

PSYCHOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY FOR THE 21st CENTURY

Jack David Eller



Psychological Anthropology for the 21st Century

This book provides a comprehensive introduction to psychological anthropology, covering both the early history and contemporary state of the field. Eller discusses the major themes, theories, figures and publications, and provides a detailed survey of the essential and enduring relationship between anthropology and psychology. The volume charts the development, celebrates the accomplishments, critiques the inadequacies, and considers the future of a field that has made great contributions to the overall discipline of anthropology. The chapters feature rich ethnographic examples and boxes for more in-depth discussion as well as summaries and questions to support teaching and learning. This is essential reading for all students new to the study of psychological anthropology.

Jack David Eller is Associate Professor (Emeritus) of Anthropology at the Community College of Denver, USA. An experienced teacher and author, he is the author of the major introductory textbook *Cultural Anthropology: Global Forces, Local Lives* (third edition, 2016). His other titles for Routledge include *Introducing Anthropology of Religion* (second edition, 2014), *Cultural Anthropology: 101* (2015), *Culture and Diversity in the United States* (2015), and *Social Science and Historical Perspectives* (2016).



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Psychological Anthropology for the 21st Century

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Introduction

When I started my doctoral education in anthropology in the early 1980s, psychological anthropology had fallen into disfavor, if not disrepute. The excesses and oversimplifications, along with the unkept promises of previous incarnations—known by such diverse and overlapping names as culture-and-personality, cognitive anthropology, and cognition and culture, among others—had largely led anthropologists to turn their back on the psychological anthropology of the first half of the twentieth century and to move on to other questions, theories, and methods. Yet fascinating new ideas and approaches were on the horizon, and psychological anthropology was on the verge of a rebirth.

From its very inception, anthropology has been thoroughly enmeshed with psychology, whether that concerns the characteristics of alleged “primitive mentality” versus the universality of mental processes; the effects of child-rearing and social experience on personality; or the role and variability of perception, memory, learning, etc. in culture. Many members of the first generation of anthropologists or field researchers were trained psychologists or psychoanalysts (and/or physicians), and many others collaborated with specialists in those fields while sometimes undergoing analysis themselves. Most of the important anthropologists of the twentieth century—from Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski to Clifford Geertz and Claude Lévi-Strauss—asked psychological questions or offered insights that were relevant to the psychological side of society and culture. Anthropologists further incorporated psychological techniques, including tests of perception and intelligence, into their fieldwork. Most recognized that a complete understanding of humans as social and cultural beings would require consideration of the human mind and its relation to the evolved human body. Even scholars who appear to have shed the focus on mind or psychology, such as Pierre Bourdieu, still contributed to the investigation of tacit (unspoken and perhaps unspeakable) and embodied knowledge, and Dan Sperber’s suggestions about the spread and “catchiness” of certain ideas have been adopted for the cognitive-evolutionary theory of religion and culture generally and more widely for the production of “viral” ideas. Meanwhile, anthropology has ventured with intriguing and important results into other psychological territory, such as emotions, dreams and altered states of consciousness, personhood, and mental illness.

Psychological Anthropology for the 21st Century is the first comprehensive text to encapsulate both the early history and the contemporary state of the subdiscipline. It provides a detailed survey of the essential and enduring relationship between anthropology and psychology (matters of personality, mentality, character, mind, cognition, and so forth) from the very earliest days of anthropology until the present. Beyond chronicling the rise, practice, (often scathing) critique, and subsequent decline of theoretical schools and research agendas, the book describes some grand themes that have characterized not only the subdiscipline but

also the entire enterprise of anthropology, including the racist and racist attitude that infected the field and much of Western thought in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and that, depressingly, still persists too often in the twenty-first). We also see psychological anthropology change or mature as its focus shifted from personality or character to more profound issues of knowledge and cognitive process. Finally, we underscore the intimate mutual influence of anthropology on the one hand and allied fields like philosophy and linguistics on the other. Combining the questions of knowledge and language, we stress the gathering consensus that language is not a perfect model or metaphor for knowledge or mind (knowledge-as-statements, mind-as-grammar, or culture-as-text) since not all knowledge or mentation is verbal or propositional but is rather “practical” and embodied.

As with any writing project of manageable scale, it is not possible to cover every topic of interest and relevance in this book. Even in the chapter on emotions, an explicit choice is made to concentrate on a few emotions—anger, fear, and love—on the assumption that this treatment establishes the prospect for an anthropology of any and all emotions. As one of the reviewers of the final manuscript accurately commented, there are other topics that deserve attention, from pain and hope to well-being, and indeed, every psychological subject could be, should be, and probably has been investigated through a cross-cultural and ethnographic lens. At the same time, some of the scholars discussed in the book may not exactly qualify as, or identify themselves as, psychological anthropologists, but that is precisely the point: psychological anthropology is not a sharply bounded subset of anthropology but a perspective that emerges from and flows into many corners of the discipline, taking many forms. The selection of subjects in this book is mine alone and in no way exhausts the actual and potential achievements of psychological anthropology. Readers are encouraged to search out other relevant subjects and perhaps even add to the growing psychological anthropology literature.

Ultimately, *Psychological Anthropology for the 21st Century* charts the development, celebrates the accomplishments, critiques the inadequacies, and considers the future of a field that has made great contributions to the overall discipline of anthropology and that plays a crucial role in anthropology’s mission to become a comprehensive science of human nature and diversity.

Structure and features of the book

Because *Psychological Anthropology for the 21st Century* is both historical and topical, it is divided evenly into two parts, covering these two terrains. The opening five chapters are roughly chronological, beginning with the first chapter on psychological interests in anthropology from the 1800s to the 1920s. The second chapter covers the famous culture-and-personality school from the 1920s to the 1940s, and the third chapter continues that examination for the period from 1945 to the 1970s, when participants took stock of a half-century of work, even as the school was losing momentum. The fourth chapter surveys the “cognitive turn” in anthropology in reaction to the older approach, including ethnoscience or cognitive anthropology and Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism as well as Leslie White’s concurrent rejection of psychology in favor of “culturology.” The fifth chapter brings us up-to-date with presentations on symbolism, practice, and embodiment.

The second, topical part is comprised of five chapters on specific contemporary areas of research in psychological anthropology. These include self and personhood, emotions, dreams and altered states of consciousness, mental illness, and cognition and neuroanthropology.

Because the goals of the two parts are so distinct, the structure of the associated chapters differs somewhat:

- each of the first five chapters opens with a chronological list of major figures and publications, and closes with a summary of the accomplishments and shortcomings of the respective scholars and schools
- each of the second five chapters opens with a list of key questions broached in the study of the particular subject and closes with a summary of the findings and results of the respective research.

All of the chapters also feature extensive and rich ethnographic examples, both classic and cutting edge, and multiple boxes for more in-depth ethnographic or conceptual discussion.

Final remarks

Psychological Anthropology for the 21st Century is the product of over thirty years of research and teaching, beginning with an individual major in college labeled “Patterns of Human Experience,” continuing through a doctoral dissertation titled *Culture and Subjectivity: On the Theory of the Individual in Culture*, and culminating in this project. It is my hope, and the hope of the kind reviewers who evaluated the original proposal for the book, that it will reinvigorate psychological anthropology, secure the subdiscipline’s value in the past and the present, and stimulate further interest in the psychological achievements of anthropology while promoting interdisciplinary dialogue and research between anthropologists; psychologists; other scholars, like neuroscientists and artificial-intelligence designers; and practitioners, like psychiatrists and social workers—who themselves are increasingly aware of the cultural component in illness and treatment.

A note on verb tenses

Anthropologists have struggled, perhaps more than other social scientists, with the temporal dimension of our research and writing. We have often been guilty—and have castigated ourselves—for putting our findings in the “ethnographic present,” that is, using the present tense, even when our fieldwork was performed in the past and when the information we convey refers to a bygone era (for instance, “The Warlpiri do this” or “The Yanomamo believe that”). The problem also arises when citing the work of other scholars, whose books and articles may have been published last year or more than a century ago. There is obviously no simple, universal solution to this dilemma: we cannot merely put all verbs in the past tense or the present tense. In this book, where the time frame is not perfectly obvious, I have made the arbitrary decision to phrase data or quotations in the past tense (e.g. “Geertz said”) if they were published more than ten years ago (approximately before 2007) and the present tense (e.g. “Coolidge and Wynn emphasize”) if they are less than ten years old.



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Part I

The development of psychological anthropology



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Psychology in the formation of anthropology

Key figures:

Edward Burnett (E. B.) Tylor (1832–1917)

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857–1939)

Franz Boas (1858–1942)

William Halse Rivers (W. H. R.) Rivers (1864–1922)

Key texts:

Primitive Culture (1871)

How Natives Think (originally published as *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures*, 1910)

The Mind of Primitive Man (1911)

Totem and Taboo (1913)

Sex and Repression in Savage Society (1927)

The eminent twentieth-century anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote that anthropology, more specifically ethnology or the description and analysis of humankind's diverse cultures, “is first of all psychology” (1966: 131). We hope that he is wrong as this would make anthropology redundant or reduce it to a branch of another discipline, and indeed, he is wrong as anthropology has a different mission and different methods than psychology. Yet anthropology and psychology have been close companions since the 1800s, when both fields began to coalesce into their modern forms. Many of the early contributors to anthropology were professional psychologists, and many early professional anthropologists asked explicitly psychological questions while borrowing psychological theories and tools, like intelligence tests and Rorschach inkblots.

Especially in the United States but also in France and Germany, psychological concerns have pervaded anthropology and continue to do so; in fact, they may do so more today than at any time since the 1970s. American cultural anthropology in particular has actually spawned a number of specializations and subdisciplines, from psychoanalytic anthropology to culture-and-personality to ethnoscience or componential analysis to cognitive anthropology and neuroanthropology. The heyday of psychologically oriented anthropology was probably the 1960s and 1970s, when Francis Hsu (1972b: 6) proposed a new and more inclusive name for the subdiscipline—*psychological anthropology*.

Over the past century, anthropology has constructed, critiqued, transcended, and sometimes strenuously rejected this sequence of psychologically focused schools or theories, but psychological anthropology is not just the story of one failed and discarded paradigm after another. First, psychological anthropology from its inception offered an alternative to other dominant approaches, such as functionalism and structural functionalism. Second, even in its failures or excesses, each wave or generation of psychological anthropological thought can claim its accomplishments and insights, and has left its mark on the discipline. Third and ultimately, psychological anthropology speaks to the deepest issues of human culture and of the human individual, recognizing the essential connection or interpenetration of the two. In this way, it seeks to fulfill the promise of anthropology to be a true science of humanity and not mere antiquarianism or the collection of cultural oddities.

Setting the question

Everyone (well, almost everyone) can agree that culture and the individual are intimately linked: culture shapes individual thought, feeling, and behavior, while individual action produces and reproduces cultural ideas, norms, relations, and institutions. It is of course possible to investigate cultural and social phenomena without appeal to psychology—just as it is possible to study, say, mathematics without referring to brain processes, although to be sure, doing math requires brain processes—and most ethnographic research makes no specific mention of it. However, culture only exists because of certain evolved human mental capacities and tendencies (see Chapter 10), and, as psychologists have also discovered, human psychological processes are not independent of culture—are not “precultural”—but are reciprocally influenced by social experience.

What then is psychological anthropology? Hsu gave a very broad answer, asserting that it includes any work

by an anthropologist who has a good knowledge of psychological concepts or by a member of another discipline who has a good knowledge of anthropological concepts [By this definition, psychologists or neuroscientists doing cross-cultural research are in effect psychological anthropologists.]

Any work that deals with the individual as the locus of culture

Any work that gives serious recognition to culture as an independent or a dependent variable associated with personality [that is, culture may be explored as cause or effect of personality factors]

Any work by an anthropologist which uses psychological concepts or techniques or by a scholar in a psychological discipline which provides directly pertinent data in forms which are useable by anthropologists.

(1972b: 2)

Among the most persistent topics in psychological anthropology, particularly in its early to mid-twentieth-century manifestation, have been

(a) the relation of social structure and values to modal patterns of child rearing, (b) the relation of modal patterns of child rearing to modal personality structure as expressed in behavior, (c) the relation of modal personality structure to the role system and projective aspects of culture [i.e. art, myth, religion, etc.], and (d) the relation of all of the foregoing variables to deviant behavior patterns which vary from one group to another,
(2–3)

including mental illness and altered states of consciousness, like dreams and trance.

Finally, acknowledging that anthropologists are not the only scholars interested in social influences on thought or in cross-cultural differences in cognition, Hsu contrasted psychological anthropology with social psychology in the following ways:

- 1 Psychological anthropology is cross-cultural in approach from its inception while social psychology has traditionally drawn its data from Western societies
- 2 Social psychology is quantitative and even, to a certain extent, experimental in orientation, while psychological anthropology has paid little attention to research designs and only lately awakened to the need for rigor in the matter of hypothesis formation and of verification
- 3 Psychological anthropology deals not only with the effect of society and culture on psychic characteristics of individuals (a basic concern of social psychology) but also with the role of personality characteristics in the maintenance, development, and change of culture and society.

(12–13)

Admittedly, these distinctions are not as sharp today as they were half a century ago: some psychological research is truly cross-cultural, even ethnographic, while some anthropological research is quantitative and methodologically rigorous.

Defining “culture” and “personality”

In the noble and ambitious calling of psychological anthropology, a major obstacle has been deciding on and defining key terms for identifying and differentiating the collective and the individual, the external and the internal, the social and the mental, variables of behavior. The initial decades of the twentieth century, as we will soon see, leaned heavily on the concepts of “culture” and “personality,” although especially in regard to the latter, many rival, overlapping but not synonymous, terms vied and still vie for a place in the discourse, including “mentality,” “mind,” “character,” “self,” “person,” “cognition,” and so forth. Neither anthropologists nor psychologists are entirely unanimous on the meaning of these terms nor, therefore, on their interrelation.

Beginning with culture, anthropologists recognize Edward Burnett (E. B.) Tylor as probably the first scholar to give an anthropological definition of culture in his 1871 *Primitive Culture*, where the opening sentence of the book reads, “Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1958: 1). The noteworthy features of this definition are its reference to mental content like knowledge and belief, its emphasis on acquisition or learning, and its appreciation of social membership—and thus, potentially, the differences in knowledge, belief, and learning in different societies.

Others have defined culture in similar but varying ways. In his 1963 *Culture and Personality*, Victor Barnouw characterized it as

the way of life of a group of people, the configuration of all of the more or less stereotyped patterns of learned behavior which are handed down from one generation to the next through the means of language and imitation.

(1973: 6)

Ralph Linton, one of the champions of culture-and-personality analysis at mid-century, characterized culture as “the configuration of behavior and results of behavior whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society” (1945: 32), reflecting a Tylorian view; emphasizing the place of the individual in culture, Linton went on to state that “real culture” is the sum of the behavioral configurations of all the members of a society (in other words, add up all the individuals, and you have “culture”), while the “culture construct” is a creation of the anthropologist who intuitively (if not invents) “the mode of the finite series of variations which are included within each of the real culture patterns and then use this mode as a symbol for the real culture pattern” (45). In a later summary of the field, Anthony Wallace rephrased his definition of culture to designate “those ways of behavior or techniques of solving problems which, being more frequently and more closely approximated than other ways, can be said to have a high probability of use by individual members of society” (1964: 6).

Assuredly, there are many other definitions of culture, some stressing thought and others stressing action, some including material objects and others not. If anything, the situation is even more fraught when it comes to the subject of personality—for which one might substitute (and many have substituted) mind, character, or other words. Barnouw considered personality to be “a more or less enduring organization of forces within the individual associated with a complex of fairly consistent attitudes, values, and modes of perception which account, in part, for the individual’s consistency of behavior” (1963: 10). Wallace defined the term simply to mean “those ways of behavior or techniques of solving problems which have a high probability of use by one individual” (1964: 7), but Linton expanded considerably on the concept; for him, personality referred to

the organized aggregate of psychological processes and states pertaining to the individual. This definition includes the common element in most of the definitions now current. At the same time it excludes many orders of phenomena which have been included in one or another of these definitions. Thus, it rules out the overt behavior resulting from the operations of these processes and states, although it is only from such behavior that their nature and even existence can be deduced. It also excludes from consideration the effects of this behavior upon the individual’s environment, even that part of it which consists of other individuals. Lastly, it excludes from the personality concept the physical structure of the individual and his physiological processes. This final limitation will appear too drastic to many students of personality, but it has a pragmatic, if not a logical, justification. We know so little about the physiological accompaniments of psychological phenomena that attempts to deal with the latter in physiological terms still lead to more confusion than clarification.

(1945: 84)

For his part, Robert LeVine made an effort to unpack the term a bit, asserting that personality “is the organization in the individual of those processes that intervene between environmental conditions and behavioral responses,” adding that it consists of many variables, such as “perception, cognition, memory, learning, and the activation of emotional reactions—as they are organized and regulated in the individual organism” (1973: 5). Articulating the concept further, he distinguished between “observable behavioral consistencies” which he called “personality indicators”; the underlying psychological complex of “motivational, affective, and cognitive components and multiple forms of expression” which he called “personality dispositions”; and the structured “personality organization” in which those dispositions are embedded (9).

The relationship(s) between culture and personality

Given the imprecision of its two fundamental terms, it is little wonder that anthropologists (and others) disagree about the actual relationship between culture (or shared, public processes and content) and personality (or individual, internal processes and content). British social anthropologist S. F. Nadel, for instance, was quick to insist that scientists

may take it for granted that there is some connection between the make-up of a culture and the particular personality (or personalities) of its human carriers. Yet in taking this connection to be a simple and obvious one, so simple and obvious that one can be inferred from the other, we run the risk of arguing in a circle

(1951: 405)

—in fact, probably two inverse circles: one in which culture causes personality and the other in which personality causes culture.

LeVine hypothesized that observers had advocated at least five different positions on the question of the relationship between culture and personality or, more generally and less argumentatively, between culture and the individual. First were those positions that were frankly disinterested in, if not hostile to, the issue of personality/individual altogether. Among these are Alfred Kroeber's view of the "superorganic" nature of culture—that is, that culture has its own level of reality *apart from and above* the individual—and the "culturology" of Leslie White, who believed expressly that anthropology should be the study of culture and not of the individual (see Chapter 3). Alongside Kroeber and White, LeVine counted the symbolic interactionists who explained behavior in terms of meanings and situations, both external to the individual; we might add the behaviorists, who considered personality as at best a "black box" of unknown and unknowable factors and at worst an academic fiction, and at least some Marxists, who viewed individuals as less relevant than—even as mere instantiations of—class and economic relations.

Second, LeVine posited the "psychological reductionists" for whom culture could and should be explained (away?) simply in terms of personality: in the reverse of anti-personality theories, psychological processes and forces are real, and "culture" is a mere epiphenomenon of that internal world. LeVine indicted Freudian psychology as the "major contemporary reductionism" (1973: 48) for claiming to find the root of sophisticated cultural matters like art and religion in child-rearing practices and, even more reductively, in psychological (or biological) drives and mental structures like the id, ego, and superego.

Ironically, this psychological reductionism was influential in anthropological studies of culture and personality, many of which took the form of LeVine's third position, which he dubbed the "personality-is-culture" view. He claimed that prominent practitioners of culture-and-personality anthropology, like Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, "rejected the conceptual distinction between culture and personality" (53); in an anthropological cliché, culture for them was nothing more than "personality writ large" (see Chapter 2).

For a fourth contingent, including anthropologically informed psychologists and psychiatrists like Abram Kardiner, personality was intermediate between the so-called primary institutions of culture (like the family) and the secondary or more abstract cultural institutions of politics, religion, and so on (see Chapter 3). Finally, LeVine maintained that there was a fifth camp of theorists who took a "two systems" approach to culture and

personality, seeing “personality and sociocultural institutions as two systems interacting with each other”:

Each system is comprised of interdependent parts and has requirements for its maintenance. Both sets of requirements make demands of individual behavior, the personality system for socially valued performance in the roles that are institutionalized in the social structure. Stability in the interaction of the two systems is attained only when their respective requirements are functionally integrated by standards of role performance that permit the individual to satisfy his psychological needs and meet sociocultural demands at the same time. (58)

Anthropologists Melford Spiro and A. Irving Hallowell are associated with this view.

In the end, LeVine represented the five models with simple equations stipulating the avowed relationship between culture (C) and personality (P):

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Anti-personality | $C \rightarrow P$ (or in extreme cases, just C without any P) |
| Psychological reductionism | $P \rightarrow C$ |
| Personality-is-culture | $P = C$ |
| Personality-as-mediation | $C1 \rightarrow P \rightarrow C2$ |
| Two systems | $P \leftrightarrow C$ |

(59)

BOX 1.1 BRITISH SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

While American cultural anthropology has had an abiding interest in psychological matters, British social anthropology was traditionally relatively disinterested. Strongly and overtly influenced by Émile Durkheim’s sociology, British social anthropology was much more committed to “social facts” than its American counterpart. In fact, social anthropologists like Alfred Reginald (A. R.) Radcliffe-Brown doubted the utility, if not the very possibility, of studying either personality *or* culture. He asserted that one

cannot have a science of culture. You can study culture only as a characteristic of a social system... If you study culture, you are always studying the acts of behavior of a specific set of persons who are linked in a social structure, (1957: 106)

rendering the mental realm irrelevant.

Physiological psychology: body, race, and mind

It is an underappreciated fact that psychology and anthropology both emerged around the same time (in the mid-to-late 1800s) and often shared practitioners but that both originally had their roots in biological and even medical sciences. Psychology, or what Gustav Fechner in 1860 deigned to call “psychophysics,” initially grew out of investigations of the nervous system; other founders of the science, like Hermann von Helmholtz and Paul Broca, were also researchers in nerve and brain physiology and function, and

Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), who founded the first psychology laboratory, attempted to measure sensory perception and thought itself (with his so-called “thought-meter”) and penned a volume titled *Principles of Physiological Psychology*. The second source of early psychological exploration was mental illness, as in the work of Jean-Martin Charcot, who directed the French hospital of La Salpêtrière, where he studied not only spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, and Parkinson’s disease but also hypnosis and hysteria. Sigmund Freud began his career in neurology before going on to clinical psychology and ultimately his theories of mind and culture.

Anthropology was likewise conceived as a “natural science of man” before it became a cultural science. In his 1863 *Introduction to Anthropology*, Theodore Waitz asserted that the field “aspires to be the science of man in general; or, in precise terms, the science of the nature of man” (1863: 3), which should “study man by the same method which is applied to the investigation of all other natural objects” (5). Armand de Quatrefages, a nineteenth-century lecturer, explained that this meant that the anthropologist should study mankind “as a zoologist studying an animal would understand it” (quoted in Topinard 1890: 2). Paul Topinard summed up late nineteenth-century thinking when he declared that anthropology was “the branch of natural history which treats of man and the races of man” (1890: 3). Thus, anthropology was the name of the more inclusive science, including but not restricted to a branch of *ethnology* that examines the world’s diverse human populations to describe their “manners, customs, religion, language, physical traits, and origins” (8–9).

More than a century previously, Carolus Linnaeus (1707–78) had inaugurated the natural-science study of humanity. In his 1740 *Systema Naturae*, he divided the human species into four subtypes, which were eventually labeled *Homo europaeus*, *Homo afer*, *Homo americanus*, and *Homo asiaticus*. Each category—or what we would today call “race”—was characterized by skin color but also by (alleged) behavioral habits and personality tendencies, often in shockingly insulting ways.

BOX 1.2 LINNAEUS’S RACES OF MANKIND

Linnaeus described his four types of humanity as:

Homo europaeus (European/Caucasian): “white, sanguine, muscular. Hair flowing, long.

Eyes blue. Gentle, acute, inventive. Covered with close vestments. Governed by laws.”

Homo afer (African): “black, phlegmatic, relaxed. Hair black, frizzled. Skin silky. Nose flat. Lips tumid. Women without shame. Mammae lactate profusely. Crafty, indolent, negligent. Anoints himself with grease. Governed by caprice.”

Homo americanus (Native American): “reddish, choleric, erect. Hair black, straight, thick; nostrils wide; face harsh; beard scanty. Obstinate, merry, free. Paints himself with fine red lines. Regulated by customs.”

Homo asiaticus (Asian): “sallow, melancholy, stiff. Hair black. Eyes dark. Severe, haughty, avaricious. Covered with loose garments. Ruled by opinions”

(quoted in Slotkin 1965: 177–8)

For good measure, he added two purely imaginary species: *Homo ferus* (a hairy and mute being that walked on all fours) and *Homo monstrosus* (a monstrous race of nocturnal cave dwellers).

Others, writing before the dawn of modern anthropology, proposed other biological/racial schemes, like Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. In his 1770 *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*, he also announced four races—African, American, Asian, and “Caucasian,” a term he introduced, later adding Malayan as a fifth entry. These races were, unsurprisingly, not only different but unequal: he judged Caucasians as both the original or “primeval” form of humanity and the most beautiful, and non-Caucasian strains were explained as a product of “degeneration” from this primary and ideal type.

The typologies or racial classifications of humans that appeared before modern anthropology and that were inherited by the discipline were purportedly based on real, empirical physical differences. Accordingly, much of nineteenth- (and even early twentieth-) century science was directed toward documenting these differences. One of the main methods of what has been called “scientific racism” was *anthropometry*, literally “man-measure.” Anthropometry was and is a practice of measuring the bodies of human beings for the purpose of describing individual and collective physical characteristics—and, more importantly for many of its practitioners, of discovering the biological basis for supposed psychological differences between the races in terms of intelligence, temperament, morality, and so forth.

Many physical features were measured and cataloged, but of central importance were the ones that presumably indicated “primitiveness” or mental inferiority. For example, “facial angle” reflected the protrusion of the lower face and jaw on the assumption that more “primitive” races had more protruding faces (like dogs or monkeys), while higher races enjoyed flatter faces. Longer arms and legs also signaled primitiveness. No doubt the most important measurements were brain volume and cephalic index, the latter a ratio of the width and depth of the head. Surely, these scientists reckoned, larger brains with a higher index indicated greater intelligence and rationality. Physical traits, especially those of the head and face, were even seen as evidence of more complex and specific personality or psychological failings, such as immorality, criminality, or insanity. An entire parallel science of eugenics developed beside scientific racism, with the project to improve the intelligence and morality of the species (Figure 1.1).

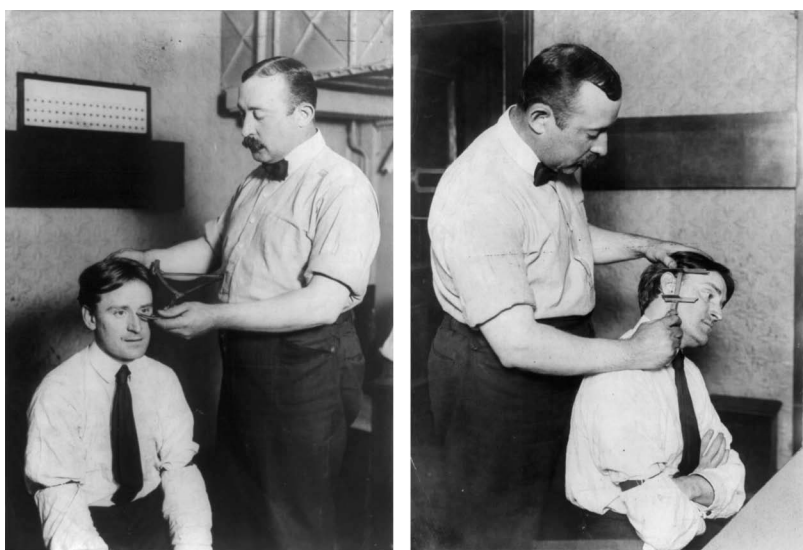


Figure 1.1 Nineteenth-century anthropometry measured human physical traits to establish differences between types (especially races) of humans; Library of Congress.

BOX 1.3 CESARE LOMBROSO: ANTHROPOLOGICAL CRIMINOLOGY

Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), a medical doctor and criminologist, devised a theory of “anthropological criminology” (or what we might call “racial profiling” today) on the basis of physical characteristics or defects that he claimed were diagnostic of deviant personality and behavior. In his learned view, criminals were throwbacks to a more primitive kind of humanity, a phenomenon that he termed “criminal atavism.” Certain bodily traits were common to criminals, “primitive” humans, and prehistoric mankind, including long arms, sloping foreheads, misshapen faces and heads, and protruding faces. Such physical deformities were the visible evidence of personality or character deformities, like stupidity, immorality, impulsiveness, egotism, and cruelty. Ideally then, a criminal or other social inferior could be detected by sight and perhaps even at birth.

It should not be difficult to see that this brand of physiological psychology was more (and less) than science but also what Eric Wolf (1994) pinpointed and critiqued as a “bio-moral” project, that is, a system to *justify* social inequalities—like slavery or colonial conquest—on the basis of putative biological and psychological differences and inadequacies. Social policies followed suit, from prohibiting interracial marriage to the selective sterilization of “inferior types” to rejections of attempts to educate or uplift disadvantaged races since apparently, they were congenitally incapable of higher intellectual and moral functioning.

One example of this reasoning can be found in the work of Stanley Porteus (1883–1972), an Australian psychologist and inventor of the Porteus Maze Test of intelligence. He conducted intelligence and personality tests on “delinquent” and “feeble-minded” boys in 1915, determining that most of the boys were several years behind in their mental and moral development. He then applied his research to remote Australian Aborigines, which he reported in a series of papers and in his 1931 book *The Psychology of a Primitive People*. Although he accepted that many of the aspects of traditional Aboriginal culture were clever adaptations to a harsh natural environment, he concluded that traditional life had left a deleterious brand on the Aboriginal mind. Mental development in Aboriginal children was normal, even rapid, early in life but was then followed by “a marked slowing-down mental development...characteristic of the Australian race” (1933: 32). Further, they suffered from poor rote memory from listening and a lack of abstract intelligence matched only “by the abilities of the feeble-minded of our race” (34), not to mention “the common racial characteristics of indolence, shiftlessness, and lack of foresight” (1917: 38). Consequently, he predicted “the improbability of marked advancement in civilization of the Australian race” (1933: 34) since it is “very difficult indeed to educate them beyond about the fourth grade” (1917: 38).

Folk psychology and the question of the primitive mind

Although modern-day psychology is usually associated with the individual and internal/mental processes, while anthropology is assumed to concentrate on collective and public/social ones, we have seen already that this division is by no means absolute today nor was it true of the disciplines in their formative years. Not only were and are anthropologists interested in psychological questions, but psychologists were and are interested in cultural ones.

As far back as the late 1700s, historian Johann Herder (1744–1803) had suggested that each *Volk* (German for folk, people, or nation) had its own unique qualities, genius, or even soul or spirit. Herder used such phrases as *Nationalgeist* (national spirit), *Seele des Volks* (soul of the people), *Geist der Nation* (spirit of the nation), and *Geist des Volks* (spirits of the people) to capture this collective peculiarity which was, to him, inexpressible and invaluable. The spirit of a people was to be found in its art, its literature, its philosophy, its folklore, etc., depending on the particular society. This emphasis on, even obsession with, a nation's identity and cultural patrimony led directly to an interest in national or group beliefs, behaviors, and accomplishments, that is, to "culture" in the anthropological sense. This, in turn, led to an attempt to identify the group/collective processes which gave rise to national cultures, that is, a *Völkerpsychologie*, a "folk psychology" or "psychology of a people," in contrast to an "individual psychology" (Diriwachter 2004: 87–8):

That is, the study of psychology was also to include the products of collective mental processes of peoples identified as a unified body (e.g. the Germans), distinctly separate from others (e.g. the French). Individual psychology was limited to the focus of the capabilities of one person.

(88–9)

One of the great early psychologists became one of the great proponents of *Völkerpsychologie*: namely, Wilhelm Wundt, mentioned earlier. In an 1888 article, he defended research into national psychology:

Just like it's the objective of psychology to describe the actuality of individual consciousness, thereby putting its elements and developmental stages in an explicatory relationship, so too is there a need to make as the object of psychological investigation the analogous genetical and causal investigations of those actualities which pertain to the products of higher developmental relationships of human society, namely the folk-communities (*Völkergemeinschaft*).

(quoted 96)

However, in the case of *Völkerpsychologie*, standard (especially experimental) psychological methods would not suffice; rather, it was necessary to employ a comparative method, to do "historical comparisons," to examine the products of these collectivities and collective minds. For Wundt, then, *Völkerpsychologie* was not a strictly psychological enterprise but "in essence a social-developmental discipline: social because it predominantly moves within societal dimensions; and developmental because it also needs to examine the different steps of mental development in humans (true psychogenesis), from underdeveloped to higher cultures" (97). He even attempted to construct an outline of this historical-developmental process from "primitive man" to "the totemic era" to "the ages of heroes and gods" to "the development of humanity":

Each stage has its own unique characteristics that mark the achievements of the group under examination. For example, while primitive man is said to be closest to nature, comparable to wild animals, the man of the totemic era is already distinguished by a realization of the possession of a soul. In fact, the totem itself is the manifestation of a

soul, either the soul of an ancestor or the soul of a protective being, often in the shape of an animal.

(98)

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, many scholars went beyond the notion of unique “national minds” to ponder whether all humans of all nationalities, races, and societies shared the same thought processes and mental abilities. Did “primitive peoples,” in a word, think like “modern” (read: “Western”) people, or did they have a decisively different (and inferior) mind? What were Western travelers and intellectuals to make of the fact that native peoples around the world seemed to believe and do things that were, to “civilized” eyes, strange, irrational, and often demonstrably false?

On one side of the debate were those who defended the *psychic unity of humankind*, that is, the position that humans everywhere had similar psychology, even if their minds produced diverging or contradictory results. One of the earliest to stake this claim was Adolf Bastian (1826–1905). After traveling around the world and spending four years in Southeast Asia in the 1850s and 1860s, he concluded that the innate and universal processes of mind generated “elementary ideas” or *Elementargedanken* (what Carl G. Jung, a follower of Freud, might later call “archetypes”) that were found in all places and times. However, because of local historical and environmental/geographical forces, these universal ideas might be expressed differently in different populations as “ethnic” or “folk” ideas or *Völkergedanken*. For Bastian, as for Herder and Wundt, a group’s folk ideas could be discovered in its folklore, art, mythology, and so on, but underneath this variation were recurring themes. One crucial implication from this perspective was the importance of conducting “investigations of the most isolated and simple societies,” that is, doing what anthropologists would come to endorse as fieldwork and ethnography. Bastian was committed to the view that the ideas of “primitive” or “natural” humans “grow according to the same laws” as those of Westerners but that their “growth and decline are easier to observe, since we are looking at a limited field of observation which could be compared to an experiment in laboratory” (quoted in Penny 2002: 23).

Around the same time, an even more seminal figure was advancing a similar conclusion. In his aforementioned 1871 *Primitive Culture*, E. B. Tylor began by enunciating that “the condition of culture among various societies of mankind...is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action” (1958: 1). Surveying such disparate topics as emotion, language (including proverbs, riddles, and nursery rhymes), counting, and religion (myth, ritual, and, most famously, his concept of “animism”), he argued for the continuity of human thought, even if different groups were at different levels of development of their knowledge and understanding. For instance, Tylor reasoned that “the language of civilized men is but the language of savages, more or less improved in structure, a good deal extended in vocabulary, made more precise in the dictionary definition of words”; however, “development of language between its savage and cultured stages has been made in its details, scarcely in its principle” (445–6). Religion too, from the most rudimentary myths and ceremonies to the glories of European Christianity, revealed consistent thought processes operating below the surface. Further, refuting the scientific racism of his day, Tylor saw no reason to introduce race into the analysis of mind and action: everywhere he looked, he encountered “similarity and consistency” of “character and habit” (6), making it “both possible and desirable to eliminate considerations of hereditary varieties or races of man, and to treat mankind as homogeneous in nature, though placed in different grades of civilization” (7).

BOX 1.4 E. B. TYLOR: PSYCHOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF RELIGION

For Tylor, religion itself had a psychological origin. The most basic form or expression of religion in his view was belief in spiritual beings, and this idea arose as a reaction to certain mental experiences, such as dreams, visions, hallucinations, and trance or out-of-body experiences. Prehistoric individuals naturally speculated that the source of these uncanny occurrences, Tylor reasoned, was that some part of a person was separate from—even detachable from—their body, so that dreams, visions, etc. were authentic experiences by this immaterial part, perhaps of other people's immaterial parts (see Chapter 8). This disembodied component of a human being (and maybe some or all other beings) is “spirit,” the first religious idea and the foundation of all subsequent religious ideas.

One other early supporter of the psychic unity position was James George Frazer (1854–1941), a student of comparative mythology and the author of *The Golden Bough*. Frazer opined that the religious beliefs and stories of all societies demonstrated common motifs (including half-human, half-divine beings and dying gods) and that those motifs were often related to cultural practices, like agriculture, or to natural phenomena, like the solstices. More, he judged that religion and magic were not so irrational after all but evinced rational if erroneous thinking; primitive (and religious) people use the same processes of thought, but they merely start from false premises and thus reach false conclusions. Later psychological anthropologist Richard Shweder put it this way: “All people are applied scientists. ‘Primitives’ are just not very good at it. That, in a nutshell, is Tylor’s and Frazer’s view of the relationship between the ‘primitive’ mind and the ‘modern’ mind” (1980: 70).

BOX 1.5 HADDON AND CORT: EARLY STUDY OF “PRIMITIVE” COGNITION AND PERCEPTION

One of the assumptions, if not stereotypes, of “primitive” cognition was that native peoples, although deficient in logic, were advanced in sensory perception. It was frequently claimed that indigenous people (sadly, probably like animals) possessed highly developed senses of sight, hearing, and smell. Indeed, one of the first formal ethnographic expeditions had the express psychological mission of testing “primitive” perception. The Torres Straits Expedition of 1898 was led by Alfred Cort (A. C.) Haddon, a trained biologist and zoologist, to study the inhabitants of the islands between Australia and Indonesia. He recruited three medical doctors plus an experimental psychologist and neurologist, William Halse Rivers (W. H. R.) Rivers (1864–1922). The team collected all sorts of data during their comparatively brief sojourn in the islands, but Rivers, who had investigated color vision, optical illusions, and other aspects of perception in his psychology lab at Cambridge, seized the occasion to study the natives in regard to