

CULTURE AND PERSONALITY

The culture personality school of thought began principally in the United States in the 1930s. The above school explained relationships between childrearing customs and human behaviours in different societies. The culture personality theory combined elements of psychology, anthropology, and sociology, but principally theory involved the application of psychoanalytic principles to ethnographic data. The school emphasised the cultural moulding of the personality and focused on the development of the individual. Culture-and-personality theorists argued that personality types were created in socialisation, and they placed particular emphasis on child-rearing practices such as feeding, weaning, and toilet training. The pioneers of this school of thought were students of Franz Boas and Kroeber. They include American anthropologists like **Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Ralph Linton, Abram Kardiner and Cora DuBois**.

According to Culture and Personality School, Cultural Practices were nothing but the character, or temperament or personality of members of a particular group. They began to deal with such question as to why there is similarity in personality or character traits of members of particular group. In their view it was culture which influenced the character, temperament or personality of group members. All members of a particular group are reared in the same cultural environment, according to which their character traits or personality types are shaped.

The primary aim of the culture and personality school of thought, is to examine the interrelationships between culture and personality. The attempts of this school are to study culture as it is embodied in the character of its members, rather than seeking to analyse culture as it is manifested in material items or social institutions.

The scholars of this school have suggested 3 approaches to study and examine the interrelationship between culture and personality:

- i) Culture determines the form of personality
- ii) Personality builds culture
- iii) C & P, both are inseparable and influence each other

Impact of Personality on Culture

Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) a student of Franz Boas, documented in her PhD dissertation the rapidly deteriorating Native American societies, providing the impetus to pursue culture and personality studies. Through her work on the patterning of culture at an individual level, Benedict opened anthropology into a much larger discussion between the disciplines of anthropology and psychology.

In her thesis on topic '**The concept of Guardian spirit in North America**', she attempted to show that among North American contemporary societies, people have in mind a concept of Guardian spirit. This guardian spirit commands every kind of respect and is held responsible for joys and sorrows. Thus, guardian spirit moulds the behaviour pattern of the group members. Such pattern can be seen in performances of rites, rituals, ceremonies, festivals etc. which form the part of cultural practices of a particular group.

Benedict's Concept of Culture Pattern:

A culture pattern is formed when traits and complexes become related to each other in functional roles. Culture traits are the smallest or single element of a culture. These units or elements when organise about some nuclear point of reference they form culture complex. When many traits and

complexes of culture become integrated into functional whole, they form culture pattern. Eg:- Gandhism, Spiritualism, Caste system, Joint family system.

In her book, **Patterns of Culture (1934)**, Benedict has developed the concept of culture pattern. While clarifying the concept of culture patterns, she has talked about the configuration of culture. The culture described in patterns of culture, illustrates Benedict's idea that a culture can be viewed as consisting of cultural configuration integrated under the domination of one general master pattern.

She also stressed that a culture is organised around a basic theme, and that all of the various elements of that culture fit together. A culture according to Benedict is analogous to an individual in that it is more or less a consistent pattern of thought and action. Hence, she says any analysis of culture requires a psychological approach. According to her when traits and complexes become related to each other in functional roles, a cultural pattern is formed. Many cultural patterns integrate themselves into a functional whole and form a special design of a whole culture. This special design of whole culture is called configuration of culture.

The integration of culture is on the basis of tendency seen in all aspects of culture. This tendency is called by Benedict "special genius" that brings about integration. She says there are two types of geniuses found in human society i.e. **Apollonian and Dionysian**. In Apollonian pattern, one will see the existence of peace, discipline and kindness. The Dionysian culture is characterised by a great deal of changes and aggressiveness. These two geniuses mould the personality of the members of their group. The Apollonian personality compels members of the group to behave in one form and the Dionysian personality in the other.

