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In Part 1 (2001, June), I argued that hybridized and homogeneous views of culture, while seemingly different, are really variants of the same culture-as-biosphere metaphor. In Part 2, my goal is to propose an alternative understanding of culture that I believe should be used to develop well-founded theories of culture. First, I will explain why most anthropologists have historically misconstrued and misused the concept of culture. I describe how the experience of fieldwork often leads to a schizophrenic embrace of culture as both pure theory (the anthropologist as academic) and as messy experience (the anthropologist in the wild). I then show that a grand unified working theory of culture is impossible and that culture should instead be considered a fluid concept that changes in scale and properties depending on the question asked. I also debunk theories of culture that either take for granted that culture is “everything” or that it has causal force. After constructing an argument describing what culture is not, I hope to convincingly illustrate what a well-founded theory of culture should look like.

Hanging on to Holism

Many anthropologists (particularly authors of introductory text books) continue to espouse a holistic view of culture, in part because of the importance

I want to thank Trini Garro for editing and commenting on this paper, and Alan R. Beals, David B. Kronenfeld and Ted Schwartz for their input.
traditionally vested on fieldwork as a rite of passage. Through fieldwork, the anthropologist acquires a stake in writing about their chosen community as both similar to and uniquely different from other communities. The comparative thread (of similarity) allows one to engage in debates over such cultural issues as gender roles, ethnicity, globalization, cultural change, or the effects of western pop culture. The cultural relative thread allows one to display one’s familiarity with local practices and knowledge with a certain level of expertise.

No other social/behavioral science discipline has made holism such a central tenet of study as has anthropology. Psychologists are unlikely to claim that they are studying or describing the entire human psyche in the same way that an ethnographer presumes to describe, more or less, a whole culture even if this claim is unstated.

**Anthropologists often claim “ownership” of the concept of culture by virtue of doing both ethnographic and ethnological research.**

Thus, anthropologists often claim “ownership” of the concept of culture by virtue of doing both ethnographic and ethnological research. At the same time the appropriation of the cultural concept by other disciplines is decried as ethnocentric because these scholars are neither trained in anthropology nor do their respective disciplines have a sufficiently rich tradition of comparative research from which to develop appropriately non-ethnocentric approaches to conceptualizing culture. I think for these reasons most anthropologists still cling to a holistic notion of culture that is no longer reasonable.

**FROM CULTURE TO CULTURAL**

Turning the looking glass on themselves, anthropologists realized that their own perceptions and writings were socio-historically situated, nurtured in the “cool” confines of the ivory tower. Both postmodern (i.e., “anti-science”) and empirically-minded anthropologists (e.g., D’Andrade 1999; Gatewood, 2000; Sahlins 1994) questioned whether we should retain the concept of culture. Roger Keesing said he “deliberately avoided” using the term “culture” because it “irresistibly leads us into reification and essentialism” and to exoticizing “otherness” (1994:301-302, 303). Another prominent figure, Arjun Appadurai, rejected the use of “culture” as a noun, noting that the “cultural, the adjective, moves one into a realm of differences, contrasts, and comparisons that is more helpful” (1996:12). Many, if not most, anthropologists concur with the “grammatical shift” that has taken place (Brumann 1999:S2). With it has also come an ideological reversal, from assuming sharedness among the members of a community and a similarity across communities in a cultural region to assuming variability, differences, contingency and a near wholesale rejection of the search for
Stephen Tyler, a leader of the ethno-science movement in anthropology in the late 1960s and early 1970s, proposed that anthropologists “...break the whole spell of representation and project a world of pure arbitrariness without representation” (1986:133). For Tyler, any “representation” that purports to be correlated with or represent reality is always purely arbitrary. He uses the term “spell” in order to accentuate that inherent intellectual sleight-of-hand that accompanies any representation. For Tyler, there is no slippery slope of representation, all representations are wrought by magic and each representation is independent of the phenomenon it is representing.

Perhaps E. L. Cerroni-Long is right when he writes in his introduction to an edited volume on anthropological theory that “the impact of postmodernism on anthropology may have been greatly exaggerated” (1999:4). But once he hunkers down to the subject he is less inclined to be quite so blasé: “...postmodernism denounces the ethnographic endeavor (as an attempt at ‘appropriation’ of the ‘other’), insofar as it is directed at describing, comparing and understanding human diversity” (p. 5). Postmodernism has, Cerroni-Long notes, “become the intellectual orthodoxy” while at the same time renouncing theory, ethnography and the comparative enterprise which has historically been to anthropology what evolution is to biology. As I will show below, the postmodern criticism of representation, when thoughtfully considered, is well-taken but should lead to re-thinking how we construct theories of culture rather than rejecting wholesale the possibility of theorizing culture.

