CHAPTER NINE

A Comparative Analysis of Subjective Culture

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The conceptual scheme of Part I suggests various "probes" into subjective culture. There is now a legitimate question whether the information one obtains from such probes is consistent. Since we have studies involving all our methods from Greece and the United States, this chapter reviews these studies and attempts to answer the question.

One major advantage of consistencies across methods of gathering subjective culture data is that it provides concurrent validation of the instruments. We can anticipate the conclusions of the review presented in this chapter by stating that we did find a good deal of consistency across methods. Much of the information, however, is complementary rather than overlapping. In the next chapter we review two studies of predictive validity of our methods of measurement, which will give us even more confidence that what we are getting when we measure subjective culture is valuable.

In this chapter we review data obtained with various instruments. We show that in each culture the kinds of answers given by our respondents can be described most parsimoniously by certain basic themes and that these themes emerge consistently from all instruments. More specifically, in our work on Greek and American stereotyping, attitudes toward key concepts, implications of various concepts, and role perceptions the basic theme of a strong ingroup-outgroup contrast can be detected in all Greek data. Reality in Greece is impregnated with social considerations, whereas in America it is focused on the individual. The Greek seems to define his universe in terms of the triumphs of the ingroup over the outgroup and his social behavior is strongly dependent on whether "the other person" is a member of his ingroup. Key concepts are judged according to their

relevance to this social reality. Relations with authority figures, with persons with whom one is in conflict, etc., are also conditioned by the ingroup-outgroup contrast.

In addition, this chapter attempts to place the data from our analysis of subjective culture in historical and ecological perspective. This suggests hypotheses for further work on how different ecologies determine the subjective culture of groups of people.

The majority of the readers of the present chapter will be familiar with American culture and will have a "subjective culture" similar to that found in our studies to be typical of Americans. Our findings are therefore presented as *explanations of Greek subjective culture from an American point of view.*

This chapter illustrates consistencies in the response of subjects to different kinds of instrument. Thus it is concerned with substantive findings rather than the methodology that led to the finding and attempts to summarize these substantive findings rather than give the details discovered with each instrument.

Stereotypes as Hypotheses of National Character

When members of Culture A perceive members of Culture B, they make judgments about the probable characteristics of members of Culture B. Such judgments are related to the difference in the mean values of the corresponding traits of the two groups. Specifically, on trait X the mean value of this trait in Culture A is designated by $\bar{X}_A$, in Culture B by $\bar{X}_B$. The probability that members of Culture A will mention trait X when they give their stereotypes of members of Culture B is proportional to $\bar{X}_A - \bar{X}_B$ (Campbell, 1967); for example, if members of Culture A wash their hands three times an hour and those of Culture B wash only once an hour, there is a high probability that members of Culture A will call members of Culture B "filthy." In fact, in terms of the total distribution around the world of the characteristic "filthy" both cultures are excessively clean.

Our view is that we can employ the stereotypes of different culture groups as *estimates* of the probable differences in the mean values of their traits.

We can then ask if the trait differences are consistent with historical and ecological analyses of the experiences of subjects in different cultures. Following this line of thought, we discuss first the stereotypes of Americans and Greeks and then present a historical-ecological analysis. The point here is that when a person is stereotyping a group he is not only responding to characteristics of the group being stereotyped but is also revealing the way he perceives himself. It is the contrast between his perceptions of $\bar{X}_A$ and $\bar{X}_B$ that is reflected in the stereotype.

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Since much of this chapter discusses differences between Americans and Greeks in their perception of subjective culture, it is appropriate to begin with a discussion of how these groups see each other and themselves.

Stereotypes of Americans and Greeks

Triandis and Vassiliou (1967b) have shown that each of the two cultural groups has a much more positive opinion of itself than it has of the other group but each group also recognizes that the other group has some "good" traits. By and large, the Americans see the Greeks as *inefficient, competitive,* and *suspicious* but at the same time *charming* and *witty.* The Greeks see the Americans in exactly the opposite fashion; that is, they see them as *efficient* but rather *dull* and not particularly *charming.*

The method employed to obtain these results involved the presentation of semantic differential scales that utilized characteristics elicited from open-ended interviews of Americans and Greeks (Triandis, 1967a). The concepts "Americans tend to be" and "Greeks tend to be" were utilized. Characteristics such as *dull-witty* defined the scales. The study found specifically that Americans see Greeks as *emotional, competitive, egotistic, suspicious, rigid,* and *with poor working habits.* At the same time they see them as *witty* and *sociable.*

Furthermore, we asked 400 Americans how they perceive Greeks (see Chapter 5). These subjects were also asked how much contact they had with Greeks. Four groups of Americans were formed. Group 1 had very little contact; Group 2 had some contact; Group 3 had considerable contact, and Group 4 had daily contact. The perceptions of Greeks by these four groups of Americans were analyzed. It was found that the greater the reported contact, the more the Americans considered the Greeks as *emotionally uncontrolled, competitive, suspicious, egotistic, unsystematic, inexact in following procedures, undecisive, sly,* and *rigid.* The greater the contact, however, the more they also saw them as *witty, honest,* and *obliging.* Americans see themselves as less *sly* and more *rational, trusting, modest, flexible, emotionally controlled, decisive, systematic, exact in following procedures, honest,* and *unselfish* than the Greeks.