Applying this approach Benedict looked at different societies and described them in terms of their basic personality configurations. Pointing out how these personality types fit in with the overall culture. In her monograph Patterns of Culture (1934) she discussed, through literature, contrastive personality types **between Zuni of the Southwest America and Kwakiutl of the Northeast Coast of North America**. The primary occupations of the two communities are different, the Zuni are foragers in a resource-rich environment whereas the Kwakiutl are agriculturists. She describes Zuni as very cooperative, never excessive in any aspect of their life. The typical Zuni was a person who sought to mingle with the group, and who did not wish to stand out as a superior among the other members of the tribe.

While comparing her study she found cultural configuration of Kwakiutl much different from that of the Zuni. According to cultural pattern Kwakiutl were characterised by a frenzied outlook, excess being the rule rather than the exception. They were **ambitious and striving, and individuality was emphasised in every aspect of their life**.

She considered the Zuni to be non-competitive, non-aggressive, and gentle etc., whereas the Kwakiutl to be characterised by strife, factionalism, painful ceremonies, etc. On the basis of above characteristics in her view the two tribal communities are represented by two contrastive psychological attributes on the basis of which she describes Zuni as Apollonian and Kwakiutl as, Dionysian after the Greek Gods of wine and light (i.e. wine as Dionysian and light as Apollonian) respectively.

Impact of Culture on Personality Formation

Margaret Mead (1901-1978) another student of Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, also investigated the relationship between culture and personality. Her monograph *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1949) established her as one of the leading lady anthropologists of the day.

In her well-known book **Coming of Age in Samoa**, based on **nine months' intensive fieldwork**, **compares Samoan with American adolescent** girls. She hypothesized that the stresses related to puberty in girls were culturally and not biologically determined, as her study showed such stresses were mainly associated with American adolescents whereas the Samoan adolescents had relatively an easy transition into sexual maturation.

While studying Samoa she found that the whole cultural mood in Samoa was much less emotional than that in America. For example, the facts of birth, death and sex were not hidden from Samoan children. Premarital sex was considered natural and did not demand strong emotional involvements and adolescents were not confronted with the necessity of selecting from a variety of often conflicting standards of ethics and values. Adolescence was, thus, not marked by storm and stress in Samoa, but was simply a part of the gradual development of life.

In her study on Samoan, Margaret Mead claims that children are taught early in their life that if they behave well or are quiet and obedient they can have their good way of life. Arrogance, flippancy and courage are not the qualities emphasised either for boy or girl. The children are expected to get up early, be obedient and cheerful, play with children etc. and the adults are expected to be industrious, skilful, loyal to their relatives, wise, peaceful, serene, gentle, generous, altruistic, etc.

Another important book of Mead is entitled **Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies** (1935). In this particular study Mead deals with the impact of culture on personality formation. In this study like Benedict, Mead compared three different cultures, namely **Arapesh, Mundugumor and Tschambuli**, to test the range of variation of cultural patterns. The study was to understand why societies living in same area differ in their character, personality and temperament and why within the same society, temperaments of male and female differ.

From her study she found that in Arapesh, cultural environments are such that both males and females have submissive temperament. In their culture, such personality traits are the matter of great praise and all members in this society follow these cultural traits with great enthusiasm. Among Mundugumor society, both males and females are aggressive. In this society, the personality traits of its members are reflected by such characters as suspiciousness, competition, quarrelsomeness, ego, jealousy, and unkindness. The cultural environment of Mundugumor is such that every member is found to be in struggle, conflict, and competition with each other. These cultural practices have direct bearing upon the personality formation of members of Mundugumor. The cultural traditions of Tschambuli are such that males acquire submissive temperament and females possess aggressive character. It is a matrilineal society dominated by female authority. The submissive character among males and aggressive character among females of their culture are reflected in the personality traits of Tschambuli (Upadhyay and Pandey, 1993).

From the above discussion of these three societies Mead reflected that differences in personality types of male and female in the same society or in different societies are due to cultural processes, which differ from one cultural group to another or from one society to another. She concludes by saying that it is a culture influence which moulds the character, temperament and personality of members of the group.

