral rather than health-related. In total, these strong cultural beliefs help shape the personalities of most of the church's members, and the striking result is that Adventists are among the healthiest and longest-living groups in the United States (Fraser, Beeson, & Phillips, 1991). An explanation of the personality and health behavior of an Adventist that disregards this religious and cultural milieu would be superficial, if not totally inadequate.

Culture and Theory

An understanding of cultures also affects how we develop theories. When Kurt Lewin was a student and then a researcher and teacher in Berlin in the 1920s, he naturally adopted ideas from the Gestalt psychologists with whom he worked. Rather than focusing on specific stimuli and responses as the behaviorists did, Lewin tried to understand complex applied situations such as behavior in restaurants, leadership in groups, and people's motivations and aspirations (Ash, 1992). He knew that personality was not located solely inside a person but also depended on the social and cultural environment. When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, Lewin fled to the United States. As a psychologist who moved from the autocratic and obedient culture of Germany to the relatively democratic and free culture of America, Lewin began thinking about cultural differences in child-rearing, education, leadership, and societal expectations. Rather than being oblivious to the environment in which he was immersed, Lewin was forced to focus even more on the environment itself and was able to exert a tremendous influence on American social and personality psychology. In other words, this type of analysis suggests that the kinds of personality theories that are developed by a researcher

will depend in part on the researcher's culture. Culture influences theory (Bond & Smith, 1996). Does this mean that the theories cannot be scientifically valid? Not necessarily. Human behavior is so complex that it is natural that different but overlapping theories will emerge to try to explain it. As we have advocated throughout this book, each theory and explanation of what it means to be a person should be rigorously evaluated on logical and empirical grounds; some theories are better than others. However, we also believe that it is helpful to understand each theory in its context and to be open-minded about differing points of view.

Some Current Research Developments

The Individual and the Group

One interesting focus of current research on cultural aspects of personality involves the nature of self. Of particular interest are differences between Western and Eastern (Asian) cultural views of the self. In America, the underlying assumptions about people grow out of the idea of the unlimited potential of the divinely inspired free man or woman. In America, it is assumed that each person should strive to be independent and self-reliant. We have seen that this view, in its extreme, leads American psychologists to underestimate or overlook the importance of biological factors to personality. Ironically, because the focus is on the individual, not on the social context, this view also leads to an underemphasis on cultural factors. In contrast, in a society such as Japan, the success of the society (rather than the success of the individual) is seen as of utmost importance. Selflessness and even self-sacrifice of one's life is admired in Japanese culture but often scorned in American society. For Americans, heroes are often those people who rebel against and overcome social expectations, such as a suffragist such as Susan B. Anthony, a civil rights leader such as Martin Luther King, Jr., or an entrepreneur such as Apple computer co-inventor Steven Jobs. Consider then people's emotional reactions across cultures (Kitayama, Markus, & Matsumoto, 1995). For example, when does a person feel embarrassed or shame? In Japanese society, making a faux pas (false step) at work, say by violating or overlooking an expected ritual of greeting or honor, could be a source of extreme embarrassment. In contrast, in certain aspects of American business (or American football), triumphing brazenly over an opponent might be cause for celebration of individual accomplishment. Note that attributing these different reactions to the individual's personality would be a mistake if culture is not also taken into account. Many African subcultures are likewise focused on the success of the group rather than the victory of the individual. A Muslim in a Holy War who charges into battle on the front lines would delight in being assured of a place

in heaven, whereas to Americans, the front line troops are akin to "cannon fodder." Asian Americans and African Americans who are in touch with their cultural roots may face a degree of personal conflict as they attempt to reconcile the pressures to be both social and individual.

How the Situation Affects Cultural Differences

As we have seen in Chapter 10 on the interactions of persons and situations, there are times when ethnic identity must be elicited from the social situation. In an experimental demonstration of this phenomenon, Anglo (European American) students and Hispanic undergraduates were exposed to either cooperative or competitive feedback while working together in small (six-person) same-sex groups. When the experimental situation was a competitive one, the response patterns of the two ethnic groups were quite similar. However, the ethnic composition of the group had a dramatic impact on the behavior of Hispanics when the situation was cooperative. Hispanics were intensely competitive when they were in a minority in the small group; but they cooperated when they were in the majority. (In contrast, the behavior of Anglos exposed to the cooperative feedback was not affected by changes in the ethnic balance of the group.) In other words, the Hispanic students functioned like the Anglos, except when the cooperative norms of their culture were salient; in that case, the ethnically influenced aspect of their personality emerged (Garza & Santos, 1991).

How Should Discrimination Be Faced?

The personality development of African Americans faces special challenges because black skin has so long been seen as a sign of inferiority by the dominant culture. They are Americans but yet not mainstream Americans. African American parents must socialize their children to understand that they will likely face discrimination (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Bowman & Howard, 1985; DuBois, 1969). Should parents explicitly talk about racial issues? Should they emphasize the unique aspects of African American culture or should they minimize differences in the hope that their children will then have an easier time dealing with—or merging into—the mainstream society? Of course, such matters face parents of many ethnic groups, though perhaps to a lesser degree. Is it good for children to know that sometimes they will fail through no fault of their own but rather due to prejudice and discrimination? Is it better to minimize such potential obstacles but at the risk that the child will not have a firm ethnic identity? Such complex matters have no simple answers but are starting to attract significant research interest as the United States and many other countries increasingly try to face up to the conflicts that exist in their multi-ethnic societies. A broad and deep understanding of personality, which includes cultural aspects of personality, will be necessary for significant progress to occur on these issues. (See the Famous Personalities box on page 446.)

Famous Personalities



The Model Minority?

