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Interactional Psychology: Some Implications for Psychological Anthropology

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Recent developments in psychology are bringing about a rapprochement between behaviorists, trait psychologists, and psychodynamically oriented theorists. The incipient perspective, which has been labeled "interactional psychology," focuses on persons-in-situations and raises some penetrating questions for psychological anthropology. Attempts by interactionists to reconcile traditional concepts of "personality" with evidence demonstrating the power of situations to pattern behavior are discussed. It is proposed that the interactionist framework fits well with recent trends in anthropology that emphasize the contextualization of behavior and an interest in intracultural diversity. [psychological anthropology, personality, situation, ecology of behavior]

IN THIS PAPER I EXAMINE some recent developments in psychology that have involved discussions between behaviorists, trait psychologists, and psychodynamically oriented theorists. The thrust seems to be toward a rapprochement of previously opposing viewpoints, and the incipient perspective has been labeled "interactional" psychology. Before discussing these developments, however, I will make some historical observations concerning the influence of psychological theory on psychological anthropology.

PSYCHOLOGY'S INFLUENCE ON PSYCHOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

It is significant that the initial label for the subdiscipline was "culture and personality." These were parallel terms, both emphasizing systematic integration, on an abstract level, of behavioral patterns and/or propensities. Both were concerned with the structuring of habitual behavior, leading to a confounding of the concepts in much of the research that characterized the field. As Sapir noted during this period, "the more fully one tries to understand a culture, the more it seems to take on the characteristics of a personality organization" (1934:412). This perspective sometimes led to a rather casual use of psychological (or psychiatric) labels to describe culture configurations.

The two theoretical orientations that were important to early culture and personality workers were psychoanalysis and behaviorist learning theory. The impetus toward psychoanalytic theory was facilitated by Sapir, who, in his article "Why Cultural Anthropology Needs the Psychiatrist," argued that cultural anthropology could not avoid testing

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its analysis of "social" and "cultural" patterns in terms of individual realities (Sapir 1938). As a dynamic theory of human functioning, psychoanalysis was congenial to anthropologists because it presented personality as an open system interacting with society (Honigmann 1976:293).

Also, as Kluckhohn (1965) pointed out, such psychoanalytic concepts as "ambivalence" helped us to understand hitherto puzzling phenomena such as death beliefs and practices; "projection" illuminated witchcraft anxieties; and similarities between compulsion neuroses and ritual activities were too unmistakable to be denied (ibid.:90). Furthermore, Kluckhohn noted, the search for meaning in the apparently chaotic and nonadaptive behavior of the mentally ill struck a sympathetic chord in anthropologists who were engaged in making functional sense out of seemingly bizarre customs. He asserted that the amnesty the psychoanalyst grants to incestuous dreams is the same that the anthropologist accedes to strange customs, with both insisting that even weird behavior has significance in the economy of individuals or cultures. In addition, concepts such as phantasy, libido, the unconscious, identification, and projection were found by anthropologists to be useful as a way of understanding religion, art, and other symbolic phenomena. Kluckhohn insinuated that these strengths made psychoanalysis a more acceptable approach for anthropologists than learning theory, which could be applied to animals at least as much as to humans (ibid.:90–91).

In fact Kluckhohn may have overstated the case. What seems to have happened is that psychodynamic concepts of personality and associated clinical methods (e.g., projective tests) became the focus of psychological ethnography, while cross-cultural theorists translated Freudian notions into behavioristic propositions. Thus Whiting and Child (1953), although testing hypotheses derived from psychoanalysis, were concerned with antecedent conditions and subsequent behavior, but not with personality dynamics. Drawing from learning theory formulations developed by Miller and Dollard (1941), Whiting and Child followed Gillin (1948) in conceiving of customs as habits shared by members of a society. Motives, values, and beliefs were defined in terms of customs, and personality was treated as a mediating process between observable input and output variables, to be inferred but not measured directly. Behaviorism thus provided a model for rigorously testing cross-cultural propositions about relationships between child-rearing variables and "custom complexes." The model has endured and has been the source of a rich body of findings (see Whiting 1968; Harrington and Whiting 1972, for summaries), although the influence of learning theory has become less explicit in more recent studies.

Nevertheless, as Hallowell has pointed out, the premises of behaviorism were thoroughly compatible with those of ethnographers in the United States during the Boasian period, and with the biological functionalism espoused by Malinowski, who acknowledged the utility of concentrating on observations of overt behavior (Hallowell 1954; Levine 1963). They conceived of cultural patterns as rooted in habit formation, and behaviorism's emphasis on conditioning fitted nicely with their suppositions. Also noteworthy are the explicit attempts, such as those of Whiting (1941) and Landy (1959), to use behaviorist theory as a foundation for psychological ethnography. However, most ethnographers interested in culture and personality all but ignored behavioristic psychology, perhaps because so much of the early literature in that field was based on animal experimentation and focused on the acquisition of nonverbal behavior, whereas the ethnographers were preoccupied with explaining social phenomena in terms of symbolic processes. The absence of a concept of personality suited to such concerns further detracted from behaviorism's appeal to those who were oriented in this direction.

But times are changing, and so have the premises of cultural anthropology, behaviorism, psychoanalysis, and personality psychology. A common thread seems to involve movement toward a view that aims at appreciating the complexity of social behavior;

i.e., its multifocality and contextualization. In anthropology, this emergent viewpoint is leading toward an increased interest in intracultural diversity (Pelto and Pelto 1975) and the patterning effects of critical events, both recurrent and historically unique. The model of sociocultural systems that postulates uniformities based on programmed normative regularities and/or shared personality traits is dissolving as we take a closer look, and as cultures join the mainstream of historical change. In place of a concern for global generalizations, many anthropologists are turning toward the interpretation of multifaceted interactions, and analysis is "thickening" (Geertz 1973).

Among psychologically oriented anthropologists, this shift has been accompanied by an enhanced interest in cognition. Perhaps one reason is that coherent models of complex sociocultural systems are more compellingly formulated on the basis of a limited degree of cognitive equivalence than on a relatively high degree of presumably shared motivational structures (Wallace 1961).