In contrast, in a study of 800 Greeks from a representative sample of the population of Athens and Thessalonica the Greeks saw the Americans quite differently from the way the Americans saw themselves. They found the Americans to be *arrogant, suspicious, sly,* and *competitive,* although *systematic, emotionally controlled,* and *flexible* as well. The Greeks in this sample perceived themselves as *modest, honest, witty, flexible, obliging,* and *emotionally controlled,* but they also saw themselves as *suspicious, competitive,* and *go-getting.*

When such discrepancies in the perception of social groups are observed,

it is likely that (a) there is some truth in what is seen and (b) the differences between the two groups are exaggerated. Americans may find Greeks "exasperating" because of their *inefficiency, competitiveness,* and *suspiciousness.* On the other hand, Americans may like the Greek *warmth* and *charm.* Greeks may find Americans "exasperating," because of their *arrogance, coldness,* and overwhelming stress on *efficiency,* but at the same time admire American *efficiency.*

Our evidence suggests that there is a kernal of truth in the stereotypes under discussion. It is well to remember, however, that there are "inefficient," "competitive," and "suspicious" Americans also. Furthermore, the Greeks are aware that they themselves have such traits.

In any event, the Greek traits under discussion are consistent with analyses of the ecology and history of that country, as the following argument will indicate. Furthermore, after describing the ecology we discuss some characteristic patterns of thought concerning interpersonal relations which constitute the bases for understanding Greek subjective culture.

Geography and History

Greece is a predominantly mountainous country (80%), cut up by the sea into a large peninsula and hundreds of scattered islands. Two basic geographic characteristics, the mountains and the sea, have brought about a considerable isolation of many segments of the population. As a result the social environment of the average Greek is limited and he is most powerfully identified with his island, his valley, or his small town. Greece is also low on natural resources. Four-fifths of the country is so mountainous that cultivation is extremely difficult. Today it is hard to raise crops except in two or three fertile valleys, among which is Thessaly. Although the country lacks resources, it has simultaneoulsy experienced considerable pressures from an expanding population. The extensive use of the sea (fishing and the merchant marine) plus the emigration of a large number of Greeks have prevented the standard of living from falling. Major influences on modern Greek culture have come from Byzantium and the 350-year-long Ottoman occupation. The Byzantines had several Christian and nationalistic concepts still to be found in modern Greece. At the same time there are unmistakable remnants of Turkish influence in the popular music, the food, and in certain social customs.

Among the most significant historical events that have probably been influential in molding the Greek national character is the fall of Constantinople in 1453, which placed the Balkans under the domination of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans used the Greek intellectuals as their clerks. This had the effect of preserving some of the values of Byzantine

culture. In addition, the Greek Orthodox Church facilitated the continued study of the Greek language, and local priests ran clandestine schools in which some of the Greek values and traditions were taught.

During the 350 following the fall of Constantinople the relationship between Greeks and Ottomans was hostile. The mountainous environment allowed autonomous Greek fighting units which never submitted to the Ottoman occupation to operate; the Ottomans retaliated against their attacks by executing the village leaders. The threat of these executions kept the best of the Greeks constantly in the mountains and away from the villages, so that the modern Greek view of the ideal man is strongly influenced by the image of the guerrilla.

This incomplete and sketchy analysis of early modern Greek ecology leads to the speculation that the period was characterized by child-rearing practices that reflect the fact that women were the only adults physically present in the home. The father was psychologically present, but the mother was the chief agent who perpetuated the values of the culture. The mother's task was extremely difficult. On the one hand she had to prevent assimilation of her children into Ottoman culture and on the other she had to rear them in the image of a hero. Such a difficult task demanded strong maternal control which in turn fostered great dependency among the children.

Moreover, one can speculate that the Ottoman practice of kidnapping male children further contributed to the development of the overprotectiveness of Greek mothers. As early as 1330 the Ottoman Empire undertook a program of recruiting an independent military force by abducting 7-to-11-year-old male Christian children and placing them in specially formed schools for soldiers, the so-called Janissaries. Between 1330 and 1826, when the Janissaries were disbanded, the threat of Turkish abduction of male children was real and relevant. This threat probably had a significant impact on Greek child-rearing practices, which have in turn determined certain aspects of modern Greek national character.