“**No-Name Anthropology**”

Despite anthropologists’ awareness and sensitivity to postmodernist issues, little has really changed in the writing of culture. Ethnographies continue to be thick descriptive accounts of human lifeways, whether in a community or in a transnational setting. The two key differences between traditional and contemporary ethnographies are the inclusion of the anthropologist in the account with an obligatory patter about...
their biases and difficulties in the field and that the anthropologist often notes that
the community is not a bounded, self-sustaining community but affected by regional,
national and global events. Nevertheless, when stripped of the bells and whistles, I
do not see any significant differences between ethnographic writing then and now.

I think the reason for the lack of change in ethnography is that anthropologists con-
tinue to rely on participant observation for collecting data. Participant observation
is not really a method for collecting data itself but rather a method for gaining
competency in community lifeways and, as a result, access to and the trust of mem-
bers of a community. Participant observation precedes actual data collection and is
akin to “hanging out” (Bernard 1994; de Munck 1998). Few anthropologists think
about sampling techniques, the representativeness of informants, nor do they regu-
larly employ systematic data collection methods (an exception is Boster 1985; Garro
2000a and b; Kempton, Boster & Hartley, 1995). In other words, most anthropolo-
gists do what Barrett calls “no name anthropology” (1996:178-184). Theory and eth-
nographic description are articulated only insofar as they exist between the covers
of a text, with a discussion on theory typically placed at the beginning of a text and
then, promptly ignored.1

Like their ethnographic counterparts, ethnologists tend to rely on an inductive forag-
ing for patterns in the cross-cultural data banks and then test for significant cor-
relations to confirm these patterns. Too often ethnologists conjure commonsensical,
ad hoc interpretations from these correlations rather than seriously considering the
underlying mechanisms that account for the correlation and then test their findings
on a second independent sample. From the point of view of those who were inter-
ested in serious science, the devotional reliance on statistics, in the absence of a
theoretical framework, looked scientistic rather than scientific (notable exceptions
being the Whitings’ Six Cultures study and the Burton and White studies on the
sexual division of labor).

A major problem with both ethnological and ethnographic “theoretical” approaches

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1Ethnographies that are exquisite examples of this are Ann Gold’s “Fruitful Journeys” (1988);
Dorinne Kondo’s “Crafting Selves” (1990), Lila Abu-Lughod’s “Veiled Sentiments” (1986); and
Ernestine McHugh’s “Love and Honor in the Himalayas” (2001). After a rich description
of theory and the near impossibility of ethnographically valid representations, all four
researchers provide rich ethnographic texts of the best sort. The theory really just gets in
the way.
is that they are never very theoretical. Both rely on “grounded theory” in which the theory is patched together post hoc from observed regularities. “No name anthropology” is an accurate label for the theory-method schizophrenia currently endemic to anthropology. This Cyclopian paradigm for “doing anthropology” is naive and ultimately drains the field of any intellectual challenge. A second stage of deduction is needed to form integrated, full-sighted theories of culture.

**REVIVING THEORY AND WORDS OF CAUTION**

de Munck and Korotayev (2000) used hypothetical and actual examples to show statistically that there are no fixed or mechanical solutions to the question “What is culture and how do we reduce culture to elemental units for cross-cultural comparison?” Murdock and White (1969) and Naroll (1970) had insisted that the community was the proper unit of cross-cultural comparison, so that the variables always referred to community beliefs and practices. de Munck and Korotayev argued that we cannot *a priori* assume either that the community represents a cultural area or that it is even the appropriate cultural unit for comparison. For example, in terms of religious precepts or practices, a Muslim community in the predominantly Buddhist nation of Sri Lanka may have more in common with a Muslim community in China than it does with a neighboring Buddhist community. Similarly, highland communities of very different cultural areas were found to share many cultural traits that they did not share with their lowland counterparts. While studying the Bantu cultural area of east Africa we also found, contrary to expectation, greater variation of some cultural traits within the cultural area than across cultural areas. In other words “community” is but one of many possible cultural population boundaries.

