

Introduction

Invisible Pioneers: "Culture and Personality" Reconsidered

As the social sciences of anthropology, sociology, and psychology emerged from philosophy and became separate academic disciplines in the decades before and after 1900, several *interdisciplinary* movements, including "social psychology" (within both psychology and sociology) and "culture and personality" (largely within American anthropology roughly 1930–55), sought to explore the connections and interactions between the individual and society. There is no full or accurate history of the culture and personality movement, and it has been shrouded in misconceptions, but new evidence has enabled us to understand the movement as the first phase of psychological anthropology, one in which a unifying theoretical framework or paradigm was constructed that continues to inform contemporary theory and research.

The culture and personality movement was founded by three anthropologists – Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead – around 1930. All three had been students of Franz Boas at Columbia University and had published articles and books in the late 1920s intended to promote and illustrate research that combined psychological and cultural perspectives in the study of diverse peoples of the world. Sapir had been teaching a course on "the psychology of culture" at the University of Chicago since 1926. An interdisciplinary movement called "culture and personality" (or "the study of personality and culture") took shape at the Social Science Research Council in 1930, with the sociologist W. I. Thomas (see Chapter 1), the psychiatrist-psychoanalyst Harry Stack Sullivan, and the psychologist Mark A. May joining with Sapir and other anthropologists in a series of discussions directed toward setting a research agenda. In 1935, Abram Kardiner, a psychoanalyst who had studied with Boas but became a physician and was analyzed by Freud in 1921, began a seminar at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, inviting anthropologists to present their findings and develop an integrated theory. There were also research and training activities in culture and personality during the 1930s and 1940s in the anthropology departments at Columbia, Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, and Harvard.

By the 1940s, culture and personality had become established in anthropology: The American Anthropological Association elected four of the movement's leaders (Ralph Linton, Ruth Benedict, Clyde Kluckhohn, and A. Irving Hallowell) to its presidency, and the discipline's quasi-official handbook, *Anthropology Today*, edited by A. L. Kroeber (1953), contained five chapters on culture and personality. But this favored position was short-lived. After 1950 there was a steep decline in the movement's reputation, and by 1960 it was widely reported to be dead. The name "psychological anthropology" was adopted to signal a fresh start (Hsu, 1961). In retrospect, these reports were exaggerated, as significant new projects were launched and established investigators continued their research and publication. Yet culture and personality was marginalized within anthropology, and doctoral students were discouraged from specializing in the field. By the later 1960s a revival had begun, followed by the publication of a journal, *Ethos*, in 1973 and the founding of the Society for Psychological Anthropology in 1977, which became a recognized unit of the American Anthropological Association. The field has never lost its vitality, as this book of readings shows, but it needs a new history.

The culture and personality movement was neither centralized nor coordinated; it was not a "school of thought" like the structural-functional anthropology of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, since it lacked an acknowledged leader, an institutional center, and an explicit consensus on theory and method. In fact, culture and personality was a field of exploratory thinking and research, with many viewpoints and divisions; its participants often disagreed with each other on important issues and even disparaged the movement itself without leaving it. Some members of the movement became well known to the general public, while others of equal or greater importance were virtually invisible except in anthropology. The reactions that brought about the movement's sudden decline after 1950 were focused largely on a few parts without even recognizing that there were others.

Two projects at Columbia University were severely criticized for flaws of scholarship that were widely and inaccurately generalized to the culture and personality movement as a whole. One was Ruth Benedict's project on the national character of contemporary East European peoples, studied "at a distance" (i.e. through documents and *émigré* testimony), particularly *The People of Great Russia*, in which Geoffrey Gorer (her former research associate) proposed that a Russian preference for authoritarian rulers was connected to their being swaddled as infants (Gorer and Rickman, 1949). This proposal set off a storm of derision in Soviet studies and the social sciences, and, in any event, most anthropologists disapproved of studying cultures without fieldwork and of generalizing from ethnographic descriptions to the national character of large, complex societies like Russia and Poland. Ruth Benedict had died in 1948, and Margaret Mead, who took over direction of the project, defended Gorer's "swaddling hypothesis" (Mead, 1954), national character research (Mead, 1953), and "the study of culture at a distance" (Mead and Metraux, 1953). Her arguments convinced few anthropologists but may have fostered confusion between the Columbia project (run by Benedict, then Mead), and the culture and personality movement, of which Mead and Benedict had been two of the three founders (the other was Edward Sapir) some 20 years earlier. Thus the scandals of the Columbia project were soon attributed to the culture and personality movement as a whole, even though most participants in the movement were not supporters of the project's approach.

