

ESKIMO AND TLINGIT RESPONSES TO PLANNED CULTURE CHANGE

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In the long term theoretical discussion concerning the relative importance of social-structural versus psycho-cultural factors in acculturation (see DeVos and Hippler, 1969), we feel that the preponderance of evidence supports the primacy of psycho-cultural aspects. Our recent research among Eskimos and Tlingits seems to support this.

Eskimos and Tlingits respond quite differently to planned culture change programs in ways which suggest that the modal psychodynamic organization of the members of the two groups is an important determining factor.

While recognizing, as Wallace so long ago stressed (A.E. Wallace, 1952), that the concept of unimodal personality is theoretically unsophisticated and leads to inadequate levels of causation as explanation for behavior, we still feel that in the macro sense a unimodal personality analysis will, at times, provide fruitful levels of explanation. In this case we shall use a broad unimodal personality concept to delineate some quite different acculturative responses.

Many writers have commented on Eskimo personality among them are Chance, 1965; Gubser, 1965; Parker, 1964; Ferguson, 1960; Honigmann, 1953, 1959; Vallee, 1967; Lantis, 1960; and others. Briefly Eskimos might be characterized as "oral optimists." Child rearing is especially lenient, breast feeding is extended and terminated more at the child's than the mother's insistence. The child is carried everywhere by the mother who does not urge sphincter or bladder control and does not punish for "incontinence." The child eats,

sleeps, plays, talks, and interacts on his own schedule and in accordance with his own desires. Without caricaturing an Eskimo's infant socialization too strongly, it might be considered as almost entirely non-frustrating.

Eskimos, however, do socialize strongly against aggression or selfishness, both of which are expectable personal consequences of an "oral optimistic" character. That is, Eskimos are socialized when young to expect that the world will be generous and never frustrating. Never being exposed as infants to frustration, Eskimos have a low tolerance for it. Getting what one wants predisposes the child to a kind of selfishness and bossiness, except that such attitudes are frowned upon, but even in socializing against selfishness and aggression, violence is almost never used on children. It is considered wrong to interfere in another person's life -- especially through violence -- even if it is only a child.

Inevitably some adults did come to adulthood as selfish and aggressive. Prior to Euro-American contact, Eskimos had no formalized technique for handling such people except avoidance or, in extreme cases, murder. Also, life's realities for Eskimos can never be so benign as the early child rearing suggests to the child. Suicide with a strong fusion-frustration dimension is a common method of avoiding the intolerable world. (See Hippler, 1969.)

Eskimos only rarely had "leaders" who told other people what to do. Even now decisions in village councils tend to be made informally beforehand and arranged so that everyone feels he is heard, that directions are given very indirectly, and that everyone feels he is his own master.

The strong tendency in Eskimos toward immediate gratification (modified by reality concerns about hunting and fishing for future consumption, etc.) mitigates against any but ad-hoc pragmatic organization through loose fictive

kin ties did function to assist in hunting. Organizational structures for long term abstract motives had and still have little meaning and effectively do not exist.

Adult Eskimos feel reasonably secure, have strong executive ego functions, and avoid conflict by any means possible as they avoid all kinds of frustrating situations. They tend toward total pragmatism and laissez-faire attitudes toward any other person's behavior. They are optimistic and often smile and agree with anyone who says anything to avoid conflict. An Eskimos true attitudes, therefore, are difficult to elicit. Eskimos characteristically agree with nearly any program a government agent may suggest to them and then with massive pragmatic, and often realistic, unconcern do very little to try to make what they see as an essentially uncontrollable universe do their will.

Insecurity about the universe undoubtedly has, in part, as its genesis the difficult climate in which Eskimos live. But in addition, like his mother, who would feed him generously and upon his demand when food was available, but often not feed him because food was not available, the land is by turns abundantly generous and implacable. Further, the oral optimist, because he has a good opinion of himself, is at a loss to explain, for example, hunting failure. In past times an extraordinary variety of taboos and phobic acts were associated with hunting. Breaking the most difficult and obscure taboo could bring failure.

The converse of this kind of emotional organization is a kind of fatalism which suggests both passive acceptance and a belief that nothing can be done to alter events. It would be better, then, through the magic of suicide, to return to the earlier fantasized perfect mother. An analagous kind of retreatism is fostered by government agencies who arrive unheralded

and arbitrarily bearing with them medical care, economic assistance, or promises, some of which come true, some not, in an equally inexplicable fashion. The character we have described not only expects this but cannot cope with this in any simple fashion except to assume that this part of the environment, like so many others, is outside of Eskimo control.