One manifestation of this shift in emphasis has been an attack on the concept of personality itself. Hsu (1961) initially suggested the change from "culture and personality" to "psychological anthropology" in order to avoid the individualistic connotation of personality, and the implication of fixed dispositions relatively impervious to lifelong processes of interaction that are at the heart of cultural analysis. More recently, D'Andrade (1970, 1974) and Shweder (1972, 1975, 1977) have called attention to the fact that personality constructs are so heavily influenced by cognitive schemata that they generally reflect clusters of meaning evoked by conduct rather than correlational patterns found in conduct.

THE TREND TOWARD INTERACTIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

In psychology a parallel shift has been taking place. Not only has cognitive psychology itself been an area of efflorescence, but within other areas a reformulation has been taking place that is shifting the focus away from a concern for identifying a set of fixed personality traits, or motivational dispositions, toward a concern for behavioral contexts and cognitive processes. The major impetus for such a reformulation has come from the work of Walter Mischel, whose book *Personality and Assessment* (1968) challenged the assumption, so prevalent in Western psychology, that personality dispositions, or traits, are relatively stable, highly consistent attributes that exert widely *generalized* causal effects on behavior. After reviewing the voluminous literature on personality assessment, Mischel concluded that the data simply do not support the hypothesis that persons exhibit marked cross-situational consistencies in their behavior. Rather, he considered the data to "fit the view that behaviors depend on highly specific events but remain stable when the consequences to which they lead, and the evoking conditions, remain stable" (ibid.:282). Mischel asserted that the notion of "typical" behavior has led psychometricians and trait theorists to view situational variability as a form of error, and advocated a situational view of dynamics, which "rather than being exclusively intrapsychic, focuses on the relations between behavior and the conditions in which it occurs, and on how an individual's behavior in any one condition is functionally related to what he does on another occasion" (ibid.:298).

Mischel's situationist emphasis stimulated considerable debate (well documented in Endler and Magnusson 1976, and Magnusson and Endler 1977), and drew strong responses from theorists taking a trait or psychodynamic view of personality. Although clearly differing with respect to conceptual models and the kinds of data on which they focus, the latter two traditions have had in common a stress on personality variables as the main determinants of behavior. In contrast, situationist research has been aimed at

finding general laws for behavioral reactions to various kinds and intensities of external stimulation.

Although Mischel's book was interpreted by many as a broadside attack on the concept of personality, and as an attempt to replace people with situations as a unit of study, he said in a subsequent article that this was far from his intention. Rather, he claims, the purpose was to draw attention to abuses of personality models by clinicians, and specifically to attack their tendency "to use a few behavioral signs to categorize people enduringly into fixed slots on the assessor's favorite nomothetic trait dimensions and to assume that these slot positions were sufficiently informative to predict specific behavior and to make extensive decisions about a person's whole life" (Mischel 1979:740).

The ensuing debate stimulated a number of theorists to seek a resolution, leading to an interactionist reformulation of the issue. For example, Pervin and Lewis assert that from an interactionist perspective

> the issue is not whether behavior is consistent or situation-specific, or whether persons or situations are more important, or how much of the variance is accounted for by person factors and how much by situation factors, but rather the issue is how characteristics of the organism interact with characteristics of the situation to produce the observed regularities in behavior. [1978:6-7]

The move toward interactionism has by no means resolved all the conflicts inherent in the contrasting perspectives of trait psychology, psychodynamic theory, and situationism, however. Conceptual confusion remains a problem. Even the term "interaction" is used in a variety of different ways, ranging from a mechanical, statistical conception of variables within a data matrix, to dynamic conceptions oriented toward accounting for the processes by which individual behavior develops and is maintained within an interwoven structure of persons and situations (see Overton and Reese 1973; Endler 1975; Pervin and Lewis 1978). Units of analysis range from global dispositions (e.g., introversion) to highly specific traits (e.g., test anxiety) on the person side, and from grossly defined settings (e.g., at church) to minimal cues (e.g., eye contact) on the situation side. Some theorists regard the attempt to separate the person from the situation in the interaction process as fruitless, and suggest that researchers focus on the person-situation set as a basic unit of analysis (Alker 1977; Nuttin 1977; Pervin 1977). Nor have researchers abandoned their favorite methods, whether these are based on testing, clinical interviewing and observation, or experimentation.

Nevertheless, some significant reformulations are taking place that may be of consequence for the future of psychological anthropology. I will briefly consider shifts taking place in two areas that appear to be of particular importance—social behaviorism and psychodynamic theory.

In his highly influential paper, "Toward a Cognitive Social Learning Reconceptualization of Personality," Mischel (1973) rejects as a pseudoissue controversy that pits person against situation in order to determine which is more important, and acknowledges that while some situations may be powerful determinants of behavior, others are likely to be exceedingly trivial. Rather than argue about the existence of personality consistency across situations, he holds that "it would be more constructive to analyze and study the cognitive and social learning conditions that seem to foster—and to undermine—its occurrence" (ibid.:259). His main concern in this paper is to propose a set of person-variables consistent with overall findings on the discriminativeness of behavior and on the complexity of interactions between individual and situation. In essence, the cognitive social learning approach to personality he advocates "shifts the unit of study from global traits inferred from behavioral signs to the individual's cognitive activities and behavior patterns, studied in relation to the specific conditions that evoke, maintain, and modify them and which they, in turn, change" (ibid.:265).

