

STUDYING PERSONALITY CROSS-CULTURALLY

Editor

BERT KAPLAN
University of Kansas



AS 344

ROW, PETERSON AND COMPANY

Evanston, Illinois

Elmsford, New York

1961

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6260

Inv. 20536

Library of Congress catalog card number
61-9093

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To the Memory of Clyde Kluckhohn

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This volume is presented in the belief that progress in the social sciences depends to a considerable degree upon the continued development of the culture and personality field which stands at the crossroads of many of the most important problems of both individual and societal functioning. One of the major roadblocks to this development is the difficulty of collecting and interpreting adequate empirical materials descriptive of personality processes in the world's cultures.

Although the culture and personality field is relatively new it has already passed through two main phases. The first, a period of tremendous enthusiasm, began in the 1940's. Large numbers of workers eagerly embarked on cross-cultural personality studies and the swiftly mobilized interest almost had the proportions of a fad. In part, this work was stimulated by the availability of a ready-made methodology and a set of methods—mainly utilizing projective techniques—which promised definitive results with a relatively small commitment of time and energy. This promise proved to be an illusion. The materials were easy enough to collect but were difficult or impossible to interpret and to integrate, with any reasonable claim to validity, into ongoing anthropological studies.

The consequent disillusionment led to the second period, one characterized by a sharp decrease in culture and personality research, although interest in its positive accomplishments probably remains as high or higher than ever. What has now come to be generally realized is that in the culture and personality field there are few easy answers and the most fundamental and elementary issues still need considerable clarification and research.

This volume is an introduction to the culture and personality field viewed from the vantage point of workers in it who are struggling to clarify a variety of theoretical and methodological issues and to develop adequate methods for collecting and interpreting empirical personality

materials. It is not a manual describing how to go about doing cross-cultural personality studies because, at this primitive stage, we do not know how; a simple concentration on methods might give the impression that we did. Rather, the book seeks to grapple with the issues preliminary to actual empirical study. These problems involve so much more than personality study itself that they lead into almost every important realm of social science and reveal the complex network of psychological and social issues, at the nexus of which the culture and personality field stands.

The volume thus comprehends a broad area of theory and research but organizes materials in such a way that they become relevant to the special problems of personality study. Through its various contributions it presents successively, an extended historical account of the major issues in the culture and personality field, a series of theoretical papers analyzing the role of personality and motivational processes in societal functioning, a discussion of the development of personality as it involves socialization and preparation for social participation, a series of methodological papers that clarify problems of doing cross-cultural research, a survey of relations between linguistics and cross-cultural personality study, an attempt to develop a framework for seeing the influence of cultural factors in personality study, discussions of projective techniques, dreams, and psychiatric interviewing, a discussion of the problem of interpreting psychic symbolism across cultures, an analysis of the role of myth and artistic productions and finally a discussion of methodological issues in the cross-cultural study of mental illness.

An integral part of the present volume is a series of case studies presented in appropriate places throughout the book. These cases serve as concrete illustrations of some of the issues discussed in the more theoretical chapters and show how the latter can be transformed into empirical research or analysis. Many of the cases, moreover, are themselves major contributions to theory and methodology, although their analysis is presented in the context of a particular set of empirical data.

The book does not attempt to offer complete and comprehensive coverage of the culture and personality field. Students should be directed to use it in conjunction with three or four other works with which most workers will be familiar. Salient among these are Inkeles and Levinson's paper, "National Character: The Study of Modal Personality and Socio-cultural Systems" which ably clarifies the present course of the culture and personality field, Honigsmann's textbook, *Culture and Personality* which provides an admirable and comprehensive account of the field, and Mead and Metraux's provocative collection of essays on *The Study of Culture at a Distance* which embodies a wide variety of imaginative approaches to the problem of personality study. It also should be supple-

mented by discussions of particular methods like Hallowell's fine paper, "The Rorschach Technique in Personality and Culture Studies."

Although the great bulk of the work in the culture and personality field has been done by anthropologists, the authors of these chapters come from a half dozen different disciplines: anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, psychoanalysis and history. This reflects the nature of the problem of cross-cultural personality study, which so urgently requires interdisciplinary collaboration. The field as a whole is one of the great meeting grounds of the social sciences, a situation that virtually insures its continuing to be exciting, important, and reactive to crosscurrents of ideas coming from many different directions. Unfortunately, there are disadvantages as well; the most obvious is the difficulty in communication among workers who have different backgrounds and the differences in professional values which lead workers to approach the same problem with a variety of conceptions of what is important. It is well to recognize that culture and personality research in general and cross-cultural personality study in particular can occur in quite different frameworks. The sociologist and anthropologist for example, preoccupied with the problems of societal cohesion and functioning, of understanding the bases of social order and of social change, utilize the data of personality studies in a way that undoubtedly seems strange and alien to the psychologist and psychiatrist, concerned with the understanding of personality development and functioning and only interested in those aspects of socio-cultural systems that have to do with these problems. The need for interdisciplinary collaboration does not eliminate the basic difference in the problems that concern the social and the psychological sciences. In the midst of this collaboration a chasm exists, which can be ignored only at the risk of confusion and frustration.

