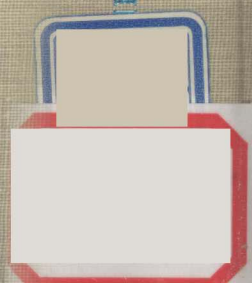White
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Exploring Pacific Ethnopsychologies

Edited by

Geoffrey M. White and John Kirkpatrick

Person, Self, and Experience

Preface

This book has evolved through a working session, in 1981, and a formal symposium, in 1982, at the annual meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania. We are grateful to the Association and our fellow members for many stimulating conversations and an excellent context for our work. In the two sessions and through the circulation and mutual criticism of the papers we were able to formulate our concerns and clarify many ideas. We benefited from the contributions and criticism of participants who are not represented herein. Allan Hanson, Michael D. Lieber, Susan Montague, P. B. Roscoe, Theodore Schwartz, Martin G. Silverman, and William Thurston presented papers. Robert I. Levy and Ward Goodenough, in 1981 and 1982, respectively, contributed as interested critics. We benefited greatly from the suggestions and overview provided by Michelle Z. Rosaldo in 1981. We deeply regret her death, and wish to dedicate this volume to her.

The organizational divisions of this work are intended only as suggestive groupings, not as definitive themes. Each of the chapters casts a wide net in its approach to ethnopsychology, intersecting in certain respects with each of the others.

We would like to thank Jenny Ichinotsubo and others at the East-West Center for their patient assistance with typing and clerical support.

Finally, we want to note that we have shared equally the tasks of editing this volume and writing its introduction. The ordering of our names was decided by a coin toss.

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Part I

Introduction

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Exploring Ethnopsychologies

John Kirkpatrick and Geoffrey M. White

Anthropologists working with Pacific peoples have long been interested in
psychological issues. Rivers studied perception in the Torres Strait in 1898–
99. Malinowski (1927) attempted to test and rethink Oedipal theory from
his Trobriand data. Gregory Bateson developed his notions of ethos ("a
culturally standardized system of organization of the instincts and emo-
tions") and eidos ("a standardization of the cognitive aspects of the person-
ality") in explicitly psychological terms in his study of the Iatmul *naven*
ceremony (1956:118, 220). Culture and personality studies were grounded
largely on research by Mead in Samoa (1928*a*, 1928*b*) and New Guinea
(1930, 1935), and on Linton's analysis of Marquesan culture (in Kardiner
1939). Mead also addressed Piagetian claims in her work on Manus (1932).
Gladwin and Sarason (1953) provided, in a study of Trukese personality
using projective tests, an example of interdisciplinary collaboration. The
bulk of recent work in the Pacific has focused on social organization and
cultural codes, although general accounts of culture and personality cover-
ing entire regions have emerged (Levy 1969; Langness and Gladwin 1972;
Schwartz 1973) and authors such as Levy (1973), Howard (1974), and
Hutchins (1980) deal skillfully with questions of affect, motivation, and
cognition.

Why, then, a book *exploring* ethnopsychologies? The answer has to do
in part with new analytical approaches, in part with the assumptions and
limitations of previous work. Culture and personality studies drew on
existing theories of personality, usually psychoanalytic in persuasion (but
see Whiting 1941 for a social learning approach), to formulate research
topics and guide ethnographic observation. The goal in many studies was
to use personality variables to interpret behavior and explain sociocultural
institutions (e.g., Kardiner 1939; DuBois 1960; Spiro 1961). But the various

theories of personality used in this way generally rely upon a model of the person in which individual motivational constructs (whether Freudian defenses, Malinowskian needs, or Murray's personality types) are the primary locus of organization in behavior. As a result, cultural data are analyzed as expressions of individual needs, motives, or behavioral dispositions— Benedict's (1934) "personality writ large." As Nisbett and Ross (1980) note, the heavy reliance on motivational explanations in psychoanalytic theory may be a reflection of the common tendency to overextend the attribution of intentions and motives in explaining the behavior of others. Much less attention has been paid by Westerners, scholars and laymen alike, to processes of interpretation whereby personal experience and behavior are seen to be relevant to the culturally constructed concerns of persons and communities. Nor do we know much about the questions people in other cultures ask about psychological matters, or the theories they draw on in formulating their answers.

The ethnopsychological approaches represented in this volume differ from the culture and personality perspective in several respects. First of all, we find that we cannot *assume* we know the cultural significance of data on, for example, religious beliefs or styles of interpersonal communication. Hallowell's (1955) notion of a "behavioral environment," in which objects, actions, and events gain behavioral significance through a process of cultural interpretation, highlights the problem of determining just what behavior is all about—a research question that is logically prior to attempts at explanation. The authors of this volume seek to understand and describe the cultural significance of social and psychological events as they are actively interpreted in social context. The locus of observation, then, shifts from individual behavior to the conceptual and interactive processes used to construct social meaning in everyday life.