These findings are tremendously significant for cross-cultural research, specifically as they address Galton’s so-called “problem”—that cultures, particularly those spatially proximate with one another, may share similar trait complexes as a consequence of the temporal diffusion of traits rather than because of any independent causal relationship between those traits. Our study shows that there may be greater cultural variation within a community, region or cultural area than across cultural areas and therefore the unit for comparison varies depending on the question asked. A cultural unit for comparison may also be delimited by non-cultural boundary markers such as elevation or climate. Thus, a cultural unit need not always imply territorial contiguity as community does. For example, Islam and Christianity are mega-cultural units that are not confined to a bounded territory.
Many different cultural dimensions potentially cut across any population. A sample that represents the population of one culture because the individuals in that sample all possess the salient criteria for that research question may not constitute an appropriate cultural sample for another research question. What we take to be the unit of culture for cross-cultural comparison cannot be determined \textit{a priori}. The same problem will also hold at the ethnographic level. For example, if we wanted to describe the status hierarchy of a community, the criteria for assessing male status rankings are likely to differ from those used for assessing female status. Without a theoretical understanding of the plasticity, limitations and uses of the concept of culture, this complication will be missed time and time again.

Though not directly addressed, the de Munck and Korotayev article implies that “culture is not everything,” as cultural boundaries and differences may be a result of non-cultural as well as cultural criteria. The most significant hurdle to overcome in developing a well-founded theory of culture is to be clear about what culture is not. In the following two sections a perspective for formulating theories of culture is developed.

\textbf{WHAT CULTURE IS NOT}

Most definitions of culture are “omnibus definitions” (D’Andrade 1999:86). Sherry Ortner writes, “Anthropologists–American ones anyway–have for the most part long agreed that culture shapes, guides, and even to some extent dictates behavior.” The difficulties with such definitions are twofold. First, we cannot get out of the tautological trap of using culture to explain culture. For example, if we call all learned behaviors “culture” and then explain some set of behaviors in terms of particular cultural values and beliefs we are doing nothing more than performing mental

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gymnastics by concealing our belief in a one-to-one correspondence between the internal (cognitive) and external (socio-behavioral) world. From this perspective, cognition (i.e., thoughts and feelings) and behaviors simply reflect each other and, consequently, cannot provide any understanding of each other. Second, if culture causes things to happen then we attribute not only existence to culture but also the ability, as a “supra-physical” entity, to “construct reality” (O’Meara 1999:120). Marvin Harris, a staunch materialist, makes the supra-physical argument, writing, “if people can become members of social groups, then social groups must have an existence separate from and prior to the individuals that join them...” (1994:412). But, as O’Meara has frequently argued, “causation is exclusively a matter of the physical properties of, and the resulting mechanical operations of and interaction among, what can be characterized as physical entities” (1999:118, italics in original). If we persist in assuming or claiming that culture is either a “behavioral text” (Geertz 1980:168) or “controls what we think and do” (Harris 1991:65) then we must either figure out precisely how a noncorporeal entity can act on physical entities or how we can define culture as being a physical entity. This is not necessarily an insurmountable problem, for non-physical “entities” such as “love” or “patriotism” do motivate behavior. On the other hand, our evidence of the existence of values or emotions is provided by the individuals who claim to have these values or feelings and they are accompanied by indirect physiological and neural activity. If culture is a shared, supra-physical state then to whom do we go for confirming evidence? To argue cultural causation, how the abstract can affect the concrete must be explained.

If culture is a shared, supra-physical state then to whom do we go for confirming evidence?

This problem generalizes to conflating a representation of some cultural practice, value, or belief with its actual expression. For example, a whole cottage industry of research has burgeoned around the distinction between “Western” and “non-Western” constructions of the self, with non-Western selves presented as “fluid,” “porous,” “dividual,” “socio-centric organic,” “interdependent” while Western selves are the opposite—“independent,” “autonomous,” “bounded,” “egocentric.” Implied in this constructionist stance is a re-Orientalizing (that is, affirming essentialist differences) of non-Western cultures. Are Western and non-Western constructions of self different? If they are, then the Western “self” must perceive, conceptualize and articulate with his or her behavioral environment very differently than the non-Western self. This also implies that reality is socially constructed. But certainly not all of reality is “socially constructed” as Howard remarked, “how do they deal with the corporeal reality of the body—it urinates and defecates and experiences hunger, thirst and sexual urges?” (1985:414). In other words, the self is, in part, biologically
constructed. Further, Modell (1993) and Neisser (1967) pointed out that all human beings have to think of themselves as a bounded whole that continues through time otherwise each self risks dying during sleep. Apparently, there is an inherent neuro-physiological cognitive capacity to recognize continuity of self and to simulate and assess future actions. This is also part of the self. In all cultures, the self, however socially constructed, feels emotions and recognizes emotions in others. Emotions consist of sensations that are managed by the chemistry of the body. The self, often put forth as the cultural construct par excellence, also consists of non-cultural components. The question now becomes, “how much of the self is culturally constructed? Eighty percent? Fifty percent? or Twenty percent?”