An organized revolution began against the Ottoman rule in 1821. It led to a series of wars which continued intermittently for the next hundred years. During this period the modern Greek state was formed by importing political institutions (e.g., government ministries, parliaments) from Western Europe. The first Greek king was Bavarian, and the second, a Danish prince, was the founder of the current dynasty.

Modern Greece (1821 to the present) has been characterized by political instability. Several revolutions erupted during this period. World War II was especially damaging and was followed by several years of conflict.

The significance of these events from a psychological point of view is

that in the last 150 years the Greeks have had little control over their personal life. Much of their behavior has been directed toward meeting crises created by war or revolution and survival has often been the major concern. As a result they have developed exceedingly effective procedures for meeting crises but have neglected skills for long-term planning. Clearly one cannot plan when one does not know the outcome of next month's events.

In summary, this introduction to Greek geography and history suggests that modern Greek culture was influenced by six important factors: (a) scarce resources and keen competition for them, (b) reaction to the domination by autocratic rulers, (c) dependence on the "male hero" for survival of the cultural values, (d) increased dangers for boys resulting in increased protectiveness of mothers, (e) the unadapted importation of foreign institutions, and (f) low control over the environment. These characteristics provide an explanatory base for our empirical exploration of Greek "subjective culture."

Greek National Character

The Importance of the Ingroup. The foregoing six factors have probably had an important bearing on the molding of Greek national character. The competition for scarce resources and the struggle for survival created an extremely tightly knit family and an "ingroup" that provides protection, social insurance, and a warm and relaxing environment; in short, a haven from the larger world. The Ottoman domination led to a division between established authority and informally accepted authority. Thus the behavior toward a person in authority *depends* on whether he is perceived as a member of the ingroup or of the outgroup. If the authority figure is accepted, then the response is one of submission and self-sacrifice; if it is rejected (i.e., belongs to an outgroup), the response is one of defiance, resentment, and undermining. A regulation imposed by a policeman (member of the outgroup) may be violated "just for fun," if the probability of punishment for breaking the law is not too great.[1]

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[1] One aspect of the ingroup concept of particular interest is the fact that different ingroups have different leaders. A threat from the external environment (as in war with neighboring countries) often makes these leaders cooperate. On the other hand, when there is no outside danger, the leaders are likely to pursue individualistic goals and to behave competitively toward one another. The size of the ingroup depends on the type of the threat. If a member's life is threatened by illness, the immediate ingroup will be mobilized. If the threat is relevant to a widely shared characteristic such as nationality or religion the ingroup expands to include all members having this characteristic. Thus effective cooperation characterizes Greek behavior in wartime, whereas internal competitiveness is typical during peace.

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The definition of the "ingroup" is somewhat different for Greeks than it is for Western Europeans or Americans. The ingroup may be defined as "my family, relatives, friends, and friends of friends." In addition, guests and people who are perceived as "showing concern for me" are seen as members of the ingroup. Within the ingroup the appropriate behaviors are characterized by cooperation, protection, and help. Not only are these "warm" behaviors appropriate, but the concept of the *philotimo* (discussed later) demands that a person sacrifice himself to help members of his ingroup.

The functional significance of such ties among members of the ingroup is clear. It is easier to survive in a highly competitive world as a member of a group of people who cooperate and help one another. In contrast to the ingroup the "outgroup" consists of anyone who is not perceived at least as an acquaintance or as a person who is concerned with one's welfare. Acquaintances are somewhat ambiguously classified more frequently in the ingroup than in the outgroup.

Relations with members of the outgroup are essentially competitive. The Greek language has at least three synonyms equivalent to the word *competition*. Amilla is "benevolent competition" appropriate for the ingroup. *Synagonismos* is equivalent to the American word. *Antagonismos* means "hostile competition" appropriate to members of the outgroup in which success requires the other's failure.

The existence of these clear distinctions between ingroup and outgroup makes the Greeks appear to be extremely suspicious when they first meet strangers. The newcomer has to be classified and until this happens he remains in limbo. If he is classified in the outgroup, all kinds of competition and unfair play are "par for the course." If he is classified in the ingroup, all kinds of help are likely to come his way.

Differences between the American and Greek relationships within the ingroup are substantial. One way of describing them is to discuss the perceptions of *appropriate behavior* of Greeks and Americans in certain roles. Triandis, Vassiliou, and Nassiakou (1968) have shown that such perceptions can be described in terms of the two dimensions: (a) the degree of affect and kind of emotion that is perceived to be appropriate (e.g., the intensity of love) and (b) the degree of intimacy that is appropriate. The basic instrument used in these studies is the "role differential." It utilizes a format exemplified by the following items:

father-son

would not .... would

hit

would not .... would

obey