We agree with the psychodynamic view that not all that is cultural is recognized or expressed. Yet, until we are able to understand just how, and in what contexts, people do formulate conscious interpretations of social experience, we are left with no way to demarcate either the extent or the behavioral significance of the culturally ineffable. In response to the influential work of Miller, Galanter, and Pribram (1960), psychologists (and anthropologists concerned with cognition, e.g., Wallace 1970) expanded their approaches to human cognition and decision making to show linkages between folk conceptual models and personal action. The chapters that follow are also concerned with these linkages, but draw their data from particular social and cultural contexts that show the importance of ethnopsychological formulations as a basis for active participation in social life.

We hold that *comparative work aimed at the elucidation of ethnopsychological principles in different cultural contexts will help to provide*

a vantage point on some of the most basic, and usually invisible, assumptions guiding theory building in social science. (See Lutz, chap. 2, and Howard, chap. 11, for further discussion.) We expect to find both convergence and divergence between cultural practices and scientific theories. Convergences are evident in, for example, Wallace's (1958) account of dream interpretation among the Iroquois, reminiscent of psychoanalysis, and White's (chap. 9) description of a psychosomatic theory of illness on Santa Isabel.

However, the following chapters show much variability in the central tenets and uses of folk models of personality, thinking, and feeling. Such variability suggests that uniform psychological constructs can be applied cross-culturally only at the risk of minimizing or misconstruing the insights and concerns of participants. This risk often went unobserved in earlier studies, as Caughey (1980:175) notes:

> Much of the early ethnographic work which paid attention to personality concepts in other cultures was based on a sympathetic feeling for local personality appraisal. Thus Mead (1935:171) describes the Mundugumor "ideal personality" with a list of English expressions whose relationship to Mundugumor personality concepts remains unclear. In later work as well, there is little tendency to see the meaning of personality terms as a problem. Where the subjects' terms are reported at all they are often described simply by equating the local label with an English gloss whose meaning is taken to be obvious in itself and approximately equivalent to that of the subjects' term. This tendency is linked to the assumption, often quite explicit, that a single universal mode of personality appraisal underlies different ethnopsychologies.

Not only personality, but emotion, cognition, and other aspects of psychological functioning have been treated similarly. For example, the opposition of shame and guilt has been recurrently invoked by anthropologists to characterize the psychological functioning or ethnopsychology of the peoples studied. The notion of "shame cultures" reached its clearest expression in Benedict's work on Japan (1946). Since that time, anthropologists and others have continued to be interested in Japanese understandings of shame and their relation to personality and affect (DeVos 1973; Doi 1973; Lebra 1976). Ideas about guilt and shame have passed from anthropologists to a wider audience (e.g., Dodds 1951; Redfield 1975): (1) guilt and shame are important bases for social control of persons; (2) these controls are differentially distributed in different societies; and (3) it is useful to distinguish shame cultures and guilt cultures. However, these ideas drastically simplify the interrelations of experience, cultural coding, and social control (Singer 1953). For us, the crucial question is whether they can serve to bring together information about action, emotional expression,

and experience precisely. How well can one characterize an ethnopsychol-
ogy by saying that shame—or guilt, or any other English term for an
emotion used to capture foreign ideas and experiences—is dominant in a
culture?

A first response is to note the indeterminacy of the formulation: in a
shame culture, do people express shame often, feel it often, or feel it only
at crucial moments of deviation from cultural ideals? Only in the first case
(in which people frequently express shame) is an ethnopsychological con-
cept foregrounded. The latter cases of "shame culture" deal with a relation
between persons and their social environment, usually without specifying
the contexts or discourses in which that relation is inculcated and elaborated.
Examples of more precise analyses of cultural formulations of "shame" in
interactive settings are offered in particular studies such as Bourdieu's (1966)
account of sequences of challenge and riposte in Kabylia, and Schieffelin's
work (1979, 1982) on socialization through teasing and shaming among the
Kaluli. Bourdieu shows honor and shame to be at issue in a wide range of
interactions, and to be negotiated in orderly ways. He deals in some detail
with the ways questions of honor arise, and hence he situates general
statements, self-evaluations, and accounts of actors in relation to a regular
social practice. We find the value of this study to be grounded in its
depiction of the contexts and procedures for questioning and asserting
honor in Kabylia. Bourdieu explicates a view of Kabyle men as "those who
confront others" (1966:232), but this is achieved ethnographically, not by
reliance on general notions of honor and shame. Similarly, Schieffelin
specifies the interactive routines in Kaluli social life in which shame func-
tions, and the action strategies available for participants in shaming interac-
tions. The quality of the description and analysis make "shame" a useful
category in understanding the Kaluli, precisely because it is ethnographically
situated.