The second Columbia project was that of psychoanalyst Abram Kardiner (1939, 1945), whose seminar of 1937–45 resulted in two books that, though pioneering efforts to create a post-Freudian psychoanalytic anthropology open to social and cultural influences, were flawed by a failure to acknowledge the importance of individual differences in personality and by speculations about the impact of child rearing on personality that many social scientists found unbelievable. The first flaw would fuel the charge that the culture and personality movement assumed “the replication of uniformity” (Wallace, 1961); the second fallacy (like Gorer’s swaddling hypothesis) was derided as an absurd “diaperology” characteristic of the movement as a whole.

But the two Columbia projects were not the whole movement, only the most visible and vulnerable parts of it. We now know that Edward Sapir had long been developing a different line of thought that, though much of it was unpublished at the time, influenced three anthropologists who were constructing an empirical approach to culture and personality: A. Irving Hallowell, Clyde Kluckhohn, and Ralph Linton.

Invisible Pioneers: Building a Theoretical Paradigm

Edward Sapir (1884–1939) has long been recognized as the original theorist of the culture and personality movement, but he died at the age of 55 without completing his book on the psychology of culture. His lectures at Yale and Chicago that were to be chapters of the book were published in 1994, 55 years later. The excerpts reprinted as Chapter 2 of this reader reveal the basic elements of his theoretical framework, forged through disagreements with other pioneers and embodying crucial ambiguities that were passed down to those who sought to translate the theory into field research. That Sapir did not do psychocultural research himself is only one of several limitations that must be recognized in identifying his role in this history: he spent most of his career in linguistic studies, and focused on psychiatry rather than psychology as the partner for an interdisciplinary nexus with anthropology. Yet Sapir’s thought is the indispensable starting point for understanding the promise of psychological anthropology as well as its unsolved problems.

Sapir was by all accounts an exceptionally talented, sophisticated, and original thinker – many called him a genius – whose work on Native American languages helped bring linguistic anthropology into being. By the time he turned his attention to culture and personality, around 1926, he had already made fundamental contributions to linguistics and published a general book on language (Sapir, 1921) full of theoretically significant ideas for the social sciences. His interest in psychology was evident in publications dating back to 1917, but in 1926 he began a friendship with Harry Stack Sullivan, the psychiatrist and renegade psychoanalyst, which played an important part in his theory-building efforts. By that time Sapir was already teaching a lecture course on the psychology of culture at the University of Chicago, which he would bring to Yale and last taught there in 1936–37.

In Sapir’s lectures on the psychology of culture and his published essays on culture and personality, a framework of assumptions can be found that entails the following propositions:

- **Plasticity.** The plasticity of the human organism permits variation in cultural patterns (symbolic codes like language) to develop, distinguishing one human population from another.
- **Cultural patterning, mediation, and communication.** Culture-specific codes mediate between external realities and individual experience by permeating all communication in the population, including the *interpersonal relations* of children from birth onwards.
- **Internalization.** From their communicative experience in *interpersonal* contexts, children internalize cultural meanings as normative standards influencing their conduct and their psychological tendencies. As they become socialized, their behavior is culturally patterned.
- **Individuality.** The culturally patterned psychological tendencies of the individual combine with the person's innate dispositions and specific environmental conditions to create individual differences in how cultural patterns are realized in behavior.
- **Individual differences.** The variability of individual psychological tendencies within a population is critical to understanding the processes of social stability and change.

This is the initial framework for culture and personality studies. Many of these points are not original with Sapir: Plasticity in human development had been emphasized by Boas (and borrowed from Rudolf Virchow, the Berlin biomedical pioneer, with whom Boas worked in 1883); cultural mediation of reality was another Boasian point (derived from phenomenological philosophy); cultural patterning was developed as a concept by Ruth Benedict as well as Sapir; communication, an important focus for Sapir, was also basic to the philosophy of George Herbert Mead; internalization as a conceptual metaphor for social-psychological development seems to have been invented several times (G. H. Mead, L. S. Vygotsky, James Mark Baldwin); and W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki had published versions of the last two points in their "methodological note" to the first volume of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918), excerpts from which are reprinted as Chapter 1 of this reader. Yet Sapir put these and the interpersonal psychiatry of Sullivan together into a framework for anthropological research in his lectures.