With regard to the interaction of situational and person-centered variables, Mischel holds that situations affect behavior insofar as they influence the individual's encoding, expectancies, and subjective value of stimuli, or ability to generate response patterns. As for their relative potency in determining behavior, he writes:

> Psychological "situations" and "treatments" are powerful to the degree that they lead all persons to construe the particular events the same way, induce *uniform* expectancies regarding the most appropriate response pattern, provide adequate incentives for the performance of that response pattern, and instill the skills necessary for its satisfactory construction and execution. Conversely, situations and treatments are weak to the degree that they are not uniformly encoded, do not generate uniform expectancies concerning the desired behavior, do not offer sufficient incentives for its performance, or fail to provide the learning conditions required for successful construction of the behavior.
>
> Individual differences can determine behavior in a given situation most strongly when the situation is ambiguously structured (as in projective testing) so that subjects are uncertain about how to categorize it and have no clear expectations about the behaviors most likely to be appropriate (normative, reinforced) in that situation. To the degree that the situation is "unstructured," the subject will expect that virtually *any* response from him is equally likely to be appropriate (i.e., will lead to similar consequences), and variance from individual differences will be greatest. Conversely, when subjects expect that only *one* response will be reinforced . . . and that no other responses are equally good, and all subjects are motivated and capable of making an appropriate response, then individual differences will be minimal and situational effects prepotent. To the degree that subjects are exposed to powerful treatments, the role of individual differences will be minimized. Conversely, when treatments are weak, ambiguous, or trivial, individual differences in person variables should exert significant effects. [Mischel 1973:276, emphasis in original]

Mischel calls for a personality psychology more attuned to the dual human tendency to invent constructs and adhere to them, as well as to generate subtly discriminative behaviors across settings and over time. Such an approach would emphasize the crucial role of situations, but would view them as informational inputs whose behavioral impact depends on how they are processed by persons. It would also recognize that a person's behavior changes the situations in his or her life as well as being changed by them (Mischel 1973:279). Mischel concludes a subsequent paper with a comment on the implications of this position for research.

> Although the need to qualify generalizations about human behavior complicates life for the social scientist, it does not prevent one from studying human affairs scientifically; it only dictates a respect for complexity of the enterprise and alerts one to the dangers of oversimplifying the nature and causes of human behavior. That danger is equally great whether one is searching for generalized (global) person-free situational effects or for generalized (global) situation-free personality variables. [Mischel 1977:352]

It is clear that this is a behavioristic approach far removed from the mechanistic stimulus-response, black-box, conceptualizations that prevailed when culture and personality studies were just beginning.

Paul Wachtel, a psychoanalyst, responded to Mischel's 1968 volume (Wachtel 1976) by acknowledging the perceptiveness and cogency of the latter's critique, while arguing that modern psychodynamic approaches are far more able to deal with human responsiveness to situations than is sometimes acknowledged by behaviorists. Wachtel also stated that the ways in which behaviorists frame questions tend to underestimate the degree of consistency that exists in the everyday behavior of individuals and suggests that there is much more possibility for convergence between the theoretical perspectives than is generally recognized. For example, Wachtel points out that recent psychoanalytical criticisms of traditional Freudian energy constructs that presume a closed system within which blind

energies build up and discharge (Holt 1967; Klein 1966, 1969; Loevinger 1966; Schafer 1970; Wachtel 1969), demonstrate that such constructs are not at all essential to psycho-analysis (Wachtel 1976:717). Also, whereas early versions of psychoanalytic theory paid inadequate attention to adaptation and response to real situations, the psychoanalytic ego psychology that has developed from the work of Hartmann (1939), Erikson (1950), and others has led to an increasing concern with how the developing human being learns to adapt to the demands, opportunities, and dangers the world presents.

Accordingly, selectivity of perception has become a central concern of modern psycho-analytic researchers who are intensely studying how human beings register, interpret, and respond to environmental stimulation.

> Thus, psychoanalytically oriented researchers have in recent years been studying processes of selective attention and inattention (Luborsky, Blinder, and Schimek, 1965; Shapiro, 1965; Wachtel, 1967), styles of perceiving and thinking (e.g., Gardner, Holzman, Klein, Linton, and Spence, 1959), the effects of weak or ambiguous stimuli (Pine, 1964), and the effects of the *absence* of environmental stimulation (e.g., Goldberger, 1966; Holt, 1965). [Wachtel 1976:618; emphasis in original]

In a subsequent paper Wachtel (1977) maintains that much of the debate between per-sonality theorists of varying persuasions derives from the utilization of conceptual strategies and units of observation which have been too narrow and restricted. He con-tends that it is possible to discern a level of orderliness in how people live their lives that can encompass the seemingly contradictory views and findings of psychoanalytic observers and of researchers guided by social learning theory. Indeed, instead of viewing psychodynamic concepts as alternatives to those of social learning theory, he sees them as complementary concepts that can help to fill in some of the details in the open-ended, content-free skeleton provided by the latter framework (ibid.:321).

Opposition to concepts of unconscious motivation, conflict, and fantasy derive, Wachtel maintains, from insufficient knowledge and understanding of recent trends in psychodynamic thought. He points in particular to Klein's effort to recast psychoanalytic thinking in feedback terms (Klein 1967) and Schafer's development of an "action language" for psychoanalysis, in which all thinglike entities are eliminated and the full range of psychoanalytic ideas is expressed in terms of what the person is doing (Schafer 1972, 1973). He notes that Schafer's approach is strikingly congruent with Mischel's em-phasis on considering what a person *does* rather than what he or she *has* (Wachtel 1977: 321–322).

Wachtel advocates using self-perpetuating interaction cycles as a unit in the study of personality. Thus, he suggests that early childhood experiences may initiate a characteristic behavior pattern, but that its maintenance depends on both self-initiated structuring of circumstances and environmental feedback. The implication is that cer-tain types of individuals play a highly active role in selecting and generating situations that fulfill dominant motives or gratify unconscious needs, while others are more adap-tively responsive, and hence more flexible in ordering their behavior. In Wachtel's view, one of the main limitations of experimental methods is that they frequently fail to address the ways in which individuals generate the stimuli they encounter, leading experimenters to overlook an important way in which consistency characterizes a human life, even if in principle behavior may vary considerably when the situation is different (Wachtel 1977:322).[1]

INTERACTIONISM AND THE CONCEPT OF
PERSONALITY IN CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Interactionism raises some penetrating questions concerning the concept of personality and its use by psychological anthropologists. To begin with, it renders inappropriate the use of static, person-bound, context-free formulations such as those generated by projective tests. The idea that persons can be conceived as having a distinctive set of behavioral dispositions fixed early in life that perpetuate themselves regardless of environmental conditions is also untenable.[2] As the work of D'Andrade (1970, 1974) and Shweder (1972, 1975, 1977) suggests, the very assumption of trait coherence is suspect. Essentially two solutions have been offered to the problem of reconceptualizing personality in the light of the developing interactionist framework. One continues to locate personality within the individual, but conceives of it as highly responsive to situational context; the other aims at blurring the distinction between person and situation, and conceives of personality as inclusive of person-in-situation.