From the sociologist's perspective the main question is whether the kind of personality processes that exist in a group make a difference in the way that societies function. The hypothesis which has most dominated the culture and personality field derives from the work of such thinkers as Max Weber, Abram Kardiner, Erich Fromm, Talcott Parsons and David Riesman. It holds that efficient societal functioning depends upon the existence in its members of congruent personality or motivational structures, sometimes referred to as social character. This congruence is thought to be produced by the shaping of personality by society's socialization institutions. While the correctness of this theory is generally taken for granted, there are enough doubts that its testing and evaluation are one of the main tasks of empirical cross-cultural research. Inkeles, for example asks, "Is there a significant difference between various national and sub-national populations in the distribution of discrete traits or personality types, and if so how does this affect the

functioning of the social system? Can we assume that a given social structure will operate in much the same way regardless of the set of personalities placed in that context?" He asserts, "No one has ever tested a national population or even a main sub-population rising either on adequate sample or adequate psychological instruments. All assertions or details of national, sub-national, regional or class differences of major magnitudes therefore remain mere statements of faith. And until we have accumulated the basic facts, the other questions of course must be held in abeyance." *

The culture and personality field is no less important for an understanding of personality functioning than it is for social functioning. The question that is most generally posed by psychologists and psychiatrists concerns the nature of the influence of the social environment in which the person develops, and its effect on the course of his development. Almost all of our present theories hold that this social influence is a profound one. There is much room, however, for more differentiated theories to tell us what sorts of environmental conditions will produce what kinds of effects. Cross-cultural personality studies have a vitally important role in providing the necessary data. The problem of influence itself is an interesting one. Work in the field of communication has been especially concerned with what actually goes on when one person influences another. One might ask as well, what happens when a person is influenced by a culture pattern.