Tlingit-Haida peoples, on the other hand, tend to be characterized by a quite different kind of emotional logic. (See Aurel Krause, 1956, for an extensive documentation of early sources.) We might very broadly describe their emotional organization as predominately anal-retentive with strong sadistic overtones and destructive components. Positively, these concerns are woven into a rich plastic art tradition and strong achievement needs. A full analysis is beyond this paper, but some of the dominant considerations can be dealt with.

Tlingit villages, in contradistinction to Eskimo settlements, were elaborate, well organized, permanent abodes. While aboriginally semi-nomadic during fishing season, the villagers built massive wooden permanent structures, large wooden canoes, elaborate totem poles, and totemic designs were painstakingly carved into community houses. Often, indeed, such villages had strong wooden palisades which enclosed the entire community as a kind of fortress for protection in the numerous slave-seeking wars.

Even personal ornamentation was much more elaborate among the Tlingit-Haida peoples than among any other Alaska native group. Many layers of clothing -- often elaborately decorated with beadwork -- were worn by men and women.

Many early observers were struck by the personal discipline, sexual reticence and unusual drive to succeed, which characterized these peoples.

The early ethnographic and other literature abounds in laudatory comments about Tlingit intelligence, artistic skill and imagination, complex melodic rhythms, and a desire to emulate white ways, all of which made them admirable to early travellers.

The Tlingit were also characterized by strong ideas of personal ownership of material possessions and were, by Alaska native standards, very rich in durable material goods. Theft was no disgrace if one was not caught and many writers commented on Tlingit selfishness. They were noted as shrewd traders and, in an environment rich in furs, workable wood, sea food, and cultivated vegetation, they were able to accumulate significant stores of these goods. There were, in fact, potlatch festivals similar to, if not so elaborate as, the "potlatch" among the Kwakiuth and men of prestige did engage in property warfare with each other -- destroying slaves and other wealth to prove their power.

The Tlingit were further characterized as vain, jealous of personal prerogatives, and disdainful of those who had somehow lost their position or power, stressing their dominance-submission concerns.

Prior to the advent of white contact, the Tlingit had maintained extensive trading relationships and, in fact, were in possession of and used iron at the time of contact (1741). The Tlingit also used a form of money, carved figures and the like -- whose worth was measured in ways similar to the famous "coppers" of groups farther south. They were difficult, some early writers complained, for whites to cheat, since they knew the price of goods and would make long trips to traders with lower prices if they were overcharged. Local fur trade companies could not engage in so lucrative a trade with Tlingits as Hudson Bay Company did with Eskimos, for example.

The Tlingit had their own trading trails and guarded these as jealously as hunting and fishing grounds and would kill whites who trespassed. Indeed their aggressive character led them to resist both Russian and American domination by force with greater or lesser success for sometime. Their (justified) fears about economic domination by encroaching Euro-Americans was expressed in many ways. Recognizing their own tendencies to dominate economically or enslave others, they saw in Europeans and Americans like-minded peoples who must be resisted. They competed with steamboats (successfully) for freight hauling, cheated on contracts with whites, and resisted imported cheap labor; as Krause notes, they would only permit Chinese laborers to make tin cans for salmon canneries for as long as it took the Chinese to teach the art to the Tlingits.

Psychologically, a complex of attitudes stressing cleanliness, antagonism toward freely allowed sex, and other, often anal and sadistic concerns, are obvious. Children were forced to vomit their "uncleanness" before they could suckle as newborns. This punishment for wanting the breast was likely a talion punishment for the expected sadistic oral incorporation desires of the infant. A month long post partum sex taboo for the mother existed and other punishments and confinements of pregnant women are also suggestive of oral envy. This is supported by an extended period of breast feeding -- up to four years. Children were severely punished for wrongdoing; the mother's brother inflicting beatings for discipline. Cold baths were used in much the same way, but also reflected the modal concern with cleanliness.

Girls undergoing puberty were confined and, most instructively, the onset of female sexuality was probably seen as filthy since one of its rituals was the smearing of women's faces with filth. Anal and genital concerns were

often interwoven as we shall note. The post pubertal seclusion may have lasted as long as a year. Food privation was also initiated then -- suggesting oral envy, oral incorporation fears, and talion punishment. There was also menstrual seclusion and fasting connected with the marriage ceremony -- bride and groom being forced to abstain from food for various periods.

Divorce was difficult because the bride's dowry had to be returned -- anal retentive concerns thus tended to hold marriages together. Another connection of anal and genital concern is evidenced by payments of gifts to the family of a seduced girl. There was a strong emphasis on marital fidelity and sexual promiscuity was rare. Anal concerns overwhelmed this puritanism, however, when whites could pay for women's sexual favors.

Concerns with property were so strong that a compulsory marriage of a nephew to deceased uncles wife (mother's brother) existed functioning to prevent property from leaving the clan. Warfare and fighting were ubiquitous over property and a kind of were-gild was, in effect, for killing, the amounts determined by the rank of the offended party.

One of the socialization practices that further indicates some sadistic aspects to the character of the Tlingits was the ritual and severe beating of young men by the old, expressive perhaps of both sexual jealousy and talion anger at the long period of mother/son closeness. Possibly because of the long mother/son intimacy and the concerns with food and anal-derived paranoia, there was great fear of flying witches who could, of course, best be fought by fasting.

Generally, the Tlingit were a group which stressed hard work, puritan concerns about sex and cleanliness, and an aggressive drive to achieve for the purpose of denigrating others. Nonetheless, no matter how destructive

the economic competition may have been, the Tlingit did amass large amounts of material wealth -- understood how to invest and save, make money grow, and manipulate social institutions for financial purposes.

The coming of Euro-Americans saw the outlawing of warfare and of property destruction potlatches. It did, however, offer new economic opportunities. In the process, clan amalgamation occurred and competitive aggressiveness was directed against whites.

Recently the federal government, through its rural electrification program, and other agencies have been introducing small electricity plants into Alaska native villages. These programs involve the individual communities in setting up utilities boards, allocating money for wiring the houses from federal funds, providing trainees for local generator maintenance, bill collection, and assistance in preparing villagers to use, accept, and understand electricity.

In the Tlingit community observed, the board was elected, carefully balancing the various clan/political factions. This board aggressively sought out all the information it could get about the program with the aim of maintaining as much local control as possible, in a self-conscious fashion.

The board not only selected men to be trained as maintenance men, but it also made an attempt to see that their training was carried out and that the maintenance men understood their job. The board also began to make long-range plans involving the use of electricity in the community, such as attracting small business and thinking about establishing a fuel oil coop (now that a generator existed which would use enough electricity to make bulk buying of fuel oil possible for everyone in the village).

Further, the utility board made decisions about allowing the village to pay for the wiring of the homes of the very poor and to have others pay for their own wiring and thus increase the village treasury.

Important to the village leaders on the utilities board was the possibility of making their village more attractive to the young people, keeping them there against the attractions of the outside world.

All this discussion was done in the broad context of a sophisticated understanding of the uses and limits of a capital improvement, such as electricity. It was done with a careful regard for the political balance of the community and with an eye forward, creating more wealth for as many villagers as possible and an understanding of the multiplier effect of money spent in the community.

In light of the dominant ethos and cultural pattern of Tlingit-Haida peoples, this was a fully expectable response. The villagers here were treating the phenomenon of newly arrived, better quality, and less expensive electricity much as they would any other tool of possible use to them and much in line with what would be considered to be a rational response by members of the dominant culture.

In Eskimo communities a quite different situation prevailed. First of all, not very many people, even some on the utility board, were sure who was on the utility board. The jobs of maintenance man and bill collector seemed to rotate in some communities with little apparent manipulation by specific factions. In fact, often no one knew who was the maintenance man or whether he had yet been trained. Further, political structures such as those clearly present in the Tlingit community had either no existence or only the most tenuous existence here.

The boards had made no long or short range village plans for electricity use, though often individuals had made their own plans for a little store, etc. There was very little concern about trying to manipulate the system for its

political rewards; there was, in fact, very little understanding of the system. Everyone agreed it was nice to have electricity, but no one was particularly interested in how it had come about or what the structure of its administrative operation was, or even to whom bills were being paid. There was some concern that the bills were too high, but -- where this took the form of thoughtful attempts to reallocate resources on a community-wide level to handle the problem in the Tlingit community -- it was here accepted as another inexplicable, endurable, but unchangeable fact of life.

Thus, the communities responded along lines which were almost caricatures of what might be termed their expected response, based on their psycho-cultural set. These responses seem to support the general notion that psycho-cultural factors are paramount in determining a group's response to impinging phenomena.

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