The first solution is based on a differentiation of levels of personality, one deeply ingrained, coherent, and continuous, the other relatively superficial and changeable. In anthropology, Robert LeVine (1973) has recently proposed such a formulation, based on the notions of genotype and phenotype. By personality genotype LeVine refers

> to a set of enduring individual behavioral dispositions that may or may not find socially acceptable expression in the customary (or institutionalized) behavior of a population. Its major characteristics are early acquisition (through the interaction of constitution and early experience); resistance to elimination in subsequent experience; and capacity for inhibition, generalization, and other transformation under the impact of experiential pressures. It acts as a set of constraints on later learning and on the adaptive flexibility of the individual. [LeVine 1973:115–116]

Personality phenotype refers to observable regularities characterizing adult functioning in a variety of settings comprising one's environment. It encompasses role performances, conscious attitudes and values, skills, competence and knowledge, preferences and tastes. It is the phenotype that is responsive to contemporaneous environmental pressures, whereas the genotype is the "relatively unchanging 'internal environment' of the personality, responsive only to its own past" (ibid.:123). LeVine sees culture, operating through the use of social sanctions, as selectively favoring certain phenotypes, thus leading to a convergent set of observable character traits which overlay an underlying diversity.

Whereas LeVine uses a Darwinian analogy, psychologist Ross Stagner (1976) uses an analogy based on transformational grammar. He proposes that personality traits be conceived as schema, or cognitive rules, that guide behavior in a variety of situations perceived as belonging to the relevant schema or rules. A trait begins as a "deep structure" which may be overtly expressed in many different ways depending on its "transformations." An observable consistency of behavior, or surface trait, only represents one of several possible transformations of the deep structure (Stagner 1976:117). Stagner thus conceives of personality traits as generalized expectancies in the face of certain categories of stimuli, and holds that these expectancies, once established, function like source traits that give rise to surface traits through a transformational process (ibid.:121–122).

Both LeVine and Stagner are attempting to salvage the personality concept in more or less traditional form, LeVine from a psychodynamic perspective, Stagner from that of trait psychology. They are simply withdrawing fixed dispositions to a deeper recess while acknowledging the significance of situational determinants in structuring actual

behavior. For both, personality and situation are conceptually independent of one another, though intimately related. A more radical solution to the problem aims at blurring the distinction between person and situation.

For example, Joseph Nuttin proposes that personality and environment not be considered as two autonomously existing units interacting with each other but as two interdependent poles of a unitary behavioral process. The personality-environment unit, Nuttin maintains, is the basic "entity" to be studied in psychology. Personality is to be conceived as functional rather than substantive in nature; "it consists in a specific and active relatedness to a behavioral world, whereas this world itself is gradually built up in the process of personality functioning" (Nuttin 1977:202). He goes on to suggest that an individual's personal world, which is constructed out of the situations, people, and objects perceived and conceived by him or her, constitutes the "objective" or "material" aspects of personality, or its content. Thus the same public world gives rise to a great many different personal worlds (ibid.:203).

One of the advantages of this latter viewpoint is a release from the attributional problems associated with LeVine's and Stagner's perspective. Thus, whether relegated to genotype or "deep structure," personality so conceived still requires a conception of characteristics, inevitably phrased in adjectival terms, that imply situational contexts. Bateson's admonition is relevant here, that

> adjectives . . . which purport to describe individual character are really not strictly applicable to the individual but rather describe *transactions* between the individual and his material and human environment. No man is "resourceful" or "dependent" or "fatalistic" in a vacuum. His characteristic, whatever it be, is not his but is rather a characteristic of what goes on between him and something (or somebody else). [Bateson 1972:298; italics in original]

Harold Raush, who cites Bateson's admonition, makes a similar point when he asserts that different traits are relevant to different situations, and that traits "belong" as much to situations as they do to persons. "Although we may prefer — as a matter of common semantic perspective — to locate capacities in the person, capacities 'refer to' situations, and can be as logically located in situations as in persons" (Raush 1977:290).

For anthropologists, this problem is crucial, for the situations implied in character trait descriptions are apt to be drawn from our own culture and may be grossly misleading when applied to another culture. To be "aggressive" in New York is likely to refer to a very different set of behaviors and contexts than in Samoa. A prime example of the difficulties of applying trait concepts cross-culturally concerns the application of the term "dependent" in Japan, a country that places a high value on being "interdependent" (see Doi 1962, 1972).

While interactionists have generally stressed the importance of cognition, they have been critical of much cognitive research and insistent that motivational and affective components of experience be given adequate attention. Wachtel (1972, 1977), for example, criticizes research that treats cognition as a static structure rather than as dynamically interacting with and responsive to events. Environmental stimulation in most cognitive style research, he charges, is primarily of interest as a way of revealing what structure the person carries around. A more useful approach to cognition would be to examine how particular modes of organizing thought and perceptual input lead to actions and adaptations that eventually feed back to stabilize and perpetuate those modes, at least in a particular class of situations (Wachtel 1977:328–329).

The importance of including motivational factors in person-in-situation models has been stressed by several commentators (e.g., Fiedler 1977; Nuttin 1977; Pervin 1977; Wachtel 1977). They point out that motives are highly responsive to situational contin-

gencies, while affect plays an important role in the organization and interpretation of situations. As Lawrence Pervin writes in relation to his own research:

> What is striking is the extent to which situations are described in terms of affects (e.g., threatening, warm, interesting, dull, tense, calm, rejecting) and organized in terms of the similarity of affects aroused in them. In other words, we may organize situations not so much in terms of cognitively perceived similar attributes but in terms of bodily experiences associated with them. [1977:383]

The call is therefore for wider range of person-centered variables to be taken into account, inclusive of both cognitive and affective components, provided they are formulated in a way that lends itself to an understanding of person-in-situation dynamics. If such a program were to be seriously entertained by anthropologists, it would lead to a merging of the currently distinctive research traditions represented by culture and personality on the one hand, and culture and cognition on the other.