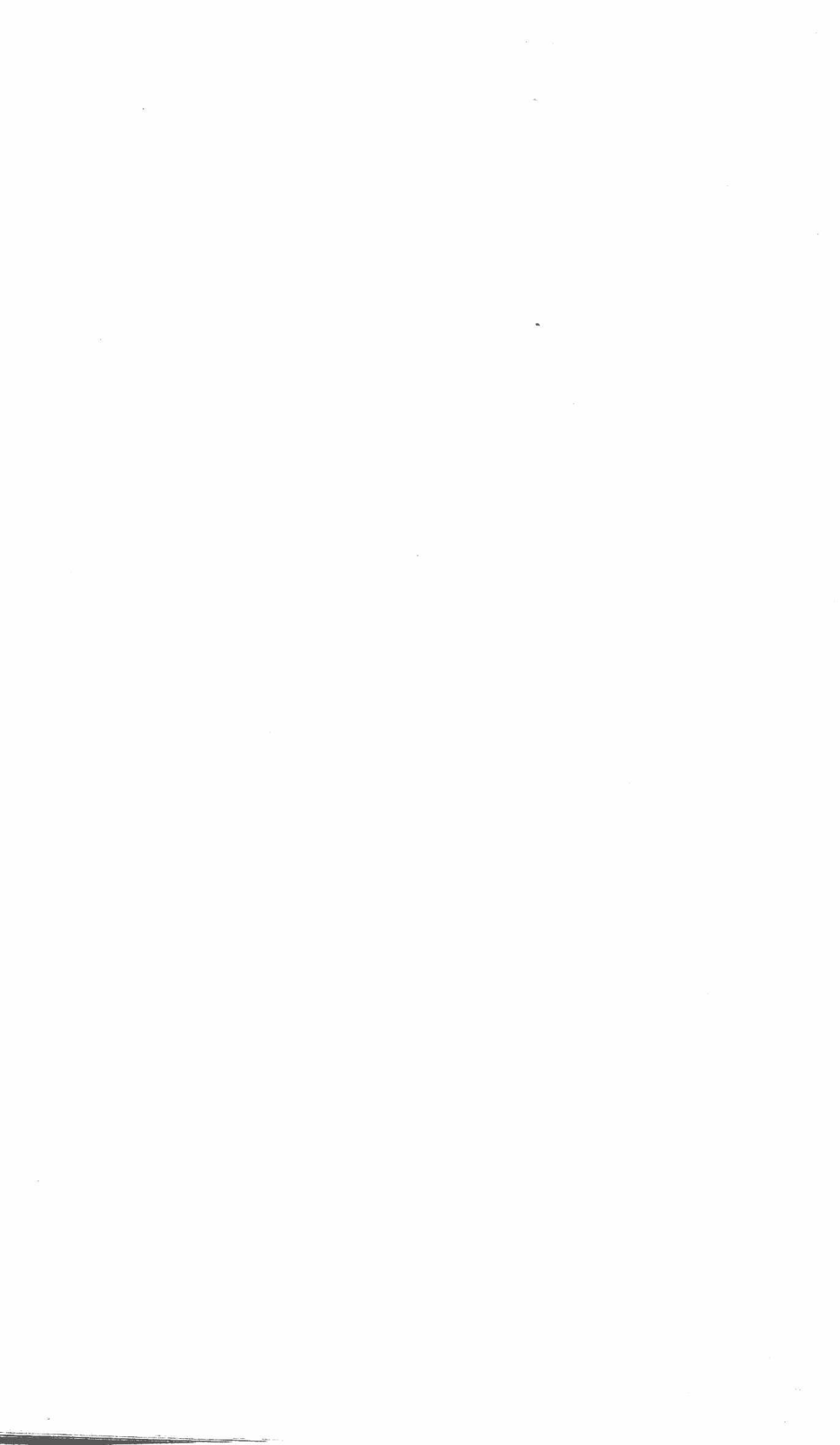
While the volume provides a general introduction to the culture and personality field its main focus is the problem of cross-cultural personality study. A number of workers have given this problem attention, notably Margaret Mead and her colleagues and A. I. Hallowell. But there has in general not been the realization that, until much greater progress is made, the data collected in empirical studies of personality may be actually incorrect and misleading. The tendency during the past fifteen years has been to apply techniques developed in our own society. This is done reluctantly because it is not clear how valid they are in other cultures. Still, in the absence of a real science of cross-cultural study, there is no good alternative. It is the purpose of this book to contribute to the development of this science. Its contribution consists principally in calling attention to the importance, and interest of cross-cultural studies and pointing to some directions from which they may be approached. The science itself is undoubtedly a great many years from fruition and is dependent in part on the development by psychologists and psychiatrists of more sophisticated and more valid ways of studying personality in our own society. It depends also, however, on the an-

* "Personality and Social Structure," in Merton, R. K., Broom, L., and Cottrell, L. S., *Sociology Today*, Basic Books Inc., New York, 1959.

thropologist's ability to comprehend and apply what goes on in the personality study situation, and on the ability of social scientists to fathom the difficulties of communication and understanding between people who are different from each other. When these problems are even partially solved the benefits will extend far beyond the confines of the culture and personality field and become relevant to the general problem of intercultural understanding.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the conception of this volume and in its editing, I have been helped by a great many friends and colleagues. I would like especially to express my gratitude to Dorothy Eggan, Rollin Posey, Melford Spiro, Jay Jackson, Louise and George Spindler, A. Irving Hallowell and Milton Singer. Although they had no direct connection with the book I am most keenly aware of the great influence of Clyde Kluckhohn, Talcott Parsons, Gardner Murphy, David Riesman, Robert W. White, Henry A. Murray and Alex Inkeles. My appreciation is deepest to my wife Hermia.



I

CULTURE AND PERSONALITY THEORY AND RESEARCH



About the Chapter

Dr. SINGER's survey of the culture and personality field sets the stage for our consideration of the more specific questions of cross-cultural personality study. He delineates the main theoretical and empirical issues in the field and places them in historical perspective. Major empirical studies and theoretical works are reviewed critically. The relationship of the study of the personality characteristics of individuals to such concepts as cultural character, social character, basic personality structure, and modal personality is clarified. The chapter also explores the field of national character and relates it to culture and personality study.

About the Author

Milton Singer is Paul Klapper Professor of the Social Sciences in the Department of Anthropology and in the College, University of Chicago. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1940. During 1954-55, he travelled in India and Asia. He is co-author, with Gerhart Piers, of *Shame and Guilt, A Psychoanalytic and a Cultural Study*. With Robert Redfield he wrote "The Cultural Role of Cities," for *Economic Development and Culture Change*, and for *Man in India*. Dr. Singer was co-editor with Robert Redfield of the series *Comparative Studies of Cultures and Civilizations*; editor of *Introducing India in Liberal Education, Proceedings of a Conference*; and editor and co-author of *Traditional India: Structure and Change*. His special interests are the comparative study of civilizations and particularly India, the relations of cultural anthropology to psychology, and philosophy of the social sciences. He is a Fellow of the American Anthropological Association and, for 1957-58, was a Fellow at the Center for the Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences.