Sapir's emphasis on the individual as the locus of culture and on individual variability within a population put him at odds with, and critical of, other former students of Franz Boas: A. L. Kroeber, who treated culture as "superorganic" (disconnected from the individual) on the one hand (Sapir, 1917), and Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, who treated culture as "personality writ large" (suggesting a group personality) on the other. His aversion to reducing either personality or culture to elementary traits that could be aggregated numerically, and his passionate preference for identifying indissoluble "patterns" like the *gestalten* of the German psychologist Koffka or Jung's "psychological types" (or his own sound patterns in language), set Sapir apart from Boas, whose passions included measurable traits and statistical analysis, and put Sapir closer to Benedict.

Sapir's rift with Benedict, his close friend and ally in the culture and personality movement until her formulation of culture as personality writ large in the manuscript of *Patterns of Culture* (1934), was a crucial moment in the history of culture and personality studies (Darnell, 1990). Benedict's book became a best-seller that epitomized cultural anthropology for the American reading public, while Sapir's

position – as represented in Chapter 2 – was known only to his graduate students at Yale and those postdoctoral anthropologists who had participated in conferences and seminars with him. Among the latter were Hallowell, Kluckhohn, and Linton, who sided strongly with Sapir in their publications of the late 1930s, echoing his criticisms of Benedict. Though they were not his students, all three had contacts with Sapir between 1930 and 1936 that influenced their own theoretical positions. In their research projects and publications Sapir's theoretical framework found its realization and its elaboration as a scientific paradigm (LeVine, 2007).

Sapir's framework raised a question he did not answer: If individuals are the loci of culture, and their psychological patterns reflect cultural influence in varying personal patterns, how does the anthropologist describe the distribution of psychological patterns within a population or their variations across populations? Sapir looked to Sullivan's psychiatry for the answer, but that meant case studies or life histories of individuals who might be unrepresentative of the population. Sapir categorically rejected quantitative methods or statistical models, but he offered no coherent alternative.

Hallowell, Kluckhohn, and Linton, however, were keenly aware of the problem and proposed quantitative solutions, including sampling and frequency distributions. Their contrasting attitude toward quantification may reflect the influence of Boas, who used and contributed to modern statistical analysis in his pioneering work on physical growth (Howells, 1959; Tanner, 1959; Xie, 1988; Camic and Xie, 1994). Boas required his doctoral students to take his rigorous seminar on statistics, though Sapir managed to avoid it. Since Hallowell and Linton had studied with Boas at Columbia, and Kluckhohn considered himself a Boasian, they did not adopt Sapir's attitude to quantification when faced with a problem his framework neglected to solve. Instead, their research and theoretical statements of the 1930s and after provided examples of how personality characteristics (Hallowell, 1938, 1945), religious behavior (Kluckhohn, 1938), child development (Kluckhohn, 1939; Leighton and Kluckhohn, 1947), and mental disorders (Linton, 1936, 1945, 1956) could be approached through statistical methods. By adding this methodological dimension to Sapir's framework, Hallowell, Kluckhohn, and Linton prepared the ground for empirical research in psychological anthropology that owed as much to Boas's empiricism as it did to Sapir's theoretical vision.

Each of these three anthropologists also added to the paradigm for research. Linton added a sociological dimension, arguing that the social experience of individuals in a population was differentiated by their statuses and roles, leading to varying personalities (Linton, 1936, 1945). Kluckhohn added an ideational dimension by re-conceptualizing culture as a "blueprint for action" (Kluckhohn and Kelly, 1945), an idea later elaborated (without the psychology) by his student Clifford Geertz (1973). And Hallowell, writing in the 1950s, added a focus on the self (Chapter 3 of this reader), a concept that would eventually eclipse personality in psychocultural research (Part V of this reader).

Thus the paradigm for psychological anthropology was largely developed by Sapir, originally with Benedict, and later (after 1934) without her, and completed by three anthropologists influenced by Boas as well as Sapir. A fuller history of the period up to 1955 would include the contributions of Kardiner (1939, 1945) and Whiting and Child (1953), who devised more specific theoretical models consistent with what I have described as the Sapir line of influence. This line of influence

contributed the basic ideas in terms of which most psychological anthropologists then and now, despite their theoretical and methodological divisions, frame their research and interpret their results. In the next section I identify some of the sources of this intellectual tradition in anthropology.

