

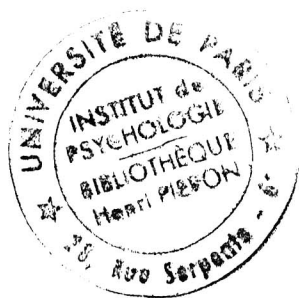


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# *Culture and Cognition: Readings in Cross-Cultural Psychology*

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Edited by  
J. W. BERRY and P. R. DASEN



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J. W. Berry and P. R. Dasen

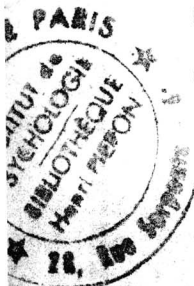
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Studies of cultural influences on cognition, carried out from a variety of theoretical and methodological stances, are collected for the first time in this volume. The editors have placed particular emphasis on selecting material by authors from many countries who have been working with peoples from a wide range of cultures. In a general introduction they provide an historical overview of the major issues, and draw together the most recent attempts to bring methodological sophistication to this difficult area of enquiry. Suggestions for future research on basic problems are to be found in an epilogue, along with a consideration of some possible applications of these studies to problems of education and social change. A comprehensive bibliography with over 600 entries is included in the volume.

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# **CULTURE AND COGNITION: READINGS IN CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY**

**Edited by J.W. Berry  
and P.R. Dasen**

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## Foreword

*S. Biesheuvel*

Cross-cultural studies are steadily increasing their claim on the attention of psychologists. The current importance of the subject is well illustrated by a number of recent developments. In 1966, the International Journal of Psychology, published by the International Union of Psychological Science, was founded; its contents are focused on 'cross-cultural comparisons of psychological phenomena'. More recently, the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* was begun to provide a further outlet for comparative studies of culture and behaviour. And most recently, in 1972, the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology was established, holding its first international conference in Hong Kong.

The subject crops up in virtually every psychological journal, regardless of its area of specialization, and symposia devoted to some aspect or other of the impact of culture on behaviour abound. A number of needs, both theoretical and applied, account for this interest. There is, for example, the demand for educational and vocational selection tests in developing countries. Pressure for the rapid advancement of the indigenous populations, coupled with limited scholastic and training resources, compelled the sorting out of those who could make the best use of available opportunities. Measuring devices of proved validity in Western contexts generally required substantial modification, or entirely new approaches had to be devised, for effective prediction in different cultures.

The differences in mental structure and function which accounted for culturally-determined behaviour patterns, quite apart from their practical importance and their bearing on measurement, were of interest for their own sake, for the light that could be thrown on factors that influenced mental development and effectiveness. Inevitably this raised questions concerning the nature of group differences and the possibility that other than environmental factors might be involved. The controversy regarding the relative importance of heredity and environment moved to the area of ethnic differences where the problem of cultural equivalence of tests became of crucial importance.



Perhaps the most interesting and important outcome of the debates about concepts, methodology, and interpretation of experimental data in cross-cultural research was a questioning of current assumptions concerning behavioural dimensions and functions. Scientific psychology is the product and reflects the characteristics of the mind of Western man. It has become clear that some restatement of its constructs may be necessary in the light of what has been discovered concerning their cultural relativity.

This applies for example to the concept of intelligence, to the modes of thought, to the motivational aspects of behaviour, to the infusion of perception with noncognitive functions, indeed to the classical distinction between cognitive, affective and conative processes itself.

Cross-cultural research is thus becoming a major influence in the evolution of psychology. The discourse and experimental data that determined the progress of its thinking should be selectively and readily available, to provide perspective for current controversies and guidelines for new hypotheses and future research.

This is the task which Berry and Dasen set themselves and which they have admirably accomplished for published work in the cognitive domain. Their limitation of the subject matter to culture and cognition was inevitable if a representative diversity of source material was to be included in a publication of manageable size. Cognition, moreover, deserves priority because of its major role in the process of adaptation to change and acculturation to Western technological demands with which all developing countries are currently confronted. The editors were wise to exclude major works of historical and methodological importance, as these are sufficiently familiar and readily available.