Of course, the counter argument would be that it doesn’t matter, whatever portion of the self is culturally constructed is the portion that reflects cultural differences. But this is an equivocal claim, for, if all differences in the self are due to culture, then we must think of the self as a modular structure with each module working independently of others and the only module that differs across cultures is the cultural module. Even after all this, at best our argument is no more enlightening than saying that “culture did it.” Were culture the sole culprit for cultural differences in constructs of the self, we would still have to specify the causal connection between culture and those aspects of the self that vary cross-culturally. However, as I show below, we do not need to rely on culture to explain cultural differences.

In addition to the “self,” culture is often said “to completely control the workings of society” (D’Andrade 1999:92). The examples provided below are intended to show that there are often simpler and more direct explanations for cultural differences. Declan Quigley (1999:18) observed that in the South Asian subcontinent “caste organization literally evaporates when one reaches a certain altitude in the Himalayas.” It seems that at the higher altitudes little to no agricultural surplus is produced and another type of social organization is required. Carol and Melvin Ember (1999) showed that males rather than females tend to do the high-risk occupations such as hunt big game in foraging societies and the universality of the sexual division of labor is explained as an evolutionary adaptive strategy as societies can reproduc-tively afford to lose more males than females. This explanation is referred to as the “expendability theory” and may also suggest the origins of patriarchy; males, in return for engaging in dangerous activities receive prestige (ibid.:141). Brian Ferguson (1995) has suggested that historically the bellicose behavior of the Yanomami was not an integral part of their culture, but is a relatively recent response to being forced to live in an ever diminishing territory as a result of the expansion of the nation-state. The decrease in territory led to an increase in competition over use rights to land and increasing hostilities between Yanomami groups.

2Of course, Dennett (1991; 1996) and many others have argued (convincingly to my mind) that mental entities also pose a logistical nightmare in that we have to wonder where for example “love” resides?
What Culture Is

The explanations above show that the “workings of society” can frequently be explained by factors other than culture. In fact, the above explanations suggest that culture is often the effect or outcome of human adaptation to particular environmental or biological factors. These factors shaped experiences which, repeated over time, become cultural practices that were, in turn, endorsed by cultural values and beliefs. In other words, I suggest that culture emerges as a conserving property, after experiences have been shaped by external forces. Cultural change occurs when there are changes in the external environment that trigger new experiences and favor new behavioral practices which are in turn legitimized and given meaning through culture. This causal sequence reverses the typical understanding of culture as causal agent. I argue that culture is the effect of physical, biological and social factors. I also argue that culture is derived from experience. Culture is what Bartlett referred to as the “effort after meaning” (1932:44, cited in Garro 2000:277, italics in original)—that is, an effort to find meaning—and that effort must take place after the initial experiences have occurred. Only when that effort has become institutionalized as “norms,” “values,” “beliefs,” “habitus,” “practice,” or “ethos” can we say that culture “shapes” behavior.

I suggest that culture emerges as a conserving property, after experiences have been shaped by adaptation to particular environmental or biological factors.

A Strategy for Creating Well-Formed Theories of Cultures

One makes an “effort after meaning” by applying representations or models of meaning onto experiences. These models are cultural in that they are constructed out of shared symbols that are arranged into a dynamic “image,” or what Boulding referred to as an “organic theory of knowledge” because it can be affected by both “internal and external factors” (1972:50). I believe that the dynamic image, called a “cultural model” by contemporary cognitive anthropologists, is the basic, elemental unit of culture.3 A cultural model exists in the mind as a Platonic essence; it is pure, bounded and utterly passive by itself. However, the models are not constructed to

3I understand that this can be taken either as an arrogant or foolhardy statement. I do not think it is either, but it is purposefully confrontational. If we are to develop an adequate vocabulary and strategy for thinking about culture and its relation to human life and history it is, as Reyna has written, best to present directly “confrontational stances”