Mead did not confine herself to the study of character, temperament and personality of different cultural groups. She opined that the study of national character can be done by the culture and personality approach. Culture has been developed by human beings and is successively learned by each generation. The learned behaviour is reflected in the character of group of nation. Thus, the study of national character has historical depth of traditions, continuity and change as various dimensions. In her study **Keep Your Powder Dry: An Anthropologist Looks at America** (1942), she deals with the national character of America. She did not find difference in the personality of a baby in America as compared to Japan and Russia. Thus, the early personality was similar. They gradually start differing as the growth follows and family education and school education become effective.

Impact of Culture on Personality and Vice-versa

The other early anthropologists who had made significant contribution to this field are **Ralph Linton (1893-1953), Abram Kardiner (1891-1981), and Cora Du Bois (1903-1991)**. The three authors regard culture and personality as interdependent and complementary to each other. They tried to correlate the type of cultural patterns with the type of individual personalities obtained in that society. **They firmly believed that as a consequence of continuous contact with a particular type of cultural pattern, similar types of personalities emerge.**

Ralph Linton:

Ralph Linton was a co-founder of the basic personality structure theory with Kardiner. He sought to establish a basic personality for each culture.

He embarked on a series of creative and stimulating studies which provided new conceptions of social structure and cultural organization. He related these conceptions in a clear if somewhat simple manner to the biological individual and his personality and utilized them in his analyses of the processes of cultural change. After studying the cultural behaviour of different societies Ralph Linton (1945) noted three types of culture viz;

- 1) real culture (actual behaviour)
- 2) Ideal culture (Philosophical and traditional culture)
- 3) Culture construct (what is written on cultural elements etc.)

Real culture is the sum total of behaviour of the members of the society, which are learned and shared in particular situations. A real culture pattern represents a limited range of behaviour within which the response of the members of a society to a particular situation will normally be form. Thus various individuals can behave differently but still in accordance with a real culture pattern.

Ideal culture pattern is formed by philosophical traditions. In this, some traits of culture are regarded as ideals.

Linton stated that there is a difference between the way of life of people and what we study and write about. Both are different dimensions of culture. The former is reality and the latter our understanding of the same. If the former is called culture the latter can be called **culture construct**. It is an abstraction from the reality which is the actual human behaviour.

Linton has made distinction among **cultural universals, cultural alternatives and cultural specialities**.

- I) He is of opinion that some culture traits are necessary to all members of society- cultural universals.
- II) Some traits which are shared by some members- culture alternatives

III) Culture specialities are elements of culture, which are shared by some, but not all groups within a society.

He conceived of culture as both overt, or open to observation, and covert, with an inferred content of meanings, emotions, values, attitudes, “and so on.” Linton also gave the concept of status and role for describing the pattern of behaviour in society. **Status** describes the position a person occupies in a particular setting. We all occupy several statuses and play the roles that may be associated with them. A **Role** is the set of norms, values, behaviour’s, and personality characteristics attached to a status.

Status can be mainly of two types: ‘**ascribed**’ or **inherited** and ‘**achieved**’ or **acquired**.

If an individual’s status is determined at his birth, it would be regarded as an ascribed status. In India, being born a female is still quite a disadvantage in large parts nor the country, although we have a legal guarantee as to the equality of the sexes. Again, in our country, birth in a particular caste among the Hindus is clearly an inherited status and the question of changing it in his life time is virtually as absurdity.

Achieved statuses are those which the individual acquires during his or her lifetime as a result of the exercise of knowledge, ability, skill and/or perseverance. Occupation provides an example of status that may be either ascribed or achieved, and which serves to differentiate caste-like societies from modern ones.