Sources of Culture and Personality Theory

Culture and personality was a distinctively American movement, born of conditions that marked it off from British explorations at the boundaries of anthropology with psychology and psychoanalysis by W. H. R. Rivers, C. G. Seligman, Bronislaw Malinowski, and F. C. Bartlett and from the Soviet Russian development of "socio-historical psychology" by L. S. Vygotsky and A. R. Luria. These peculiar cultural and historical conditions include:

- *Native American cultures.* Boas and most of his students, including Sapir, Benedict, and Hallowell, were dedicated to the study of the Native North Americans and concerned with questions concerning the diversity of their cultural traditions, the vulnerability of those traditions to social change, and their transmission to new generations (Darnell, 2001).
- *European immigration.* The influx of Eastern, Central and Southern Europeans into the United States between 1880 and 1924 made cultural heterogeneity an inescapable social fact for social scientists. Boas and Sapir were immigrants themselves, and Boas studied immigrant parents and children to detect the effects of environmental change on physical growth (Boas, 1912). As a beginning graduate student in 1923, Margaret Mead followed Boas's advice to study Italian-American children in her hometown of Hammonton, Pennsylvania, correlating their intelligence test scores with the amount of Italian spoken in their homes (Mead, 1959:131). W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki had published their five-volume work on immigrants from Poland to Chicago (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918), excerpts from which appear in Chapter 1 of this reader. The grounding of culture and personality theories in the immigrant experience was clear from the start.
- *Language.* Boasian anthropology (unlike its British counterparts) included the study of language, and Sapir introduced Indo-European linguistic methods into research on unwritten Native American languages (Darnell, 2001, p.51). His argument that language is central to the social experience of the individual as well as an aspect of culture became a fundamental tenet of the culture and personality movement (Sapir, 1921).
- *Pragmatism.* The culture and personality movement developed in a milieu of social thought that had been shaped by the American philosophers known as pragmatists: Charles Saunders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, Josiah Royce, and George Herbert Mead. Although the intellectual history remains to be spelled out, it is clear that the founders of the culture and personality movement were directly and indirectly influenced by these pragmatist philosophers. Echoes of Peirce on meaning, James on the self, Dewey on learning, and Mead on the internalization of social interactions as symbolically mediated self – resonate throughout the theorizing of the culture and personality movement.

- *Neo-Freudian psychoanalysis*. The founders of the culture and personality movement were acquainted with, but critical of, Freudian psychoanalysis. In the 1930s, European refugees in New York joined American colleagues in the “Neo-Freudian” movement of cultural revisionism in psychoanalysis led by Karen Horney, Erich Fromm, and Harry Stack Sullivan, who directly influenced Mead, Benedict, and Sapir. At the same time, Kardiner’s seminar on culture and psychoanalysis moved from the New York Psychoanalytic Institute to the Department of Anthropology at Columbia, with Linton as a participant. From these efforts, the culture and personality field embraced a psychoanalysis purged of biological universals and open to social and cultural influences.

Thus the culture and personality movement arose from research on cultural diversity and intergenerational transmission among Native Americans and European immigrants to the United States and was built on premises derived in part from philosophical pragmatism, linguistics, and revised forms of psychoanalysis during the first half of the 20th century.

Chapter 1: *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, a five-volume work published in 1918, anticipated the culture and personality movement in its attention to individuals and families undergoing social and psychological change as they migrated from Poland to Chicago. Thomas, who had studied with G. H. Mead and would later work with Sapir in initiating culture and personality studies as a movement, was the leading theorist of the Chicago School of Sociology, which conducted ethnographic studies of urban life. In the “methodological note” from which the selections come, he and Znaniecki (a Polish philosopher of neo-Kantian inclinations) formulate a distinction between the social and the psychological and their adaptive interactions that influenced American social scientists – including the culture and personality movement – for generations to come.

Chapter 2: These selections from Sapir’s lectures on the psychology of culture, delivered in 1936 and earlier but not published until 1994, reveal a conception of culture and personality, including his critique of Benedict, that remains the central framework of psychological anthropology.

Chapter 3: The first selection, from Hallowell’s *Psychological Leads for Ethnological Field Workers* of 1938, shows his early effort to translate the ideas of Sapir and others into an empirical research program for culture and personality studies. The second selection, written about 15 years later, is from his now-famous essay, “The Self and its Behavioral Environment,” a foundation-stone for contemporary psychological anthropology.

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