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PREVIEW

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COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES: AMERICAN SUBCULTURES
AND THE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL

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PREVIEW

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COMMUNICATION ACROSS CULTURES:
AMERICAN SUBCULTURES AND THE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL

by

Harriet Roberts O'Neal

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
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Major: Psychology

Under the Supervision of Professor James K. Cole

Lincoln, Nebraska

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Communication Across Cultures: American Subcultures
and the Culture of the School

BY

Harriet Roberts O'Neal

APPROVED

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They gradually lost their ancient traditions,
their recollections; they forgot their writings,
their songs, their poetry, their laws in order
to learn by heart other doctrines, which they
did not understand, other ethics, other tastes,
different from those inspired in their race by
their climate and their way of thinking. . . .
They were lowered in their own eyes, they became
ashamed of what was distinctly their own, in
order to admire and praise what was foreign and
incomprehensible, their spirit was broken and
they acquiesced. . . .

Jose Rizal, 1889

The trouble with losing face is you become invisible.

Marie Chung, 1970

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Culture has been defined as "the summation of the behavior and habitual modes of thought" (Herskovits, 1972, p. 15) of the people who make up a society. It represents the particular means devised by a group to meet its needs (Woods, 1956) which derive, in turn, from certain biological drives common to all humans and the physical and social constraints (e.g., geography, impingement by other cultures) of the group's environment. Attitudes and behavior which evolve as the result of adaptation to such internal and external pressures acquire value related to the survival of a society and thus become highly emotionally charged. Such emotion-laden values are transmitted through a society's major institutions (e.g., family, religion, government), so that attitudes and behavior which are endorsed or cherished by one generation are taught to the next. "Because culture is learned and not biologically transmitted" (Woods, 1956, p. 6), it is, like all learning, susceptible to modification. However, since the major values of a culture are generally learned from "significant others" and carry historical connotations of survival and group belonging, their acquisition and observance tend not to be questioned, and ethnocentrism--the belief that "one's own way of life is to be preferred to all others" (Herskovits, 1972, p. 21)--becomes the rule. Herskovits (1972, p. 95) thinks that a certain "restrained ethnocentrism"

can be useful to the individual, as well as to the efficient functioning of a society, since it tends to consolidate the individual's identity, create a climate of friendliness and trust within which to establish relationships, and strengthen the ego.

While ethnocentrism may be beneficial to intracultural relations, the question arises of what may result when cultures of unequal size with conflicting sets of values meet.

Berry (1979, p. 420) delineates four possibilities:

When a group does not maintain its cultural distinctiveness and moves increasingly toward participation with the larger society, an Assimilation pattern emerges. Its polar opposite (Separation) occurs when a group does maintain its distinctiveness and does not participate within the larger society; when this is enforced by the dominant group Segregation exists, but when it is chosen by the cultural group, Withdrawal exists. A third pattern, that of Marginality, occurs when a group's culture is not maintained and when there is no participation in the affairs of the dominant group. When both questions are affirmed, the Integration pattern emerges; a group retains its cultural integrity and at the same time moves into an integral position within the larger society.

In most culturally heterogeneous nations, the patterns of intergroup relations endorsed by the majority culture tend to be assimilation or segregation, while those preferred by minority cultures are integration or withdrawal. It was the object of this study to develop a program that, borrowing from Kagiwada (1973) and Sue (1977), allows for mutual accommodation of majority and minority values, a "syncretistic" integration of both cultures.

As wide and as deep as are the issues posed by cultural diversity, a more thorough understanding of them has a potentially much greater impact still. The reason is that ethnic diversity can be used as a model for many other dimensions of human diversity. Age is one example: some writers (e.g., Brody, 1968; Derbyshire, 1970) argue for the view of youth, or adolescence, as constituting a cultural or subcultural group within a given society. Brody (1968) makes the case:

To the degree to which shared values reflected in shared behavior and the use of shared symbols unify the group of adolescents in the pursuit of common aims; to the degree to which these elements provide a set of guidelines for behavior in a variety of situations; to the degree to which they are socially transmitted from one generation of adolescents to another; and to the degree that they constitute a set of standards, symbols, and values acting in opposition to those of the dominant or adult culture; to that degree the group of adolescents in United States society may be said to be a collectivity with a culture, which is in some ways a contra-culture, of its own (pp. 5-6).