If a great deal of work remains to be done to develop a suitable inventory of person-centered variables, far more effort will be required to generate an acceptable classification of situations. It is not only that situations are inherently more variable, particularly in cross-cultural perspective, but also a result of the fact that behavioral scientists have all but ignored the task. What is needed is a more satisfactory and systematic concept of the environment. This would require, at minimum, a dimensional analysis of stimulus variables comparable to those developed for describing individual differences (Frederiksen 1976:490; Sells 1963:700).

The task appears to be a formidable one inasmuch as the potential number of situational stimuli appear unlimited, particularly when cultural variation is taken into account. Nevertheless, as Sells points out, an imposing but manageable system of variables can be adapted to empirical measurement in relation to strategically selected dependent variables. He presents an "outline of basic aspects of the total stimulus situation" that he regards as a preliminary step toward the development of a usable set of taxonomic dimensions (Sells 1976:508–513). In fact a number of researchers have developed schemes for defining situational variables in relation to their specific requirements (see Frederiksen 1972, for examples), a strategy that should appeal to ethnographers more than attempts to construct an exhaustive set of situational components using such techniques as factor and cluster analysis. For ethnographic purposes, the most useful approach would seem to be to sample situations ecologically in terms of natural habitats and to examine their relationship with patterns of feeling, thinking, and behavior (see Brunswick 1950, 1956). This suggests an approach similar to that proposed by Argyle (1977), to the effect that social situations be treated as discrete rather than continuous entities. Thus we would look for the repertoire of situations that characterizes the population we are studying, while perhaps trying to identify specific features that differentiate one from another.

The task of identifying situations and relating them to behavior in a manner that is compatible with an array of person-centered variables is a tall order even in small, relatively stable societies. In complex, rapidly changing communities the empirical problems are obviously much greater. Even experimental psychologists interested in interactional approaches acknowledge the inadequacy of current methods for dealing with person-in-situation behavioral systems, and several have called for innovative research strategies.

It would seem that methodologically oriented ethnographers have a great deal to contribute to the development of interactionism as a general approach to the study of human behavior. Various combinations of observational and experimental methods, intensive

interviewing and strategic questioning—the kind of eclecticism of method that ethnographers often build into their field strategies—may be just what is needed to generate appropriate methods and concepts for what may prove to be an emergent paradigm. Some recent examples may be instructive.

In a study of contextual shifts in meaning of Maasai personality descriptors, Kirk and Burton (1977) used multidimensional scaling to deal with the dynamics of cognitive representations. Using ethnographic facts as guides, they studied systematic shifts in Maasai perceptions of personality as they develop from early childhood to full adulthood. Through the use of marking theory they created a new method for studying how the meanings of personality decriptors used by the Maasai combine to form composite meanings, enabling them to examine meanings as a function of the contexts in which they are used. The approach is suggestive of ways of researching the relationships between social situations and implicit personality theory. Studies of this type may help us to conceptualize person-centered variables in ways that are maximally compatible with culture-bound situations.

A more comprehensive psychological ethnography is provided by Robert Levy (1973) in his study, *Tahitians*. A psychoanalyst turned anthropologist, Levy combined intensive psychodynamic interviews of nine persons with 26 months of participant-observation. He discusses the ways in which emotions, thoughts, and beliefs are structured not only through socialization patterns but through maintenance systems built into the culture which provide a great deal of redundancy to everyday experience. He follows Bateson (to whom the book is dedicated) in conceiving of the community he studied as a communication system in which behavioral "messages" condense important maintenance information. Throughout the description and analysis he is concerned with the interplay between "private" and "public" experience, between "inner" and "outer" forces. He raises many of the issues that are of concern to interactionists while providing a sensitive, often brilliant, portrayal of persons in cultural context.

In my own research among Hawaiian Americans with Ronald Gallimore, a developmental psychologist, we used a strategy of moving back and forth between ethnographic data and a sequence of social experiments in order to refine our understanding of behavior patterns (Howard 1974; Gallimore, Boggs and Jordan 1974). The ethnographic materials provided a basis for selecting representative circumstances around which to construct experiments; for understanding the meaning assigned to stimuli, rewards, and punishments; for comprehending the significance of situational contingencies; and for interpreting behavior. The experiments provided precise information about the impact and significance of specific but critical situational contexts, and often led to a reinterpretation of the ethnographic data. As a result we were able to refine our analysis far beyond what would have been possible with either approach used alone. This same type of reverberative research strategy has been used in cross-cultural cognitive studies by Michael Cole and his associates (Cole and Gay 1972; Gay and Cole 1967; Scribner and Cole 1977).

There are, of course, dozens of other examples in the ethnographic literature. The point I wish to make, however, is that the complexity of the person-in-situation perspective lends itself to a variety of research strategies, and that exploration of these possibilities by ethnographers may provide important input toward the development of an interactional approach to human behavior and a more satisfactory framework for psychocultural analysis than we have yet enjoyed.

The issue of comparability of situations across cultures is a much stickier one since the attribution of meaning to circumstances is in large measure a cultural process. As Shweder has pointed out, many culture and personality theorists have attempted to handle this problem by postulating certain universal goals, but this raises other questions

(such as comparability of means). He nevertheless acknowledges the possibility of generating transcultural situational variables that can be utilized for constructing nomothetic theories, provided they are kept conceptually distinct from personality constructs (Shweder 1979b:282–287).

HAWAIIAN AMERICAN ACHIEVEMENT BEHAVIOR:
AN INTERACTIONAL SOLUTION TO AN ETHNOGRAPHIC PROBLEM

I was initially led toward an interactionist perspective as a result of trying to work out a framework for analyzing the behavior of Hawaiian Americans with a psychologist collaborator, Ronald Gallimore. The research was stimulated by concern for the "social problems" experienced by Hawaiian Americans; they were overrepresented in virtually all problem categories and underrepresented in categories indicating success.[3] Of central concern was the fact that Hawaiian American children did poorly in school. They had exceptionally high dropout rates and scored well below average on standardized tests. Given the importance of adequate education for socioeconomic success in the contemporary world, our attention was drawn toward an attempt to understand the bases for underachievement within the schools.

"Folk explanations" offered by teachers, school administrators, and other agency personnel took a characteristic form: the children are not motivated; they are not motivated because Hawaiian American parents take little interest in their children's education. As an anthropologist, I was naturally inclined to dismiss such speculations, and instead sought to understand the conditions under which Hawaiian American children do learn, and do achieve. I saw the classroom as an arena in which structural arrangements controlled by teachers from alien cultural groups (usually Japanese American or Caucasian American) were leading to miscommunication and estrangement of students. Ethnographic research among parents made it clear that they were indeed concerned for the children's education. The teachers' misperception was an indication of a failure to communicate accurately across cultural boundaries. I implicitly accepted the notion that the students were not motivated to achieve in the classroom, but I attributed this entirely to situational variables. I was not concerned with measuring individual differences in motivation to achieve.

After a year of ethnographic research, Gallimore joined the project. His inclination was to focus on individual variability, although his training in social learning theory made him sensitive to the impact of situational contingencies on behavior. As we struggled to develop a research framework compatible to both of us, we recognized the necessity of including anything as a variable that either of us thought might be important, including those situational factors suggested by the ethnographic data and those personality measures suggested by psychological theory. Although we did not know it at the time, we had agreed to take an interactionist approach.

In order to develop a theory of achievement behavior among Hawaiian American children, we initiated a series of social psychological experiments, under Gallimore's supervision, and predicated on our ethnographic observations of child-rearing practices and schoolroom behavior. Our preliminary hypotheses were concerned with dependency behavior. The first experiment indicated that contrary to teachers' labeling of Hawaiian American preschoolers as "emotionally dependent," the children's behavior in experimental situations could be better characterized as "dependency inhibited." Based on this concept, an attractive explanation for their poor school performance would have been that they were not oriented toward eliciting rewarding responses from teachers, hence were not susceptible to influence by the teachers. However, we were dissatisfied with this essentially motivational explanation, in part because our ethnographic data

suggested a marked fluidity in response to differing social situations. We decided, therefore, to explore situational variability in children's responses to attempts by adults to influence them. It appeared to us that Hawaiian Americans were much more responsive to social than to symbolic rewards (such as grades), and that social reinforcement retained its potency well past the point where middle-class, mainland children had become responsive to symbolic rewards. The results of a subsequent experiment confirmed our expectations, and made it clear that Hawaiian American children's performance was likely to be better when situations promised social rewards, such as displays of approval, than when such rewards were absent.

By this time we were ready to tackle the problem of achievement behavior directly. A wide array of data already at our disposal made it clear that as a group, Hawaiian Americans did not develop a strong need for achievement in the sense that McClelland and his followers had used that concept, essentially as global personality trait. We confirmed this by administering a set of line drawings (after Minigione 1965) to Hawaiian American boys in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades, and smaller control samples of Japanese American and Filipino American students from the same grades. The results showed Hawaiian Americans projecting significantly fewer achievement themes than either of the other groups. They were also below the norms established for mainland Anglos and Blacks. Superficially, then, the data appeared to support a strict personality interpretation—that Hawaiian Americans are low achievers *because* they have low need for achievement. To bolster such an interpretation one could point to the child-rearing data, which showed a pattern inconsistent with the development of a strong need for achievement, as defined by psychologists.

However, a within-group comparison revealed that some Hawaiian American students were in fact achievers by school standards. Indeed, an analysis of achievement test performance from a subset of our sample attending a private school established for children of Hawaiian ancestry (Kamehameha) showed them to score *higher* than either the Japanese American or Filipino American groups. Yet these students were not higher on need-achievement measures than the nonachievers. It was apparent, therefore, that need for achievement did not account for within-group differences among Hawaiian Americans.

This led us to explore person x situation sets associated with achievement. Our ethnographic data suggested that Hawaiian Americans valued affiliation and easy sociability more than competitive success or self-satisfaction with accomplishment. It follows that the more such individuals value and desire affiliation, the more likely they are to engage in performances they expect to pay off in affiliative rewards. We therefore hypothesized that affiliative motives represent a more significant factor in accounting for achievement behavior among Hawaiian Americans than achievement motive as defined by McClelland.

Further experiments confirmed that affiliation need was indeed the primary person-centered variable to account for achieving behavior among Hawaiian Americans, but it was apparent that this motive was only likely to serve the interests of achievement in appropriate situations, i.e., when affiliative, and especially group rewards (i.e., signs of approval and acceptance) were forthcoming. Thus it is when individuals with a strong need for affiliation (a person-centered variable) are behaving under conditions where social rewards are being dispensed (a situational variable) that achievement behavior is maximized.

The reverberative strategy used in this research, utilizing both careful ethnographic observations and field experiments to generate person x situation sets, thus led to a theory of achievement behavior among Hawaiian Americans that was not only more predictive than either simple motivational or situational models, it was far more culturally sensitive. It allowed us to probe the *ways* in which motives articulated with culturally specific con-

ditions to generate a certain class of behavior. If we are to develop adequate cross-cultural theories of achievement, aggression, and other key categories of behavior, I have no doubt that the various ways in which motives are affected by culturally specific situations will have to be taken into account.

On the other side of the coin, an important point is that the key motivational variable in this case, need for affiliation, is one that presumes a high degree of responsiveness to external (situational) contingencies. This contrasts with need for achievement, which in its original conception presumed a low degree of responsiveness to situational contingencies (recent revisions in the theory of achievement motive have altered this bias; see Atkinson and Raynor 1975). In my view this highlights one of the key neglected issues in psychological anthropology, i.e., the implications of various motivational structures for responsiveness to ecological conditions. It is but one of the benefits of the interactional perspective that it calls attention to such questions.