Professor Berry's introduction capably summarizes the highlights and trends of this body of information and provides the context for the selections that follow, mostly papers likely to be less generally known. Opinions are bound to differ about the significance of their selections, but this is inevitable in readings of this kind. I found the choice of material discriminating, comprehensive and unquestionably useful. I am reasonably confident that both the general psychological reader, as well as the specialist in cross-cultural psychology, will find this book of value as a source of important information and a stimulus to new insights into the many problems which still abound in this branch of psychology.

*Johannesburg*  
September 1972

## Preface

This collection of papers is an attempt to bring together, for the first time, a wide variety of psychological research which is explicitly concerned with cognition in its cultural context.

By cultural context is meant that vast pattern of group-shared behaviour which is transmitted by learning from one generation to another; by cognition is meant those aspects of psychological life characterized by the reception, organization and use of information gained through contact with the world outside the individual. The collection will focus on interactions between these two sets of variables in a series of papers which attempts to relate a wide range of cultural contexts to variations in thought, abilities and developmental stages of these human processes.

The primary goal of the book is to provide a handy volume of studies which have not been readily accessible heretofore. The very nature of cross-cultural studies encourages the publication of research findings in a wide variety of journals and in many languages. Thus this collection brings into a single volume articles from both English and French sources which have been either published in specialist journals or are original contributions.

However, we have not been content merely to assemble these various studies in a single volume. We have taken, as a secondary goal, the challenge of placing a 'point of view' on the collection through the choice and organization of the component parts. The three sections, and the individual selections within them, have been structured to raise the questions of qualitative variation, quantitative level and developmental stages in cognition.

The editors believe that the overwhelming influence of Western modes of cognition (including Western science, and specifically Western psychology) should not be permitted to obscure the study of possible qualitative variation; and even more emphatically we believe that where cognitive variation is discovered, we should not automatically interpret this in terms of differential cognitive competence (quantities or levels of cognitive ability). There is no doubt that some cultural groups direct their cognitive potential towards similar goals; however the historical fact that psychology has concentrated its efforts in this

relatively homogenous value system should not limit our search for (and readiness to accept) quite a wide variety of cognitive phenomena. Similarly there is no doubt that many parts of the world are becoming more Westernized, and may desire to reorient their cognitive abilities more towards those which are useful in urban or industrial life; however this fact should not nurture our ethnocentrism nor increase our readiness to interpret differences as deficiencies.

To meet our specific aims we have had to limit the scope of the material collected here. Two general collections of cross-cultural work in psychology (Price-Williams, 1969; Al-Issa and Dennis, 1970) have sampled widely from the available literature. We have thus decided to limit our coverage to the central issues of culture and cognition. However the impact of these studies will largely be to open up broad questions, rather than to make definitive or universally acceptable generalizations.

The editing of this volume has been very much a joint effort, with responsibility for the general introduction and Parts 1 and 2 lying primarily with J. W. Berry and for Part 3 with P. R. Dasen. We acknowledge with gratitude the comments and permissions of our colleagues who are represented in this volume. Without them, of course, there could be no collection; however what is more important, without them there would be no advance in the cross-cultural study of cognition.

April 1972

J. W. B., *Kingston*  
P. R. D., *Geneva*

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## Introduction: History and method in the cross-cultural study of cognition

The introduction to this collection will attempt to do two things: to distinguish briefly between 'culture and cognition' and that better-known speciality 'culture and personality', and to trace the historical antecedents and methodological concerns of present-day psychologists working in the field of culture and cognition. The first aim is necessary, not only to limit the focus of our attention, but to show that this field is indeed a somewhat neglected speciality worthy of study. Our second aim is necessitated by the editorial decision not to include any specifically historical or methodological papers; some of this early material is thus excerpted and reviewed in the introductory section. This review will not attempt a complete coverage, but will provide the flavour of early research and thinking in just sufficient detail to raise many of the basic issues still confronting comparative cognitive psychology.

A third aim might have been included: to distinguish between psychological and anthropological approaches to the study of 'culture and cognition'. However, in the interest of minimizing those interdisciplinary barriers, already lowered by Hallowell (1955), Campbell (1961), Kluckhohn (1962), French (1963), Tyler (1969) and most recently by Cole *et al.* (1971), no resurrection will be nurtured here; on the contrary, psychologists' and anthropologists' writings are mixed freely and no author is included who betrays little competence in the other discipline.