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wallpaper the mind, but to be utilized. Human beings draw upon cultural models in their “effort after meaning” and in so doing compromise the model. Let me take the example of the image of a circle. We can all imagine what a circle looks like and the image is of a perfect circle, without bumps or irregularities. We draw on this model for specific purposes—either to map it onto real world objects for the purpose of classifying things, to use as a metaphor (e.g., “going around in circles”), to make wheels, etc. The actual implementation of the cultural model is never the same as the cultural model we see with our inner eye, but the reason for the cultural model in the first place is to make meaning and not to duplicate the real world. There are “parts” to the circle or to any model. These parts are usually “natural” or “essential” to the image in the sense that without any one of them the image would be significantly altered (e.g., the circle would no longer be a circle if it were not round). In this sense, the cultural model is a Platonic essence, because it is not “of this world” but a simplified, generalized, bounded dynamic image that is a distillation of criterially pure meaning. Cultural models cannot be immanent in that immanent things are fundamentally contextualized and constituted of non-criterial as well as criterial elements.

In the same way that there is a cultural model of a “circle,” there is likely to be a cultural model for “intelligence,” “marriage,” “the President,” “money,” and all the things, events and processes in the world to which we ascribe meaning. Culture models are collective models and therefore must, like other collective constructs, be easily learned, acquired from everyday life experiences, abstract and flexible enough to be used for a wide range of situations. Cultural models consist of an “interpretive content” presented as “prototypical formulations” that are understood when the model is instantiated. The interpretive content is layered and not always explicitly invoked though always typically associated with the expression of the cultural

Cultural models consist of an “interpretive content” presented as “prototypical formulations” that are understood when the model is instantiated

Continued

(Reyna 2001:3). This outline is mainly derived from discussions with and the writings of David Kronenfeld (1997) and secondarily from the writings of Roy D’Andrade (1992, 1995, 1997) and Theodore Schwartz (1978).

4 The example of a circle is taken from a paper by David Kronenfeld (n.d.) who also provided input on the later prototypical formulations.

5 These terms are taken from a paper by David Kronenfeld (n.d.)
model in action. Some prototypical formulations that are taken-for-granted in the implementation of a cultural model are: (1) typical situations—the conditions under which a cultural model is typically expressed; (2) typical social association—who uses the cultural model and who is typically addressed by the cultural model (e.g., a lover, teacher, sales representative, etc.); (3) typical moral associations—is the cultural model typically invoked by good or bad people in the society? (4) social response—is the invocation of the cultural model usually greeted with praise or condemnation? (5) power association—is the invocation of the cultural model typically associated with status equality or inequality?

To study culture is to study cultural models. If the concept “culture” refers to the meaning we assign to the things in this world—including our own feelings, thoughts and sense of self—then the first stage in the development of theories of culture is to discover the properties of these cultural models. This is a difficult but not impossible task. The important thing to recall about cultural models is that they are shared, simplified, easily learnable models that we can describe. The criteria described concerning their use suggests a strategy for relating cultural models to social practices and power relations. The advantage of this approach over other approaches is that it differentiates culture from behavior and other social systems. The goal should be to identify cultural models as abstractions and to see how these are mixed and instantiated to form personal schemas which in turn motivate behavior. The cultural models are derived from iterated experiences that have historical depth, collective breadth, and contextual specificity. From this perspective a theory of culture is a theory of cultural models. From this perspective it also becomes easier to formulate theoretical questions about the connections between culture and other disciplines such as history, psychology, biology, sociology, geography and political science. As I see it, my argument reinforces the division of labor within the social sciences by suggesting that the various disciplines do have specific fields of concentration and none has an overarching destiny to subsume the others but that they are all, nonetheless, linked together.

REFERENCES


50 Years of SIP:
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The Collective Psychology and National Development wants to give special recognition to all of the people who contributed to the development of the SIP in commemoration of the Interamerican Society of Psychology: 50 years of Interamerican Psychology.

“With the objective of promoting the direct communication between psychologists and groups of people with similar scientific interests, a group of psychologists and psychiatrists present at the IV International Congress of Mental Health gathered under the direction of Oswaldo Robles of Mexico, and having the direct support of Werner Wolff of the United States, founded the Interamerican Society of Psychology on December 17, 1951 in Mexico City.

A small group of idealists, they recognized the necessity of an institutional structure which would promote communication in the field of psychology among the countries of the Americas. The Society also encouraged the increase of psychological studies and promoted the exchange of ideas aimed at improving international understanding through an appropriate recognition of the differences and likenesses among the cultures.

The founding of the Interamerican Society of Psychology was an event that notably influenced Latin American psychology and for several decades has been a motor of progress.

Marcelo Urra
Colectivo Psicología y Desarrollo Nacional