Roles also are of two kinds: “actual” roles—the way roles are in fact performed; and “ideal” roles—the normative patterns that serve as models for actual role performance. The total set of ideal roles constituted for Linton a social system. With this conception of roles, including child roles and those acquired as an adult, Linton laid the foundation of a theory of behavior that could bridge the gap between the individual and the cultural system.

Regarding basic culture, he argued that in a society all the individuals undergo a similar type of socialisation, custom, traditions etc., and therefore, individuals acquire a common set of habits, which may be called a **basic personality of the society**.

Culture is integrated because all members share certain early experiences that produce a specifiable basic personality structure.

Abram Kardiner:

Abram Kardiner (1891-1981) Kardiner, along with Linton developed the concept “**basic personality type**” in his book, **Psychological Frontiers of Society (1945)**. The theory basic personality type is a collection of fundamental personality traits shared by normal members of a society acquired by adapting to a culture. The above theory was formulated after reading Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion* (1928/1961) in which he argues that children’s early life experiences determine their later religious life. Similar to Freud, Kardiner understood that the foundations of personality development were laid in early stage of childhood. Further Kardiner argued that since basic childrearing procedures are common in a society they resulted in some common personality traits among members of a society. He said that the basic personality exists in the context of particular cultural institutions or patterned ways of doing things in a society.

While postulating the existence of a basic personality type, Kardiner divided the institutional aspect of culture in 2 categories **i) Primary ii) Secondary**

Primary institutions are those responsible for forming the basic personality structure. Primary institution is the one which is older and more stable. Although he didn’t mention the list of primary

institutions, yet some example of Primary cultural institutions include kinship, childrearing, sexuality and subsistence, which are widely shared by societies. The shared personality traits across the societies are what constitute the basic personality structure.

The secondary cultural institutions, on the other hand, include religion, rituals, folkways, norms etc. Between primary and secondary institutions, he poses the basic personality structure. According to him, childhood plays significant role in the formation of basic personality structure.



Kardiner's concept of 'Basic Personality type' can be understood better by going through the example of Marquesas, a Polynesian Island Culture. Among Marquesa islanders, periodic starvation due to severe drought, constitutes the chief problem in social adaptation. Marquesans deal with the problem of limited food supply by expedient of female infanticide.

In this case, solution of one problem poses derivative problems. In Marquesans, control of population leads to female shortage (5:2). This reduces sexual opportunity. This has led to polyandry.

This has important effects on attitude and behaviour of Marquesans. Women has problem of equitably devoting her time and attention between her husband and children. With several husbands to satisfy, the problem is greatly magnified. Mother spends most of her time with husbands, and when not with them, at the local version of beauty shop, maintaining the condition of her status and prestige. This lead to maternal neglect of children.

In same way, husband too suffer from female neglect. Hence a common shared hatred for women. In folktales of Marquesan women are represented as wicked, heartless, exploiter/ they are portrayed as cannibals, seductress of young men and robbers of children's food. In the folklore Marquesan express a fear and hatred for women.

Cora Du Bois:

Following the Basic Personality Construct of Kardiner, **Cora Du Bois** also formulated a similar construct which she named '**Modal Personality**' involving a **more statistical concept**. Here, the basic personality is expressed in the **most frequent type of patterned individual behaviour** observed in a society. Du Bois (1903-) was heavily influenced by the work of Abram Kardiner and Ralph Linton. Her experience as an ethnographer and psychologist provided a valuable link in the chain of thought of the culture and personality school. Du Bois modified Kardiner and Linton's notion of basic personality structure with her modal personality theory. She assumed that a certain personality structure occurs most frequently within a society, but that it is not necessarily common to all members of that society. **Modal personality defined as the personality typical of a culturally bounded population, as indicated by the central tendency of a defined frequency distribution.**

To develop the concept of modal personality Kardiner gathered data through psychological tests, which include projective tests Rorschach, or "ink-blot" test, and the TAT (or Thematic Apperception Test). TAT consists of pictures that the respondents are asked to explain or describe. The above tests

combined with observation of frequency of certain behaviours, collection of life histories and dreams, and analysis of oral literature.