### COGNITION AND PERSONALITY IN CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Traditionally, psychologists have excluded cognitive measures from their tests of personality, although there is no doubt that most early personality theorists (e.g. Allport, 1937; Murphy, 1947) have been eclectic enough to include cognitive function in their theoretical formulations. This has led to a division in academic psychology, especially in curricula, between the study of socio-emotional and intellectual life.

Bateson (1936), looking at this distinction from the vantage point of

an ethnographic field worker, has termed the two aspects *ethos* and *eidos*, defining the first as a 'culturally standardized system of organization of the instincts and emotions of the individual' (p. 118) and the second as 'a standardization of the cognitive aspects of the personality of individuals' (p. 220). As Gladwin (Chapter 1) has pointed out, the former is now well-studied cross-culturally while the latter has been attended to considerably less. Bateson implies in his definition of *eidos* that these cognitive aspects are to be included within the broader term *personality*, thus following early personality theorists. Wallace (1970) too includes individual cognitive organization. ('mazeway') within his overview of the culture and personality field as does Honigmann (1967, p. xi).

These recent attempts by anthropologists to view the growth of behaviour in a particular cultural milieu as *integrated*, however, have not produced a corresponding change of view among psychologists. Nevertheless, the two foremost concepts in these discipline sub-areas (*personality* and *intelligence*) are conceptually similar, in that both are inferred from the consistency of peripheral behaviour over time and across situations. Each is a hypothetical state of the organism, attributed on the basis of past behaviour, and found useful by psychologists for the prediction of future behaviour.

There can be little doubt, though, that the distinction between cognition and personality is still a real one for many psychologists and some anthropologists, even though if the question were put, most workers would probably agree that the former is subsumed within the latter. The question of the empirical domination of 'culture and personality' over 'culture and cognition' is an historical fact, but one which need not continue. The comprehensive review by Singer (1961) or text by Honigmann (1967) should be read by those wishing a quick demonstration of this predominance; hopefully the present collection will stimulate further inquiry to balance, and perhaps integrate, our knowledge of total psychological functioning across cultural contexts.

#### HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

Around the turn of the century, as the social science world was feeling the impact of growing specialization, there existed a number of persons who possessed real dual competence; only later were they to be led by the growing disciplinary boundaries to assume a single title as 'psychologist' or 'anthropologist'. Such well-known men as McDougall, Woodworth, Wundt and Bartlett (among those later known solely as



psychologists) and Rivers, Boas and Nadel (later known solely as anthropologists) were doing research requiring both psychological and anthropological sophistication.

To illustrate this early work, four major monographs will be discussed. The first, by Rivers and McDougall, was primarily concerned with basic sensory and perceptual processes in an exotic cultural setting; the second, by Boas, enquired into the cultural content and context of mental development; the third, by Wundt, examined the mental basis for cultural development; and the fourth, by Lévy-Bruhl, questioned the assumption of identity of mental processes among all groups of mankind.

### *Rivers*

Inevitably the tale must begin with that assemblage of later famous men, who, under the leadership of Professor A. C. Haddon, ventured to the Torres Straits Islands (between Australia and New Guinea) in 1899. Haddon had previously carried out fieldwork in the area and had established valuable contacts and a useful fund of information for the psychologists to build upon; this pattern, of anthropologist preceding psychologist into the field, is a logical one and a practice later to be used when dual competence was no longer possible. Dr W. H. R. Rivers was selected to be in charge of the physiological and psychological studies, and was assisted by Mr Myers, Mr McDougall and Mr Seligmann.

In his introduction, Rivers (1901) discussed a number of problems too often taken for granted in current research: cultural setting, problems of testing in this setting, changes in tests to suit local conditions, and sampling and research strategies in native communities. He also felt obliged to make two apologetic observations on the work about to be reported: 'I am afraid that the introspective aspect of psychological experimentation was almost completely absent in our work' (p. 6); and 'It is perhaps as well to mention that most of our observations on adults were made under the influence of tobacco' (p. 5)!

The Rivers team carried out a large number of observations on memory and perceptual functioning, in visual, auditory, olfactory and cutaneous modes. Their aim was explicitly comparative, to discover whether these basic psychological phenomena were vastly different among such an unusual (to Victorian Britons) people. Many of their observations are placed side by side with data from previous studies in Britain and concurrent studies by Seligmann among people on the