For some of the same reasons, juvenile delinquency may be seen as a subculture within adolescence.

The purpose of this dissertation was to develop and evaluate a particular approach to coping with cultural diversity on both the literal and metaphoric levels. This approach consisted of a "mainstream" social skills training program for adolescents of diverse cultural backgrounds, including delinquents and "predelinquents," as one option for behavior in a particular social/cultural context. This chapter will elaborate the concept of "subculture," with special reference to youth and delinquency. It will discuss various "ac-

culturation" techniques which have been developed. The question of whether or not such techniques would be approved by those asked to participate in them will be explored in the following section, which analyzes the issue of the effects of cultural change on self-esteem. At that point, the way will have been cleared for introduction of the present model.

A. Theories of subculture

Students of American subcultures have noted one characteristic that such subcultures have in common: their values and behavior often differ from those of the majority culture, and there are no "legitimate" channels of expression for such differences, as defined by the majority (DeFleur, 1969; Brody, 1968; Sue and Sue, 1977). This pattern of denial of legitimacy differs from the "gentle ethnocentrism" which Herskovits (1972) advocates and which exists in many cultures in that, in American society, attributions of "superiority" and "inferiority" are strongly valued and attached to inter-group differences. Thus, an active depreciation of the things held to be of value by subgroups takes place as a result of the cultural emphasis on competition. The message from the dominant culture is clear: subcultures are "a tragic but temporary inconvenience to be gradually eliminated" (Hixson, 1974, p. 114). Moreover, while there is pressure on subculture members for assimilation of "mainstream" or Anglo-American values, access to economic, political, and social institutions for realization of such values is con-

trolled by the majority and limited for outsiders. Thus, the system makes incompatible demands, creating a situation which is, in many ways, analogous to Bateson's "double-bind" theory of schizophrenia (one individual gives contradictory messages to another through different channels of communication).

It is this malintegration between the pervasive value emphases of the culture and the socially structured limitations on legitimate access to these values which generates pressure toward deviance--that is, pressure toward adopting alternative, even if illegitimate, means to achieve success or to cope with failure (Jessor, Graves, Hanson, and Jessor, 1968, pp. 55-56).

Merton (1957) describes several different styles of individual adaptation which may arise in response to the anomie engendered by discrepancies "between culturally induced high aspirations and socially structured obstacles" (Merton, 1957, p. 174) to their realization. These forms include (1) ritualism--"the abandoning or scaling down of . . . cultural goals" (Merton, 1962, pp. 149-150), but with continued adherence to culturally prescribed means of achieving them; (2) retreatism--rejection of both means and goals promulgated by the dominant society; (3) rebellion--substitution of new means and ends for socially approved methods and goals; (4) innovation--full acceptance of the dominant society's goals, but with abandonment of socially acceptable means of achieving them. This last category perhaps best exemplifies the position to which many subculture members are relegated--having adopted American values of success and achievement, they lack

"institutionalized means of obtaining control in these new areas of importance" (Sue, 1977, p. 295). Such a pattern of replacement of ethnic values with those of the dominant culture, without viable means of participation in the affairs of the majority, leads to what various authors (Sanua, 1959; Stonequist, 1973; Lohman, 1967; Sue, 1977; Berry, 1979) have described as "marginality," a lack of strong identification with either culture. Such a position is accompanied by anxiety, hostility, feelings of alienation, and normlessness, and, according to Jessor et al. (1968), generates pressure toward behavior which is inconsistent with the standards or values of the larger society.

In their analysis of the adolescent subculture and the origins of delinquency, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) take the application of anomie theory one step further. They argue that delinquency develops as a response to discrepancies in values-normative practices for two reasons: (1) "limited access to success-goals by legitimate means" and (2) "availability of various illegitimate means" (p. 152). According to their thesis, differential availability of illegitimate means is related to patterns of informal social control (i.e., constraints placed on "acting outside the system" by the values of the dominant culture or by the values of the reference group to which the youth belongs). Despite the frustration or anger which adolescents may feel with regard to values-normative discrepancies within the majority adult

culture, they are not likely to become delinquent (Merton's "innovator") if (a) they accept mainstream "means" as well as "ends" values as a guide for their conduct (i.e., they are "conformists" with regard to the dominant culture); (b) they possess subcultural values which preclude violation of or are consistent with the "means" values of the dominant culture (i.e., they are "ritualists" in Merton's schema).

Such a pattern of differential adaptation of mainstream values as a cause of delinquency is a position adhered to by many sociologists, criminologists, and social psychologists (cf. Cohen, 1955; Eysenck, 1964; Hindelang, 1969). This way of thinking suggests that "the differential normative standards of delinquents and non-delinquents result from the ineffective internalization of [mainstream] cultural values and norms by some individuals" (Hindelang, 1969, p. 508). Thus, an adolescent may engage in illegal activity (as defined by the majority culture) as a result of (a) frustration of "ends" values similar to those of the dominant culture, which co-exist with subcultural "means" values, allowing for "acting outside the system" to achieve goals (a position similar to Cloward and Ohlin's); (b) "means" and "ends" values which differ completely from those of the majority. Presumably, legal sanctions are not effective with such youth since they do not enjoy a system of personal supports, such as respect for mainstream cultural values. This view concludes that the problem in delinquency basically lies in insufficient ties

to and inculcation in the values of the dominant society.

A third position advocated by certain sociologists and social learning theorists as an explanation of delinquency focuses, not on values, but on behavioral or social skills deficits which supersede moral constraints and lead adolescents into illegal activity even though it may violate their personal norms. Matza and Sykes (1961) have postulated that

Many delinquents are essentially in agreement with the larger society, at least with regard to the evaluation of delinquent behavior as "wrong." Rather than standing in opposition to conventional ideas of good conduct, the delinquent is likely to adhere to the dominant norms in belief but render them ineffective in practice (pp. 712-713).

Freedman (1974) and others (cf. McFall, 1971) have suggested that such lapses in practice can be conceptualized, at least partly, as the result of deficiencies in mainstream social skills. Thus, hope for prevention of deviant behavior lies in providing the adolescent with the social-behavioral skills necessary for competent functioning in the dominant culture, thereby maximizing access to legitimate channels for achieving personal goals.

B. Techniques of "acculturation"

The upshot of the various theories of subculture which have arisen to explain subgroup functioning in the United States has been the development of strategies for "acculturation" of such groups. From a sociopolitical perspective, this has at times meant bringing pressure to bear on the

dominant society to narrow the gap between theory and normative practice so that institutional participation for subgroup members is increased. This corresponds to Merton's hypothesis that subcultures are denied access to "legitimate" channels of expression as a result of discrepancies between mainstream values and practices, thereby making intervention at the societal level the appropriate target for change.

Pressure at this level has been created through increased electoral involvement by subcultural members, community-based advocacy groups, and public demonstrations, to name but a few examples. While such methods have proven necessary and useful for increasing minority access to "legitimate" channels for achievement of personal goals, they have not directly addressed the issue of values conflicts between majority and minority cultures and what Herskovits (1972, p. 105) calls "the . . . demoralizing assumption of cultural superiority" by the dominant society. While the level of subgroup participation in the larger culture appears to be increasing, little attention has been given to the need for or desirability of retaining cultural integrity and distinction for groups newly brought together with the mainstream.