Acknowledgments

This article is based on material developed by the author over a period of years in classes and seminars at the University of Chicago. Colleagues and students there provided a unique interdisciplinary forum for the free exchange of ideas. To the late Robert Redfield especially and the program of Comparative Studies of Cultures and Civilizations under his direction, and supported by the Ford Foundation, the author owes much in intellectual stimulation and professional support. While a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences during 1957-58, discussions with John Tukey and Edgar Anderson elucidated some of the statistical issues in personality and culture research. Helen Singer, Dorothy and Fred Eggan, Bert Kaplan, Alfred Kroeber, Clyde Kluckhohn, and Melford Spiro were kind enough to read the manuscript and to make helpful suggestions for its improvement. The author is indebted to Margit Gerow and Barbara Dwyer for help in preparing the manuscript for press.

1

A Survey of Culture and Personality Theory and Research

MILTON SINGER

University of Chicago

EMERGENCE OF THE FIELD

Until a few years ago the field of culture and personality theory and research was considered an American heresy in anthropology. Today it is no longer a heresy, and in a few more years it will no longer be distinctively American.

Before 1920, anthropology in the United States was predominantly non-psychological if not anti-psychological, and the culture and personality approach was unknown (Kluckhohn, 1944b). Within the next fifteen years, say from 1920 to 1935, not only were the ideas inherent in such an approach actively discussed, but field research was undertaken and collaboration between anthropologists and psychiatrists was begun. This was the period of Margaret Mead's South Sea studies, Ruth Benedict's articles and book on patterns of culture, and Edward Sapir's influential articles on the relations of anthropology and psychiatry.

In 1931, after Sapir left Chicago for Yale, he collaborated with John Dollard on a special seminar on culture and personality at the suggestion of Lawrence Frank, then of the Rockefeller Foundation. During this same period the Social Science Research Council recognized the

new interdisciplinary field by sponsoring symposia and by having William I. Thomas prepare a special report on the possibilities and problems of research on culture and personality (Volkart, 1951).

The most important stimulus during this formative period was psychoanalytic psychology. It was in fact the encounter of anthropology, and to a lesser extent sociology and political science, with psychoanalysis, that gave rise to culture and personality studies. One of the first public records of this encounter is A. L. Kroeber's review of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, which appeared in the *American Anthropologist* in 1920. Although he found the book "an important and valuable contribution" to the psychology underlying cultural anthropology, which "every ethnologist must sooner or later take into consideration," and expressed interest in extending Freud's point of view, Kroeber devoted most of the review to demolishing Freud's principal thesis that the origins of culture and society meet in the Oedipus complex. The general tone of the review is highly critical: "This book is keen without orderliness, intricately rather than closely reasoned, and endowed with an unsubstantiated convincingness." Psychoanalysts who wish to establish serious contacts with historical ethnology are told that they "must first learn to know that such an ethnology exists."

Twenty years later, in 1939, Kroeber wrote another review of *Totem and Taboo*, in which he said he saw "no reason to waver" over his earlier critical analysis. Nevertheless, as an *amende honorable*, he took a kindlier view of psychoanalysis. He now thinks Freud's explanation of culture would deserve at least "serious consideration as a scientific hypothesis," if it were restated as a proposition about the constant operation of certain psychic processes—for example, the incest drive, incest repression, and filial ambivalence—in widespread human institutions. He still finds that psychoanalysis refuses to undertake such a restatement, because of its indifference to history and to accepted scientific attitudes, and its dogmatic all-or-none attitude which resists influences from without. Kroeber cites as examples of this last trait Ernest Jones's resistance to Malinowski's discovery of a matrilineal form of the Oedipus complex among the Trobriand Islanders and Róheim's *Psychoanalysis of Primitive Culture Types* of 1932.

In this later review, nevertheless, Kroeber lists Freud's concepts of repression, regression, infantile persistences, dream symbolism, overdetermination, guilt sense, and the affects toward members of the family, as ideas which have "gradually seeped into general science and become an integral and important part of it." On the other hand, the concepts of the censor, the superego, and the castration complex, and the explanations of specific cultural phenomena have not, he says, found their way into science. The conclusion of the review is a tribute to Freud: