

THE APPEAL AND PITFALLS OF CROSS-DISCIPLINARY DIALOGUES

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Crossing disciplinary boundaries, even if only to seek inspiration beyond the confines of familiar intellectual paradigms, is an arduous endeavor. Yet the participants in the Almagro Workshop, whose revised contributions appear in this volume, took an important step towards significant cross-disciplinary exchanges. This important step is the appreciation of how scholars in other disciplines couch research questions, what kinds of presuppositions underlie these questions, and what counts as evidence as they go about trying to answer them. It is unfortunate that this preliminary step is often overlooked in cross-disciplinary research, as scholars from one discipline simply borrow results, procedures, and approaches from another discipline without understanding the intellectual context surrounding them.

The following discussion is an attempt to identify the mines in the no-person's-land that separates psychological and anthropological research on emotions and closely related topics.¹ Since I am considerably more familiar with anthropological than with psychological approaches to the question, I will attempt to elucidate, with a psychological audience in mind, what I consider to be key features of anthropological approaches to emotions. I stress that this essay is not a sweeping critique of psychology from an anthropological perspective, a formidable task that would take considerably more space, knowledge, and audacity than I have at my immediate disposal; rather, most of my remarks relate directly to the dialogues that took place at the Almagro Workshop and which therefore underlie this volume. I also want to emphasize that I am addressing only half a question, since I do not attempt to balance my discussion with a critique of anthropological approaches to emotions from a psychological perspective, a task that is best left to my colleagues in psychology.

Universalism vs. Particularism

For many years, the anthropological literature on emotions appeared to be dominated by debates over whether emotions are universal phenomena or experiences of a radically different nature across societies and cultures. Researchers

focused, for example, on emotions like *liget* among the Ilongot of Central Luzon, made famous by Rosaldo (1980), and proponents of both sides debated the extent to which *liget* differs from the categories of middle-class Euro-American emotional experience that resemble it, such as *anger*. On the one hand, Rosaldo (1984) claims that the Ilongots' perception of *liget*, their reaction to its manifestation in other individuals, and the relationship between *liget* and other Ilongot constructs all contribute to providing a radically divergent meaning to the emotion from what *anger* means to middle-class Westerners. On the other hand, for scholars like Spiro (1984) and Bock (1988:197-202), Rosaldo's description of Ilongot *liget* offers irrefutable evidence that it is fundamentally the same as what English-speaking folks term *anger*, although the contexts of *liget* and *anger* differ slightly.

These debates had the unfortunate effect of obscuring, particularly to scholars outside the discipline, the fact that the significance and purpose of anthropological research on emotions really lies elsewhere. First, the form that the debates has come to take is marred with serious problems: for example, it is commonly presented as an argument between uncompromising essentialism against uncompromising constructionism, even though most scholars stand on considerably more moderate grounds somewhere between these caricatural extremes (cf. Hinton, 1993; Rosenberg, 1990; White, 1993). More seriously, the debates had the effect of translating the works of anthropologists like Rosaldo as a simple search for the exotic, the exceptional, or at the very least the different. Anthropology has long been perceived to be such a search, particularly in the popular mind (anthropological research rarely is the object of journalistic coverage unless it claims to have "discovered" a society where "things are different"). Unfortunately, anthropologists often focus on the exotic rather than the ordinary and frequently exoticize the ordinary (particularly if they are interested in seeing their picture in the newspaper), and are therefore in part responsible for this image of themselves. White's (1992:27) remark to the effect that Rosaldo described the differences between *liget* and *anger* while neglecting the similarities is a case in point.

While there is of course some value in searching for exceptions to universalist hypotheses, it should not obscure one of the main goals of anthropological research on emotion, namely to depict how an emotion for a particular group is a piece of a much larger puzzle, whose other pieces are other emotions, in terms of which it is rationalized, cultural processes other than emotions (e.g., religious beliefs, theories of knowledge, concepts of person, and socialization theories), and social constructs (e.g., in the case of the Ilongots, egalitarianism, head-hunting, material conditions, colonialism, and gender). Successful ethnography demonstrates that, to make sense of each piece of the puzzle, one must consider how it fits with the rest of the puzzle. (I will not pursue the metaphor much further because it runs the risk of representing culture as an entity in which all pieces fit snugly together, a view that I will criticize presently.) In Irvine's words, "the feelings one experiences in a given situation are not just primarily 'there', but are experienced in a given situation in relation to something—indeed, to many things, including the possibilities of expression, the feelings one attributes to other

with whom one interacts, and the feelings one attributes to other with whom one may be associated" (1990:156). It is this emphasis on society-internal relationships and tensions that the universalist-particularist debate has obscured.

Needless to say, relativism and social specificity is what anthropologists mostly find when they focus on the social and cultural embedding of emotions. However, one needs to add a caveat to this remark, which might not be obvious to non-anthropologists reading the anthropological literature. Recognizing variability in human experiences of emotions does not mean that human experience is *infinitely* variable, and that generalizations are impossible. On the contrary, good anthropological research attempts to go beyond the recognition of variability and to make sense of it. Particularly successful illustrations are recent works that have addressed the relationship between emotions, morality, and power relations, and have demonstrated that hegemonic structures are commonly built upon and justified through the attribution of morally devalued emotions to subordinate groups, but that these processes of attribution and moral devaluation can also be turned around and used to resist structures of inequality (cf. many contributors in Lutz and Abu-Lughod, eds., 1990, and other citations in Besnier 1990:435-7). Cross-social and cross-cultural generalizations are thus both possible and desirable when one examines how emotions are embedded in a broader socio-cultural context.

The Physiological and the Social

To many psychologists, the anthropological focus on the social realm may appear to imply that anthropologists deny the possibility that emotions have body-internal physiological correlates. This implication is erroneous, as most anthropologists do not deny that emotions are closely related to the physiological and cognitive processes that psychologists have so carefully described (cf. Frijda, 1986), such as rising blood pressure during a fit of anger. However, rather than equating rising blood pressure and concomitant physiological events with emotion categories, anthropologists are interested in showing that these physiological events acquire meaning only when placed in a social and culture context. An individual may experience rising blood pressure in a specific social situation, but the physiological experience will be "connected" (e.g., understood, rationalized, attributed) to an anger-like emotion only if that particular physiological experience in that particular social context is part of the cultural templates and social scenarios through which members of the society organize experience (cf. D'Andrade, 1990; Lutz, 1988; Shweder, 1991). This "connection" will not take place, or will have different characteristics, if for example there are strong moral sanctions against getting angry in that particular situation, or if the individual is defined as someone who does not readily experience anger because of his or her gender, social class, or personal biography (e.g., J. Briggs, 1970).

It is important to realize that understanding the biological component of emotions as culturally mediated does not mean that human beings are locked inside a straightjacket labelled "culture" (or of course "language"), outside of which they

are incapable of making sense of experience. (This erroneous view stems from a very narrow understanding of culture, to which I will come back presently.) The experiencer of rising blood pressure who is robbed of the ability to express and experience legitimate anger by the cultural "cover story" of his or her society can challenge the morality that seeks to stifle his or her anger at that social moment. Acts of personal and political resistance that stem from such challenges of the emotional order of society are the topic of exciting developments in anthropology (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1986; Briggs, 1992; Ong, 1987; Radway, 1984). However, this challenge remains a social act, in that it focuses on the relationship between an internal experience and its place in a moral order and social context.

Thus most anthropologists insist that biological and social components of emotions are not discrete aspects of the question that can be analyzed separately. An analogy might clarify this stance. Traditionally, the differences between women and men have been understood as being of two types: biological (genotypical and phenotypical) differences, and the socio-cultural "correlates" of the biological differences. These two types of differences are commonly referred to as matters of "sex" and "gender" respectively. However, the definition of sex as a biological category is itself a deeply social act. Thus, for example, it is women's biologies (e.g., menstruation, menopause, pregnancy) that are invariably considered to be "problems," rather than men's (Hubbard, 1990; Martin, 1987; Tavris, 1992). Similarly, when infants with ambiguous sexual attributes are born in the USA, physicians commonly decide the sex to which they will be assigned on the basis of whether they have a penis of "adequate" size or not, among others (Kessler, 1990). It is difficult to think of a more socially grounded decision-making process, particularly in light of the fact that American physicians are overwhelmingly men. Thus the boundary between the sex as a biological phenomenon and gender as a social phenomenon is increasingly blurred as one finds more and more traces of the social in the biological (see also Laqueur, 1990 and many other social historians of sexuality). In a similar vein, anthropologists maintain that the dichotomy between emotions as physiological events and emotions as social processes is artificial and counter-productive. Furthermore, the social definition of emotions is not simply a veneer that societies and people apply to a physiological core, but a grain that pervades and determines what we think of as this core.

Anthropologists often appear to psychologists to be reluctant to ever talk about "internal" emotions. Instead, they seem to focus on phenomena such as what Fiji Indian villagers call *bhaw* "socially bound feeling" (Brenneis, this volume), which overlaps with but is not equivalent to emotions as narrowly defined in psychology. However, after spending a few years among rural Fiji Indians, the anthropologist soon realizes that the internal states that psychologists, therapists, talk-show hosts, DSM-IV, and their audiences back home are so fond of mulling over have little significance in the everyday lives of his hosts and in the explanations they give of their actions to the ethnographer and to one another. What is considerably more relevant is what they call *bhaw*, and *bhaw* should occupy a

central position in the ethnographer's representation of his hosts' world if it is to have any pertinence to what it purports to represent.

Two points should be made. First, in Brenneis' words, "to suggest that only shared, socially constructed emotions are given full value as *bhaw* is not to claim that [Fiji Indian] villagers do not recognize individual feelings" (1990:119). Indeed, they view anger as an individualistic emotional experience, but at the same time devalue it and consider it dangerous. Which particular emotions are seen as residing inside the individual and which are construed as social experiences are topics of importance for an ethnographic investigation of the everyday forms of emotions, as well as the reasons why such differences exist. Second, to say that Fiji Indians generally understand emotions (other than anger) as social rather than internal phenomena is not simply based on the fact that the word *bhaw* (which most closely resembles the English word *emotion*) refers to a social notion. Rather, the social nature of Fiji Indians' understanding of emotions is evident in many areas of social life. It shapes the way that they explain other people's actions and intentions; it is evident in the theoretical accounts they provide to the ethnographer; it affects their religious rituals and aesthetic values; and it governs the politics of gender. The evidence, then, is not a simple matter of lexical semantics, nor is it, for that matter, restricted to the domain of linguistic communication.

Culture

For anthropologists, psychologists' treatment of the notion of *culture* probably stands out as the singlemost problematic issue. In its least refined form, culture in the psychological literature on emotions is taken to be an independent variable, which, like other independent variables such as gender and socio-economic status, can be straightforwardly tabulated quantitatively to test for the universality of particular phenomena and categories. Generally speaking, researchers who adopt this approach assume that people share a culture if they live within the boundaries of the same nation-state (thus references are made to "Indian culture"), if they speak the same language (e.g., "English-speaking culture"), or if they are members of the same society. However, counter-examples to these assumptions are very easy to come up with. For example, within multi-ethnic nations like the United States or India, many different cultural systems co-exist more or less uneasily; most Native Americans in the United States and Canada, and most Australian Aborigines are now monolingual speakers of English, yet they do not share a culture with the dominant groups in these nation-states; and the extent to which the working classes and middle classes share a culture in post-industrial societies is an empirical question. Oversimplified definitions of culture also sometimes confuse "culture" with "Culture," i.e., systems of ideas and symbols on the one hand, with overtly elaborated objects and contexts (e.g., the Constitution, the literary canon, and the Sunday *New York Times*) that are controlled and exalted by elite minorities and used to maintain and justify hegemonic structures.

The view of culture extant in mainstream psychology did not spring out of nowhere; indeed, anthropology is as responsible as any other discipline in fostering it. Traditionally, anthropology was the science of "the other," an entity best found in the classic field sites, i.e., "little communities of enduring face-to-face relationships and a very limited division of labor, [where] a large proportion of knowledge and experiences may quite naturally come to be extensively shared—that is, uniformly distributed" (Hannerz, 1993:103). Gathering data in such field sites, most anthropologists of the past adopted an implicit view of culture as the shared ideational framework that held society together, was minimally affected by time, operated on members of society who remained passive entities, and did so uniformly for everyone. Two particularly problematic assumptions are embedded in this perspective: culture is discrete and bounded; and culture is shared and consensual.

Most anthropologists nowadays balk at both of these assumptions. In more recent works, culture emerges as more or less organized disorder, whose boundaries are porous, and which is subject to intense contestation and divergent characterization (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Hannerz, 1993). Unhappy with the historical connotations of sharedness and homogeneity that the term "culture" has come to have, some anthropologists have replaced it with the concept of "ideology." Although it has inherited its own awkward connotations from its Marxist past (Abu-Lughod & Lutz, 1990:9), "ideology" nevertheless felicitously challenges the traditional dichotomy between the ideational world and the social world by focusing attention on the way in which members of society actively manipulate ideas and symbols to advance their own divergent agendas. Of course, this alternative view does not imply that the ideational world is made up of discrete individuals, each so complex and distinctive that it shares no common ground with its neighbors. Rather than searching for sharedness, anthropologists understand the commonalities of cultural systems as meeting points between conflicting forces.

From a more practical standpoint, this view of culture leads in two possible directions. First, a research strategy that has gained favor in many anthropological circles consists in focusing on how all human groups, even diminutive atolls seemingly lost in the middle of the ocean, are englobed in national contexts and partake in transnational movements (most obviously through such phenomena as migrations, but also in more other ways). This situation is of course particularly pertinent to a world on the eve of the third millennium, but, as historically sensitive anthropologists have shown (e.g., Wolf, 1982), it is hardly a new phenomenon. One of the tasks for the anthropologist is thus to understand how the economic and political embedding of small-scale communities in larger entities give rise to particular cultural forms and are affected by them (see Irvine, this volume).

A second research strategy consists in shying away from sweeping characterizations of the ideational world of members of particular societies, and to focus on specific persons (cf. J. Briggs, 1992; Kracke, 1978; Wellenkamp, this volume), specific contexts such as conflict resolution (e.g., Watson-Gegeo & White, eds., 1990), or specific, sometimes trivial, events. This approach, which is congruent with the renewed emphasis on *social practice* in contemporary

ethnography (Ortner, 1984), represents a reversal of more traditional ethnographic methods: rather than stating general principles and illustrating them with specific examples, the ethnographer begins with the specific and attempts to catch a glimpse of persons as they negotiate, challenge, and create social and ideational structures and relationships. This strategy often allows for a considerably more dynamic definition of culture, and is a more fruitful way of understanding persons as agents, rather than automata that go through life "applying" the structures imposed by the group.

Needless to say, the much more complex conceptualization of culture described here does not lend itself well to the quantitatively driven research favored in some subfields of psychology. However, it can offer a loud word of caution for psychological work on emotions against trivializing the relationships between agents (i.e., persons) and the social groups of which they are members; particular communities and the broader entities of which they are a part; emotion categories and the social action that they engender or are associated with; and, on a methodological level, self-reports and social action in real-life settings.

Contextual Sensitivity vs. Ethnography

In the last decade, giant leaps have been made in some psychological circles towards recognizing the importance of the socio-cultural context in how emotions are conceptualized. For example, recent works have seriously entertained the possibility that ways of conceiving the self may differ across societies and culture, proposing that, while societies like middle-class America promote an egocentric view of the self, others, like Japanese society, elaborate a socially grounded sense of self (see in particular Markus & Kitayama, 1990; Kitayama, this volume). These works have managed to narrow down significantly the differences between anthropological and psychological concerns, and have important implications for the study of emotions across societies and cultures, since an egocentric sense of self will encourage the view that emotions are primarily located in the individual, while a sociocentric outlook is strongly associated with an understanding of emotions as intersubjective entities.

While one would have expected anthropologists to have welcomed these developments with enthusiasm, their response has been at best lukewarm. Indeed, some anthropologists have found problems with "egocentrism" and its identification with "Western" societies (Holland & Kipnis, this volume; Spiro, 1993; also di Leonardo, 1990) while others have criticized "sociocentrism" and its association with "non-Western" societies (Hollan, 1992; Poole, 1991). I cannot go into the details of these arguments here; but I will focus on one specific argument that could be advanced in support of understanding the Western self as egocentric. Through this discussion, I will attempt to illustrate the difference between culturally sensitive psychology and ethnography.

One particularly striking illustration of the egocentric character of the "American" self are the character types associated with American literary

traditions.² In the nineteenth century, writers like Melville, Poe, and Twain developed a specific type of fictional character, typically a man who rejects the social constraints of domesticity and society, and survives by relying on his own resources. This rugged individualism can easily be seen as the embodiment of the American sense of self (although it is not unique to this fictional tradition, as Gulliver and Odysseus remind us). However, when we take a closer look at the material conditions under which American fiction developed, as sociologist Wendy Griswold (1981) has, the picture that emerges is considerably more complicated. Throughout the nineteenth century, copyright laws in the United States only protected American citizens, which meant that publishers could pirate British writers' works with impunity and sell them very cheaply. Until international copyright laws came into existence in the 1890s, this fiercely competitive market was one factor that encouraged American writers to develop a style of fictional writing which differed from the trendy (and cheap) British social novels of the time. It is in this economic climate that the themes one finds in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Moby Dick* emerged.

It is of course interesting to speculate about why rugged individualism, and not other themes, appealed to American novelists and their audiences; one fruitful avenue is to see them as the antithesis of the sappy social fiction that British novelists were mass-producing at the time. Interestingly, nineteenth-century American novelists were indeed innovators, but they also acted as members of a group, rather than isolated individuals concerned with their self-preservation as writers, since together they developed a clearly identifiable American fictional character. The important point, however, is that it arose as a direct result of the social and material context of production, and not simply as a "mirror" of the "American character" (the nature of which is itself highly problematic). An understanding of the material and social conditions of nineteenth-century American literature is of course not enough to seriously challenge the characterization of the American self as egocentric. It does, however, highlight the difference between injecting psychological theory with a component of cultural sensitivity, and conducting ethnographic research. In other words, ethnographic research does not limit itself to observing the surface appearance of key cultural symbols and recurrent social patterns. Rather, at its best, it interrogates the relationship between these symbols and their social and material contexts.

Experimentation

Research methods are probably the one area that separates most dramatically the two disciplines. My impression, formed elsewhere and confirmed at the Almagro Workshop, is that psychologists find anthropological methods unfathomable, and perhaps rightly so. At the same time, anthropologists criticize psychologists for failing to attend to sampling problems, and for not spending enough time worrying about contexts of discourse, the social identity of subjects, and the relationship between observer and observed.

I will not attempt to identify the methodological differences that separate the two fields, but instead will focus on one salient difference, namely the use of experimentation. Perhaps the biggest frustration for psychologists reading the anthropological literature is what comes across as a lack of openness to experimentation. Anthropologists make declarative statements which psychologists find unsubstantiated, and which they think could lend themselves to experimental testing. However, there are good reasons why anthropologists are so wary of experimentation, as it invariably makes assumptions about the nature of persons, psychological processes, and social groups that anthropologists find problematic. First, assumptions are made about subjects' understanding of the experimental task as simulated reality, an understanding that schooling drums into the average middle-class member of the post-industrial world from early childhood, but which may seem rather exotic and bizarre to members of many other societies (even societies with long traditions of schooling). Second, experiments may be difficult to apprehend not just cognitively, but also on a social level. Take the case of experiments with children: children everywhere learn very early to expect certain things of adults and peers, such as a certain level and quality of attention (e.g., Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Children who are used to primarily adapt to the needs of adults, rather than expect adults to adapt to their needs, probably find it very difficult to comprehend and deal with the attention paid to them by a foreign adult experimenter (who by the same token may have been assigned honorary high status). For example, adults on Nukulaelae Atoll (Central Pacific) originally met with incredulity (and continue to do so) my own attempts to conduct even naturalistic observation of children and, for that matter, other low-status persons: what could I possibly learn from the little critters, since *they* should be the ones to learn from *me*? Asking adult members of the community to run experiments may solve some problems, but certainly not all, and it most probably introduces others.

In short, the anthropological reaction to most experimental research, particularly when conducted outside of the middle-class post-industrial world, reads as follows: How was the experiment understood by the subjects? What is the relationship between behavior during the experiment and everyday behavior in naturalistic contexts? Where and how is the experiment "located" in the social world of the community in which it is conducted? While these questions obviously call for greater attention to the context of the experiment, they cannot simply be answered by devising more sophisticated research designs. Rather, they call for experimentation to be situated in an ethnographic context, and for the experiment itself to become the object of ethnographic scrutiny. For example, the extent to which experimenter and subjects share the same cultural conventions governing the organization of social interaction is a topic of crucial importance, which is often ignored in cross-cultural psychological experimentation (cf. Irvine, 1978). There are precedents for this sort of enterprise, such as Scribner and Cole's (1981) research on cognitive skills related to schooling and literacy among the Vai of Liberia, but these precedents bear witness to the enormous amount of time and energy that such ethnographically contextualized experimentation demands.

Towards a Cross-Disciplinary Dialogue?

Having identified points of conflict and misunderstanding between anthropological and psychological approaches to emotion, is productive dialogue possible across disciplinary boundaries? Several stumbling blocks lie in the path of a meaningful exchange. Of these, differences in what the two fields consider "fundamental" and "worthy of study" are the most potentially problematic, particularly when couched in extreme terms: between anthropologists who insist that what happens in someone's head is uninteresting or impossible to investigate, and psychologists who view the social as peripheral or irrelevant, there is little hope of a dialogue. Fortunately, these polar views are not held by many on either side of the disciplinary boundary.

In this brief critical discussion, I hope to have implicitly identified areas of inquiry where anthropological research can be more productively utilized in psychology. First, anthropological works can illuminate the nature of society and culture, which psychologists tend to under-problematize, and provide a considerably more sophisticated understanding of the impact of the social and cultural on human beings. Second, anthropologists can guide psychologists towards more holistic approaches to emotions, in which physiological, cognitive, and contextual aspects are not isolated from one another, but connected dialectically, so that each aspect can potentially influence the other. Third, cross-disciplinary collaboration can shed light on the complex relationship between the individual as a sentient entity and the individual as the member of a group.

Notes

Acknowledgments. I am grateful to Philip Bock, Jean Briggs, Judith Irvine, James Russell, and Jane Wellenkamp for their invaluable comments on a previous version of this piece. Some of my remarks were inspired by the closing comments at the Almagro workshop, and by a detailed commentary that Jean Briggs wrote after the meeting. Any remaining shortcoming remains my responsibility.

1. This brief discussion runs the danger of representing the anthropological viewpoint as if there were few or no disagreements in anthropology as to how to approach emotions, which is of course far from reality. First, there are major differences in the way that biologically oriented anthropologists and socio-cultural anthropologists view emotions (see Worthman, 1992). Second, socio-cultural anthropologists themselves disagree vigorously on many fundamental issues. What I take as the anthropological voice here is an approach to psychological anthropology represented at the Almagro Workshop and in this volume. My comments will not bear on mainstream linguistic approaches to emotions. However, the anthropological approach I present here presupposes sophistication on issues of language and context. (Indeed, the majority of anthropological contributors to this volume are trained in linguistics and give prominence to language in their research.)

2. Whether American fictional characters have been presented as illustrations of or evidence for the egocentrism of the American self matters little for the general point I am making here. Comparable analyses could be made of many other institutions, conventions, and social practices that are commonly thought to reflect or encourage an autonomous sense of self in Americans (e.g., the legal system, the Constitution, and socializing practices).

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