Incidentally, Kardiner did not have the kind of data he needed to prove his theory. To overcome this handicap, Cora Du Bois went to Alor Island in the Dutch East Indies where she collected variety of ethnographic and psychological data. When she returned in 1939 she along with Kardiner analysed the data and arrived at the same conclusions about basic characteristics of Alorese personality. On the basis of this work she proposed 'modal personality' by which she meant the statistically most common personality type. This approach allowed interplay between culture and personality, and provided for variation in personality that exists in any society. This was an improvement upon Kardiner's 'basic personality theory' because of its ability to explain for the variation in personality types within a given culture.

She published the findings of her research on Alor in the year (1945) under the title **The People of Alora: A Social Psychological Study of East Indian Island**. For her research purpose, she spent almost eighteen months on the island of Alor, in eastern Indonesia. Her experiments were of three kinds:

- 1) She collected information on child-rearing;
- 2) She collected eight biographies, each with dream material; and
- 3) She administered a broad range of projective tests –the Rorschach test to thirty-seven subjects, a word-association test to thirty-six subjects, and a drawing test to fifty-five children.

A rather unfavourable modal personality for the Alorese emerged from this many sided investigations. Alorese of both sexes are described by Du Bois and her colleagues as suspicious and antagonistic, prone to violent and emotional outbursts, often of a jealous nature. They tend to be uninterested in the world around them, slovenly in workmanship, and lacking an interest in goals. Kardiner drew attention to the absence of idealised parental figures in the life stories. Oberholzer noted the lack of capacity for sustained creative effort, indicated by his reading of the Rorschach scores. Schmidt-Waehner identified a lack of imagination and a strong sense of loneliness in the children's drawings.

Turning to the possible causative influences, Du Bois and her co-researchers focused on the experiences of the Alorese during infancy and early childhood, up to the age of six or so. At the root of much of Alorese personality development, they suggested, is the division of labour in that society. Women are the major food suppliers, working daily in the family gardens, while men occupy themselves with commercial affairs, usually the trading of pigs, gongs and kettledrums. Within about two weeks after giving birth, the mother returns to her outdoor work, leaving the infant with the father, a grandparent, or an older sibling. She deprives the newborn child of the comfort of a maternal presence and of breast-feeding for most of the day. The infant thus experiences oral frustration and resultant anxiety. At the same time, the baby suffers bewildering switches in attention, from loving and petting to neglect and bad-tempered rejection. Thus, maternal neglect is viewed as being largely responsible for the Alorese personality.

Criticisms of culture and personality theory

Because Benedict believed that each society had a wide range of cultural options to choose from she did not explain why a society chooses one and not the others. Benedict has been criticised on her studies because of her strong belief that cultures have logical constancy. She has been criticised for saying that Pueblo in her study they did take alcohol during her fieldwork and they still do. She has been criticised for her statement like ignoring aspects of cooperation among Kwakiutl and strife, suicide and alcoholism among the Zuni cultures. Applying individual personality attributes to

characterise whole cultures was also considered to be risky, as was later found from national character studies. Derek Freeman strongly criticised whose findings are completely contradictory to those of Meads. In her Samoan study she found the girls carefree about sexual experimentation whereas Freeman found a strict virginity complex among them. During their studies Mead noticed a free male-female relationship, while he found male-female hostility. The differences occur in their studies because their fieldwork was conducted in different Samoan villages at the time-gap of 15 years.

Prior to Freeman, Marvin Harris has criticised Mead for being too generalised about the emotions of Samoan girls.

Morris Opler criticised this configurationalist approach stating that there are not only two bases of cultural integration but many. Thus, this approach is very narrow.

Even in small societies Kardiner's basic personality structure could not explain the variation in personality traits for this reason he has been criticised. Later on the weakness of the theory was taken care of by Du Bois' in modal personality theory.

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