"Shame cultures" can be found nearly everywhere. As Kroeber
(1948:612) noted, this testifies above all to the exceptional status of the
opposed case, "conscious sinfulness," among Anglo-Saxon Protestants.
The prominence of shame also reflects the practice, probably universal in
human cultures, of characterizing affective experience in relation to interac-
tional contexts. Even if contextual bases of affect are universally recognized,
we doubt if these are the sole means for construing persons' states in any
culture. (No culture is only a "shame culture.") We doubt, then, whether
any people depends exclusively on a single, uniform mode of ethno-
psychological interpretation. Different sorts of behavior are noted in differ-
ent circumstances, depending, for instance, on situation, the intentions of
the observer, or biographical facts known about the observed. Furthermore,
different concepts and models (such as personality, intention, or emotional

state) are used, separately or together, to formulate inferences from be-
havior. (Sapir [1949] offers classic examples.) We have no reason to expect
that the situations in which members of one culture make personality
appraisals, the evidence they call on to make them, and the categories they
draw on to map the variety of recognized personalities correlate closely
with those of members of another culture. (For instances of noncorrelation,
see Hall 1976 and Bateson 1972:99ff.)

    In this thicket of problems, some researchers may choose to cut their
way out, avoiding questions of interpersonal assessment and ethno-
psychological variance altogether. Culturally variable processes can be
excluded or reduced to quantified aspects of a controlled experiment. The
drawback of these research strategies is a failure to learn much about ordi-
nary social or psychological events as experienced by enculturated human
beings, and about the insights into psychological functioning found in other
traditions.

    We choose a different route, that of exploring, with ethnographic
description and analysis, the procedures and categories used by actors to
assess persons and situations. We find, in our experience of diverse cultures
and in accounts such as those of Hallowell (1955, 1976), Geertz (1973, 1976),
Keeler (1983), LeVine (1980), Levy (1973), Read (1955), Rosaldo (1980),
M. Strathern (1968), A. Strathern (1975, 1981), and Straus (1977), ample
evidence that interpersonal assessments vary from culture to culture. We
do not expect to be able to map all the cognitive procedures involved in
such assessments at this point, but we are certain that adequate models of
those procedures cannot be developed without extensive study both of
cultural codings of personhood, action, and situations, and of social prac-
tices of talking about actors and action. Moreover, we expect that studies
of the organization of interpretive routines in the form of classification,
metaphor, inference, and other orderings are necessary if we are eventually
to understand the economy with which the cognitive work of interpersonal
assessment is accomplished.

    Several essays on the relationship of culture to self and affect have
recently appeared (Heelas and Lock 1981; Lee 1982; Shweder and LeVine
1984). Theoretical statements about the interrelations of cultural categories
and experience abound, although the rich accounts of social life needed to
inform and test them are harder to find. We see this volume as helping to
rectify that imbalance, and as suggesting analytic strategies for dealing with
both the orderliness and the complexity of people's situated uses of
psychological concepts. The objectives of this book are to document prac-
tices of understanding persons in a sample of Pacific cultures, to develop
analytical strategies for making explicit important relations among concepts
used in those practices, and to assess the role those practices and concepts

play in social life. In the process we hope to show that the study of ethnopsychologies can be a fruitful collaborative enterprise with results pertinent to larger questions posed by anthropologists and psychologists.

The ethnographic chapters of this book take particular cultures and societies as frames of reference, dealing with such matters as the definition and interrelation of anger, grief, and shame among the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea (chap. 5). These are all written on the basis of extended fieldwork conducted in the local language. The authors situate ideas of personhood, shame, and the like in relation to social organizations and universes of discourse in which they are pertinent to actors. The authors differ in their topical emphases, their strategies for identifying major components of ethnopsychology, and their perspective on links between those components and the rest of social life. One chapter deals with early childhood development; another emphasizes practices of "disentangling" emotional conflict; yet another brings out abstract ordering principles of world view—but all deal with the definition of personhood and the cultural recognition of interpersonal variation. The authors of all the chapters agree on the need to view ethnopsychology in detailed social and cultural contexts, and on the fruitfulness, in relation to wider analytic concerns, of studying ethnopsychology in the Pacific.

Most of the ethnographic chapters were first presented at meetings of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania. At those meetings, we tried to identify common ground for work on ethnopsychology, and to distinguish fruitful strategies for research. As a result, the ethnographic chapters are not merely reports. They include explicit accounts of perspectives on ethnopsychology, as well as findings and analysis. In writing this introduction, we draw in part on the insights and arguments that emerged in the meetings.