Despite the usefulness of agitation for mainstream change in the direction of congruence between values and practice, historically the more powerful forces of acculturation have operated in the opposite direction. Most of the cultural influence and adaptation that actually occurs comes about

through the functioning of mainstream social and political institutions (e.g., religion, government, education) which exert pressure on subgroups to relinquish subcultural values and to adopt both the objectives and norms of the dominant culture. Such a view of acculturation is the natural product of theories which stress the "incomplete" adaptation of mainstream values as the cause for subculture alienation in the United States.

The very substantial role of the schools in this acculturation process has been documented by writers representing a broad range of disciplines (Lohman, 1967; Woods, 1956; Kopan, 1974; Hixson, 1974; Castaneda, 1974; Slaughter, 1974; DeFleur, 1969). These authors point out that the educational system is an especially potent medium for acculturation since it affects the individual from an early age and enjoys a sustained influence, in most cases, through adolescence.

The public school system contributes to the organization of social life through its promotion of values and concepts common to a given set of human experiences. Value orientations are promoted through the articulation of social goals worth striving for and through the reinforcement of certain behavioral means used in such striving (Hixson, 1974, p. 115).

Traditionalists in the realm of acculturation have typically advocated a "more of the same" approach in dealing with conflicts arising from cultural diversity. Thus, schools, churches, and governmental agencies are exhorted to be more explicit and unyielding in their advocacy of mainstream values through emphasis on such notions as one language or dialect

as the only "legitimate" means of communication, one type of family structure as the only "moral" alternative, one style of interpersonal conduct as the only "civilized" means of human interaction, etc. This approach (to subgroup differences from the mainstream) necessarily raises broader issues of legitimacy and identity for subgroup members. If their language, customs, and social mores are litigated out of existence or otherwise placed beyond the range of acceptability, then questions of worth, utility, and respect for individuals who adhere to such practices or values ensue. The result, for many subculture members, is a devaluation of their own cultures and of themselves as their identities overlap with that of the minority culture (Slaughter, 1974).

Both means of acculturation discussed above have operated at the societal level. Other approaches focus on individual and small-group behavior, with little consideration for values differences between cultures. Such behaviorally oriented approaches to acculturation usually proceed from the assumption that subgroups in the American culture possess values coincident with those of the dominant society and are simply lacking mainstream skills for realization of their values. This line of reasoning reflects the social learning position discussed in the previous section, and has led to the development of numerous broad-spectrum approaches to acculturation (e.g., assertiveness training, rational restructuring), emphasizing acquisition of interpersonal skills and social

thinking which are representative of the majority culture. Various ethnic authors (Sue and Sue, 1977; Cheek, 1977; Hwang, 1977) have noted the general utility of cognitive/behavioral methods with minority group members since they tend to be more structured and problem-centered and, consequently, more congruent with subculture orientations to problem resolution than traditional forms of counseling. Such methods typically employ procedures such as reframing, modeling, coaching, roleplaying, and feedback, and have been used with a wide variety of populations, including ethnic minorities, delinquent and nondelinquent adolescents (Alberti, 1977; Sarason and Ganzer, 1971; De Lange, Lanham, and Barton, 1981; Wright, Morris, and Fetting, 1974; Kiter, Lewis, Green, and Phillips, 1974; Uhlemann, Lea, and Stone, 1976; Schwitzgebel and Kolb, 1964).

Despite a fairly high level of success with such groups, little attention has been given to treatment "failures" sustained through such methods. These "failures"--individuals who do not increase their level of mainstream responses to interpersonal situations or those who show a decrease in self-esteem despite acquisition of mainstream behaviors--may be conceptualized as individuals whose subcultural "means" values conflict with the mainstream values implicit in most social skills training. Thus, despite the general utility of cognitive/behavioral methods, emphasis on a mainstream orientation as "the one best way" of thinking and behaving (i.e., direct,