CULTURE, PERSONALITY, AND THE EXPLANATION OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

I will now explore briefly the implications of interactionism for three central issues in psychological anthropology: (1) the use of psychological constructs to explain cultural forms, (2) the impact of cultural forms on personality structures, and (3) the explanation of human behavior in cultural context.

Before beginning this exploration, it is necessary to define some terms. When viewed through the interactionist lens, "culture" may be conceived as a construct based upon the organization of experience around situations. It involves shared suppositions and recipes for performing activities, but also encompasses the full range of human experience that can be described in situational terms. Thus, for example, to speak of an "aggressive culture" or a "cooperative culture" is to refer to a high frequency of situations that generate aggressive or cooperative behavior (however they may be defined). "Culture change" may be thought of as a reorganization of situations and/or changes in the frequency of occurrence of specific situations. When we speak of a cooperative culture becoming competitive we are, given this definition, referring to a shift in the dominant situational mode from circumstances that elicit cooperation to those eliciting competition.

The term "personality" can be conceived as a construct based on the organization of experience around persons. The degree to which different populations conceptualize experience in such a manner seems to be variable, with middle-class Americans representing an extreme case. Our ideological biases (deeply rooted in situational structures) place a heavy emphasis on locating experience *within* individuals, and so the construct "personality" has been for us a particularly compelling one for attempting to understand human behavior. Other populations, like Hawaiian Americans, organize experience more around relationships (involving various dyadic sets) or primary groups. For them the construct "personality" may seem to be a weak or inappropriate basis for interpreting behavior (this quite aside from any scientific merit it may have). However, this should not deter us from asking legitimate questions about the organization of experience around individual persons in other societies, provided we allow for variations in the salience of alternate loci for experience.

Defined in this way, as the *organization* of experience, it should be apparent that the constructs "culture" and "personality" have no explanatory power vis-à-vis one another, but are themselves objects for explanation. The experience from which they are constructed is greatly overlapping, and may even be coincident. But it is possible to use psychological *variables* to partially explain cultural forms, and to use cultural *variables* to partially explain personality patterns. For this purpose we can speak of person-

centered and situation-centered variables (although at times it may not be easy to "center" certain variable constructs). Research questions would then be in forms like How do person-centered variables (such as motives, cognitive types, psychodynamic defenses) contribute to the organization of cultural experience? and conversely, How do situation-centered variables contribute to the organization of personal experience? As far as individual or group *behavior* is concerned, both constructs are explanatory in the sense that explanation relies on placing behavior within an organized system of events, but from this standpoint one is forced to choose between either culture or personality. Neither can properly be considered a residual of the other, nor does it make sense to ask about the relative contribution of each to sustaining behavior patterns. It is permissible, however, to ask about the relative contributions of person-centered and situation-centered variables to the patterning of specific behaviors in specific contexts. Let us now go on to consider the three issues posed above.

Use of Psychological Constructs to Explain Cultural Forms

From the interactionist perspective, this boils down to using person-centered variables to account for the structure of situations. In part, of course, situations are structured by ecological conditions and by historical antecedents, but where circumstances allow, they are also generated by the motives and cognitive apparatus of actors. Perhaps this is most evident in migrant populations who recreate, where opportunities permit, situations in new environments that replicate those characteristic of their homeland. They do so by founding organizations, performing rituals, arranging living space, initiating activities, etc., that make it possible to experience at least a portion of their new lives in terms of prior suppositions. As a general rule, one would expect that the greater the degree to which ecological constraints operate within a particular environment, the less person-centered variables contribute to the maintenance of cultural forms; and conversely, the more opportunities a particular environment offers, the more input person-centered variables are likely to have in supporting cultural forms. However, in populations that organize experience around relationships and primary groups, person-centered variables (e.g., measures of motivation, cognitive styles, defensive modalities) may be filtered through intermediate structures and thus have a somewhat diluted effect.

As a research strategy, therefore, the interactionist perspective calls for psychological anthropologists to assess ecological constraints and opportunities before making judgments about the degree to which person-centered variables contribute to cultural maintenance. Such a strategy has been used by the Whitings and their associates, and was implicit in Kardiner's differentiation of primary and secondary institutions, but the assessment of ecological conditions has often been indirect and inferential. Interactionism calls for direct assessments, and wherever possible, parceling out the relative input of psychological and ecological variables in an empirical manner.

Impact of Cultural Forms on Personality Structures

The key question here concerns the degree to which recurrent situations generate comparable organizational structures for personalized experience. Past orthodoxy assumed that recurrent childhood experience was of prime importance in forming personality structure and that subsequent experience had only superficial impact; current viewpoints place more emphasis on the role of everyday situations in shaping and maintaining psychological structures. Much depends, logic dictates, on the overall organization of activities and situations among a population. Where activities are tightly coupled with one another, such that a high degree of redundancy occurs (as Levy [1973] has documented

for a Tahitian community) personality organization tends to be strongly patterned by situational structures, such that there is a high degree of similarity between individuals *in certain key respects*. Those *key respects* have to do with the way in which individuals are coupled to situations. For example, where the main cultural forms place a premium on cooperation, and on avoidance of interpersonal conflict, we might expect certain person-centered traits to be salient in individual personalities. Such traits have been described in various terms: an acute social sensitivity, a strong need for social approval, a shame orientation, a cognitive field dependence, a strong self-monitoring of emotional expression, a strong reliance on displacement as a defense mechanism against hostile emotions, or a need for affiliation. The salience of such traits has sometimes led anthropologists to portray people in societies with these emphases as more uniform than would be warranted by individual assessment. The point is that precisely because of close monitoring within the public domain, a significant portion of experience is never exposed to cultural patterning, but remains private, and must be integrated privately into personality structures. This is the source of considerable individuality within even the most tightly organized cooperative societies, but it is individuality built around a strong articulation of persons with situations.