In the rest of this chapter, we sketch a background for the studies that follow. We define ethnopsychology as a topic for both ethnographic and comparative work, and discuss some of the major ideas used by anthropologists to formulate accounts of ethnopsychologies. Problems of method are briefly reviewed, and the ways that the authors of the following chapters have confronted and dealt with such problems are identified. Some of the findings of those chapters are noted, so as to suggest the import of ethnopsychologies for our understanding of culture and social life.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

We take ethnopsychologies to be cultural understandings of personal identity, action, and experience. Following Hallowell's (1955) lead, we recog-

nize self-awareness as a human universal. Along with it, awareness of similarities among persons and of shared involvements and propensities crosscutting the distinctiveness of selves also seems universal. These apperceptions are basic parameters of the psychological aspect of cultures, not of ethnopsychology per se. This is because, as Hallowell's argument implies, the definition of self can occur in and through any domain or element of a culture. We wish to focus attention on a more restricted topic: cultural formulations of persons, personal action and experience, and the interactive practices through which such formulations are conveyed in social life. (We view persons and selves as shaped by processes of cultural definition and as interrelated but distinct. We do not attempt to define "self" here; for approaches to that problem, see chaps. 2, 4, and 8.) We note particularly that the interpretive work of folk psychology depends, as the notion of "psychology" implies, upon an organized body of knowledge for its coherence and communicability. Hence, we repeatedly ask, Upon what presuppositions, and through what course of reasoning, do cultural formulations of experience rely for their intelligibility and effectiveness?

Persons are points of intersection between the subjective and the social. Here we follow Durkheim (1898), but only to an extent. We take persons to be, first, cultural elements, topics of knowledge and discourse. Persons are constructs deemed capable of experience, will, action, identity, and the like. Actual beings may be treated as persons in a culture, but we do not take them to be persons by definition. Indeed, not all humans need be persons in a culture, nor are all persons likely to be human. (See Hallowell 1960 and Straus 1977 for exemplary cases.) Persons are cultural bases for formulating and exploring subjective experience. Equally, persons are recognizable as elements of social life, as occupying social statuses and participating in social groups and events. In a particular culture, the field of human action may be either extensively or minimally coded as social, that is, as orderly by virtue of persons' involvement in an institutional and moral universe that stands apart from their identities and capacities as persons.

We do not wish to define the bounds of the personal and the social by fiat, but to explore them. Similarly we do not claim particular experiences or attributes of persons to be by definition central to personhood and subjectivity. We hope to learn on what foundations personhood may be erected in different cultures.

Cultural Formulations of the Person: Personage/ Person/Individual

In a classic paper, Mauss (1938) suggested that cultural conceptions of social actors have evolved from a view of the person as enacting a determi-

nate ritual role to modern Western ideas of the individual. For comparative purposes, this model can be used without its evolutionary phrasing and further specified in several ways (see Rorty 1976, and Fajans, chap. 10, for examples). This model hinges on our sense of the social and the individual as opposed, as does the shame/guilt duality discussed above (see also chap. 2). Its ideal types, however, have the advantage of synthesizing expectations and values in a way that may capture much of the orderliness of an ethnopsychology.

Thus, in chapter 10, Fajans uses the term "person" in a technical sense, as an embodied actor of roles, and argues that the Baining understand themselves as persons in this sense. Her argument is more extensive: she shows how Baining structure their interactions so as to validate this view and how actors who cannot be so coded find themselves experiencing disorder or deprivation. Fajans also shows how such discordant experiences are remembered in ways that, over time, condense them into images of disorder.

The argument, then, is not simply that Baining are or see themselves as actors of a particular sort, but that their social world is organized to support this view. Furthermore, their understandings of experience set apart events that do not fit easily within this perspective and hence are not to be integrated with normal estimations of self and other. Much like Bourdieu, Fajans uses a general topic and theoretical distinctions as a point of entry into, and a synthesizing image of, the cumulative impact of social practices and cultural codings. She shows the Baining as working to construe themselves as persons (in her sense), not simply to be persons, and hence depicts the tension between ideal images and the evidence of divergence from ideals which emerges in Baining life.

We suggest that, for cross-cultural analysis, it is not the Maussian categories so much as the problem of accommodating reality to valued images of humanity which can usefully serve as a basis for comparative study. After all, in many cultures persons are valued as conforming to well-known social routines, and discretion about slips or confusions in performing is enjoined: ideals of personhood approximate Mauss's notion of the person, and social life can be viewed as confirming such ideals as realistic. The threats to ideal images which actors face vary widely, however, and these deserve attention along with the images they challenge.

In any event, the ability of members of a society to embrace ideals conditionally—as applying in many situations but not all, as ideals that fallible humans can only sometimes meet, or as ideals that must be upheld because humans are tempted to reject them, with disastrous consequences—must be recognized. Riesman (1977:122) offers an example worth keeping in mind: