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Does Culture Affect our Personality?

Loosely defined, culture refers to the shared values, beliefs and norms of a specific group of people. Culture, therefore, influences the manner we learn, live and behave. Because of this, many theorists believe that culture is an important shaper of our personality. One of the general assumptions asserting the effect of culture to personality is that people who are born and bred in the same culture share common personality traits.

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Personality: Boas and Benedict

According to Franz Boas, pioneer of Psychological Anthropology or the study of the relationship between culture and personality, personality is obtained thru culture and not biology. His theory called Cultural Relativism gives a comprehensive understanding of the underlying relationship between culture and personality.

Boas' student Ruth Benedict expounded the research on the effect of culture to personality through studying cultural various patterns and themes. Although she admitted that the global cultural diffusion has made the cultural patterns of civilized societies are difficult to trace, primitive societies located at the remote areas have preserved their shared personalities through their values, beliefs and rituals. When Benedict wrote her book *Patterns of Culture*, she mentioned her comparison of the cultural patterns of two different northern American Indian groups as well as an Indian group located off-coast of Papua New Guinea. In her study, she found out that although they are from similar genetic collection, these groups have significant differences in their respective value systems. For instance, one tribe's idea of a "good man" differentiates to that of another. Her book, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture*, included a detailed description of Japanese belief and value system as well as a hypothesis on the reason behind the actions of the Japanese during

World War II.

Personality: Margaret Mead

Arguably, Margaret Mead was one of the leading anthropologists of the 20th century. Being a student of Boas, Mead extended the school's knowledge in culture and personality as she focused from the American culture to the whole Western World. She travelled to Samoa and she found out that the societies there have uniform value systems, and thus, they share common personality traits. In the culture of Samoan tribes, it was noted that until individuals reach the age of 15- 16, when they are to be subjected to marital rituals, they do not have significant roles in terms of social life. In fact, children are ignored by their parents and the rest of the society until after they reach puberty. Girls are taught to see boys as their enemies. The effect of this portion of the Samoan culture is that children tend to be either aggressive to gain attention, or passive due to the lack of affection and love from their significant others.

Sex, Differences and Personality

Evolution and genetics are believed to have brought about differences in personality traits as determined by the biological sex of a person. As explained by the Theory of Sexual Selection, males compete to attract females, so men are more likely to be aggressive and competitive than women. However, nowadays we may see that more and more women become aggressive in competing against other women for a man.

Our culture greatly contributes to the development of our beliefs and values. For this reason, both cultural psychologists and social anthropologists believe that culture affects one's personality. In addition, gender differences also influence the personality traits a person possesses.

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