Should Asian Americans appreciate or deplore their status as a "model minority" group? Consider this analysis, written by an Asian American college student—undergraduate honors student Patricia Ja Lee:

Mental health institutions, counseling centers, and community psychological services agencies rarely treat Asian Americans. Does this mean that Asian Americans are all mentally and emotionally secure and untroubled? Do Asian Americans as a group have personally characteristics that protect them from psychological problems?

A popularly held stereotype of Asian Americans is encompassed in the term "the model minority." The model minority is believed to have adjusted and assimilated into the majority group's mainstream way of life, and they are thought of as well educated and financially prosperous. Being recognized for such traits as passivity, hard work, not complaining, obedience, and emotional rigidity, Asian Americans have been regarded by the dominant culture as possessing the traits that other minorities should have in order to succeed in American society.

Are Asian Americans really so successful financially and psychologically? Research data show that Asian Americans (like other Americans) have a multitude of psychological disturbances that could be relieved through treatment, some of which may result from the false attributions of their "model minority" status and the resulting differential treatment of Asian Americans.

Although Asian Americans may be highly educated, this does not guarantee financial

success. Once they enter professional fields, Asian Americans often find themselves held back from upward mobility within the hierarchy of their companies. Because of personality traits attributed to the model minority, such as passivity, Asian Americans are often denied positions involving interpersonal relations. Often kept from reaching managerial positions, Asian Americans are frustrated by a glass ceiling. Traditionally held attitudes contribute to the tolerance of discrimination. As a whole, Asian Americans generally believe that hard work under harsh or unfair conditions will eventually pay off. Biting their tongues and not complaining, they believe that perseverance is a virtue for which they will eventually be compensated. This attitude is reflected in their lack of activism and could also be one reason they do not seek psychological treatment for the effects of their frustrations. Asian American culture also stigmatizes the use of psychological services—such services are viewed as being for people who are crazy and have no strength to persevere. Therefore, seeking psychological help would be an admission of weak will, and would result in embarrassment to the person and to his or her family.

Therefore, although Asian Americans may be suffering and may be in just as much need of psychological treatment as other members of society, they are less likely to seek help both for social reasons and for cultural reasons. So Asian Americans' underutilization of psychological services may not be a result of their being psychologically healthier, but rather a result of their greater reluctance to seek psychological services.

Summary and Conclusion

Understanding cultural influences is important to understanding all eight of the basic aspects of personality that we have been discussing in this book. Cultural differences involve the shared behaviors and customs we learn from the institutions in our society, and they are an essential component of who we are. Many influential personality theorists were born in Europe and were heavily affected by European culture, and so personality psychology has a rich tradition of cultural awareness even though such matters are sometimes ignored in modern personality research. Since culture is one key determinant of what it means to be a person, the systematic study of these cultural influences should be, as Gordon Allport noted, an essential part of personality psychology. A person raised in private Catholic schools in Boston is likely to have patterns of responses quite different from those of a person raised in communist schools in Beijing.

It would be a mistake to try to show how the individual's personality explains all these behavioral variations. Rather, people are shaped by their cultures. More individualistic themes tend to be found in Western cultures, more collectivist themes in Eastern cultures (Triandis, 1994). In America, black-white differences are the most significant cultural grouping, because of minority can history. The United States embodied principles of both equality and racial stratification, a problem Gunnar Myrdal called the American Dilemma. It should now be clear that rather than studying the vague notion of "race," it is more fruitful to study the effects of ethnic identification, history, family, sub-culture, religion, and social class as they interact with temperament and affect personality. These classifications are more readily definable and less susceptible to scientific and social distortion.

The effects of social class—social and economic status—on personality can be dramatic. Such issues are obvious to investigators in countries like India, which have a clear history of social classes or castes, but in America, personality psychologists typically have had little to say about social structure and personality. Karl Marx argued that psychosocial attributes such as alienation could be traced directly to the economic structure of a capitalist society, and his writings greatly influenced Erich Fromm and his associates as they thought deeply about existential alienation in modern society.

Language is one of the defining features of a person's identity. Because we each have different experiences, each individual speaks a unique version of his or her native language, called an idiolect. The "English Only" movement in the United States provides striking evidence of the psychological importance that most people attach to the idea of their mother tongue as part of who they are. Not only does our language influence how we say things, it also impacts how we think about and understand and perceive the world. Gender is

one important domain where many issues of status, power, and identity profoundly influence how we use language.

A major problem with psychological testing is not simply that the tests are culturally biased but rather that the test results are used inappropriately. A fully valid personality psychology must take into account cultural variations and must simultaneously construct theories that are verifiable through the scientific collection of data. One solution to the problems of cultural ignorance in approaches to personality is not to try to eliminate culture (or "control for" culture) but rather to bring culture into key consideration as a basic element of personality.

Key Theorists

Margaret Mead
Beatrice and John Whiting
Ralph Linton
Harry Triandis
Karl Marx
Jane Mercer
Claude Steele

Key Concepts

culture
ethnocentrism
emic approach versus etic approach
archetypes
individualistic versus collectivist cultures
American Dilemma
SES gradient
stereotype threat
Assessment
System of Multicultural Pluralistic
"English Only" movement
pronouns and status
linguistic relativity
idiot and dialect

Suggested Readings

Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.
Lonner, W. J., & Berry, J. W. (Eds.). (1986). *Field methods in cross-cultural research*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
Matsumoto, D. R. (1996). *Culture and psychology*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
Meyer, M. (1967). *Law and temperament in three primitive societies*. New York: Morrow. (Originally published in 1935)
Sugrén, J., & Snweder, R. A., & Herdt, G. (Eds.). (1990). *Cultural psychology: Essays on comparative human development*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism & collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.