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# Review of Psychological Anthropology: A Reader on Self in Culture

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Psychological Anthropology: A Reader on Self in Culture. Robert A. LeVine, ed. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. 2010. x-390pp.

Reviewed by:

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Robert LeVine has not only conducted an important body of child development research and trained many students (of whom I was one). He has also written and edited several volumes that introduce students to psychological anthropology, ranging from his 1973 *Culture, Behavior and Personality* and accompanying *Culture and Personality: Contemporary Readings* (1974) to a 2008 Wiley reader co-edited with Rebecca New (*Anthropology and Child Development: A Cross-Cultural Reader*) and this 2010 Wiley volume, *Psychological Anthropology: A Reader on Self in Culture*. His latest reader fills a real need: I am aware of no other collection of current work in psychological anthropology for undergraduates.

Ranging from classic articles by Edward Sapir and A. Irving Hallowell to work published in the last ten years, this reader is a superb selection of examples of what psychological anthropologists do. The emphasis is on interesting pieces, not necessarily key theoretical selections, but rather ones that reveal the extent of cultural and historical variability in what people learn to think, feel, fear, and want.

Among the standout articles are several that bring vivid ethnographic scenes or revealing interviews to bear on important questions. For example, in "Emotions have many faces: Inuit lessons," Jean Briggs presents examples of the way Inuit adults tease young children to illustrate the cultivated ambivalence of attachment feelings in that society and to show that the meanings of emotion words are not obvious from their standard definitions. Waud Kracke in "Kagwahiv Mourning I: Dreams of a bereaved father" uses a remarkable set of depth interviews with an Amazonian Indian to explore the possibilities of empathic understanding despite cultural differences. In a less engaging but important follow-up article, "Kagwahiv Mourning II: Ghosts, grief, and reminiscences," Kracke proposes both universal and culturally variable aspects of mourning. Peggy Miller, Heidi Fung, and Judith Mintz's "Self-construction through narrative practices: A Chinese and American Comparison of Early Socialization" shows contrasting socialization emphases in Chicago and Taipei conveyed by the way caretakers tell stories about and with children. Tensions in contemporary Mainland Chinese socialization are apparent in Vanessa Fong's presentation of complaints by teenage Chinese interviewees about their parents' inconsistent preachings in "Parent-child communication problems and the perceived inadequacies of Chinese Only children." Fong draws an important distinction between stated values and the more nuanced implicit cultural models that adults may have in mind. These articles go far beyond a glib description of typical traits, revealing cultural complexities and conflicts. The 23 articles in the volume offer many additional good teaching choices.

The articles in *Psychological Anthropology* are organized into sections that partly, but not entirely, replicate standard subdivisions within psychological anthropology. Each section has an introduction by LeVine, and some of those introductions are significant contributions in themselves that will be of great interest to advanced students and scholars. The first section, "Part I: Constructing a Paradigm, 1917-55," includes foundational articles by W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, Sapir, and Hallowell. LeVine's introduction is one of the highlights of this

section. In discussing the history of psychological anthropology, he gives a fascinating account of Sapir's criticism of his friend Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, as well as the unfortunate story of the way a few poorly conducted national character studies tainted culture-and-personality work in general. Others would tell the history differently, but even if you never plan to use this reader for teaching, it is worth getting for that discussion.

"Part II: Emotion and Morality in Diverse Cultures" brings together articles by Briggs, Geoffrey M. White, Usha Menon and Richard A. Shweder, Takie Lebra, and Arthur Kleinman and Byron Good. These articles explore the situated meanings of emotions and mental illness.

"Part III: Psychoanalytic Explorations through Fieldwork" gives examples of psychoanalytic anthropology through articles by Robert A. Paul, Anne Parsons, and Kracke. LeVine's introduction to Part III presents a number of cross-cultural challenges to the father-centered Oedipus complex. Paul's discussion is a useful review of newer approaches in psychoanalytic anthropology.

The fourth section of the book, "Part IV: Childhood: Internalizing Cultural Schema," has articles by Amy L. Richman, Patrice M. Miller, and LeVine; Miller, Fung, and Mintz; and Fong. Surprisingly, given that this is LeVine's own area of expertise, child development research is primarily exemplified through work stressing linguistic communication. LeVine was somewhat constrained in his choices to avoid overlap with articles reprinted in other compendiums, including his 2008 Wiley reader on child development (e-mail to the author, November 26, 2011). His own research is represented by two co-authored articles on the effects of mothers' education; it would have been interesting to include one that gives his criticisms of attachment theory or his discussion of cultural variation in precocity.

"Part V: The Self in Everyday Life, Ritual and Healing" includes chapters by Thomas Gregor, Gilbert H. Herdt, Douglas Hollan, and Joseph D. Calabrese. The final section, "Part IV: Psychosocial Processes in History and Social Transformation," round out the volume with articles by Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, R. LeVine and Sarah A. LeVine, Anthony F. C. Wallace, and Charles Lindholm. Together they give a good sense of the variety of sociocultural contexts in which personalities are formed and altered.

The organization of this work reveals a shift of emphasis compared with LeVine's 1974 *Culture and Personality* reader. That volume presented several articles proposing psychological universals, followed by others emphasizing cultural variation, thereby encouraging teachers and students to discuss exactly how cultural practices shape psyches. In this 2010 reader, while some of the selections (e.g., the articles by Hallowell; Hollan; Kleinman and Good; Kracke; Miller, Richman, and LeVine; and Wallace) attempt to disentangle what is universal from what is variable, overall the underlying message is of cultural differences in psychic formations. Teachers who want to present a contrasting point of view should be prepared to bring in outside readings.

Because of the book's organization, one has to hunt a bit for cognitive anthropology, which is discussed in LeVine's introduction to the child development section (Part IV) as well as in several of the articles scattered throughout the volume, e.g., those by Fong; Hollan; Menon and Shweder; and White. Mental illness in cross-cultural context is addressed in useful articles by Kleinman and Good in Part II and Calabrese in Part V, as well as some of the articles in Parts

III and VI (e.g., Lindholm's case study of Rajneesh). Gender is discussed by Herdt; R. LeVine and S. LeVine; Menon and Shweder; Parsons; Richman, Miller, and LeVine; and C. Suárez-Orozco and M. Suárez-Orozco. The examples of these central topics and approaches in psychological anthropology are present; it is up to the teacher to draw them together.

Some approaches that are unrepresented or underrepresented in this collection include cultural phenomenology, Vygotskian inspired cognition-in-practice (with the partial exception of Miller, Fung, and Mintz), critical psychological anthropology (e.g., feminist or post-colonial approaches), and newer biocultural work. While no one collection can cover all aspects of psychological anthropology while remaining affordable for students, LeVine could have said more to place the examples chosen in the context of competing frameworks.

The quibbles above (and some annoying typesetting errors) aside, *Psychological Anthropology: A Reader on Self in Culture* is a first-rate compilation that demonstrates the relevance and excitement of psychological anthropology.

#### REFERENCES CITED

LeVine, Robert Alan  
1974 Culture and Personality. Contemporary Readings. Chicago: Aldine