   In more complex social systems, those in which activity systems are only loosely coupled with one another, the patterning effects of situations on individual experience is generally more diffuse, but in fact may be more pervasive, particularly where mass media and educational domains provide models for organizing private experience. Also, certain core traits may derive from the dominant modality by which persons articulate with situations, although one would expect more diversity in both their distribution and organization. In part, this stems from an expansion of the sheer range of experience in complex societies, particularly those undergoing rapid change. The point here is that possible ways in which cultural forms pattern individual experience is much greater than in simpler societies, not that the impact is less. In fact the whole issue of the effects of situational structures on personality remains nebulous, and an inviting area for interactionally oriented psychological anthropologists.

Explanation of Human Behavior in Cultural Context

   Basically, the interactionist framework developed out of attempts to explain human behavior by incorporating both situational contingencies and learned dispositions as of potentially equal consequence. One approach has been to treat situation-centered and person-centered variables as parallel sets of independent variables, each competing with the other to account for the most variance. Each type of variable may exist in a strong or weak form; thus the same type of behavior may be accounted for more by situational variables in one circumstance, by person-centered variables in another. For example, a pattern of competitive behavior may be sustained by constant immersion in competitive activities (characteristic of certain occupational roles) or by a personality structure organized around a strong competitive disposition. Where the two sets of variables reinforce one another we would expect the strongest pattern of persistence. What may be of primary importance for psychological anthropologists, however, is the likelihood that in some societies situational determinants may be so powerful that person-centered variables are nearly irrelevant for explaining major segments of public behavior. Under such conditions, descriptions of typical, or modal, personalities are likely to be either vacuous (phrased in terms of deficits, e.g., lack of motives or abilities)[4] or a mere relabeling of observed behavior (e.g., they are generous, meaning they frequently give gifts to one another). In other societies, situations may typically be unconstraining, permitting a wide range of acceptable behaviors. Under such circumstances person-centered variables

can be expected to demonstrate greater potency. In most cases a mix of person-centered and situation-centered variables will be required for a satisfactory explanation of specific behavior patterns, and I suggest that our research designs should give substance to both types of variables in an unprejudiced manner.

A second approach has been to account for behavior in terms of person x situation sets, such that context is specified in conjunction with personality types (e.g., the individual is the type of person who behaves aggressively when losing to a competitor). Shweder, in a recent paper reviewing some of the basic postulates of culture and personality theory, raises the question of how much context can be tolerated without abandoning the pursuit of universal explanatory theory altogether. At the extreme, each situation can be considered unique, totally frustrating a search for theoretical principles to account for human behavior (Shweder 1979a:258–268). Mischel also acknowledges this problem, and correctly points out that an appropriate mix of person x situation depends on the goals one has in mind. His 1968 book, he asserts, was oriented primarily to the goals of clinicians interested in assessing the adjustment problems of individuals. Given their purposes, neglect of situational contingencies is counterproductive, hence the book's emphasis on situationism. As a nonmothetic scientist interested in generalization, however, he seeks a mix that allows for parsimony, and limits the degree to which situational uniqueness is considered (Mischel 1979). It is also apparent that ethnographic studies of particular populations invite far more attention to context than holocultural studies aimed at establishing pan-cultural generalizations. And interactional psychologists have found person x situation constructs to have improved significantly their capacity to predict important types of behavior (see, for example, Bem and Funder 1978).

CONCLUSION

A question may be raised as to whether or not it is presumptuous to talk in terms of an emergent interactionist "paradigm," as do several participants in the recent discussion. After all, theorists such as Lewin, Sullivan, and Brunswik proposed frameworks for person-in-situation analysis years ago, while a variety of systems theorists have routinely included internal-external interactions in their conceptualizations. And, it could be argued, a rapprochement was affected years ago between psychodynamic and learning theories in the work of Miller and Dollard and Whiting and Child. Is interactionism anything new?

Whether or not it is justified to talk about an emergent paradigm must be left for science historians to determine, but some movement toward convergence does seem to be taking place. Thus a historical survey of personality concepts led Ekehammar to conclude that "conceptions have converged and are converging toward an interactionist conceptualization" (Ekehammar 1974:1044), while a survey of personality and social psychological research over a span of three decades by Sarason, Smith, and Diener (1975) shows a substantial increase in the percentage of studies that permit determination of interactions between individual and experimental effects (Nelsen 1977:100). Although it is true that several visionary theorists took interactionist positions years ago, the fact is that most behavioral research has been informed by highly constricted sets of assumptions about whether person-centered or situation-centered variables are to be given precedence. Also, early attempts at theoretical rapprochement between psychodynamic and behaviorist approaches were more in the way of translation from one framework to the other rather than genuine integrations. In contrast, it appears that current discussions involve a "complexification" of previously distinctive positions, so that each is incorporating more of the conceptual apparatus of the others. A comparable diversification of methods likewise seems to be occurring. Whether or not a singular unified framework emerges,

the current brand of interactionism may make it easier for psychological anthropologists to talk with psychologists in mutually intelligible manner. If so, we both stand to draw sustenance from one another.

Of perhaps greater consequence, however, is the promise the interactional perspective holds for strengthening psychological anthropology's relationship with the rest of our discipline. The approach dramatizes the limitations of ignoring either psychological or ecological determinants of behavior, and challenges anthropology to develop a more genuinely holistic framework for understanding both human nature and human variation.

NOTES

[1] For a review of some of the major issues in psychoanalytic theory from an interactionist perspective see Wachtel 1978.

[2] Wachtel refers to this as the "wooly mammoth model" in psychodynamic theory; see Wachtel 1978.

[3] The research was conducted between 1965 and 1968; for background and further details about the work reported here see Gallimore, Boggs, and Jordan 1974; Howard 1974.

[4] A prototypical example is the psychological language used to describe personality patterns among the poor, and particularly the ethnic poor. They have generally been portrayed as psychologically pathological, and as lacking the adaptive qualities of middle-class persons, despite the fact that most of the behavioral patterns presumably being explained are much more convincingly accounted for by the press of economic circumstances and the inability to control contingencies through the use of resources. See Howard and Scott 1981.

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