

THEORY AND EVIDENCE IN CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY



INFLUENCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT ON CULTURE

- CULTURAL ECOLOGY STRESSES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A CULTURE AND ITS ENVIRONMENT
 - CULTURAL VARIATION COULD BE EXPLAINED AS A RESULT OF A SOCIETY'S METHODS OF DEALING WITH ITS ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATIONS
 - IT WOULD APPEAR THAT SOME ELEMENTS OF CULTURE MAY BE DERIVED FROM RESPONSES TO ENVIRONMENTAL SITUATIONS, BUT CERTAINLY NOT ALL
 - HOW COULD ONE EMPIRICALLY TEST WHETHER OR NOT A PARTICULAR ASPECT OF SOME CULTURE IS NOT USED OUT OF TRADITION, OR THAT MORE ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES EXISTED?

Political Economy

- The study of how external forces explain the way a society changes and adapts.
- Political impact of those powerful state societies that transformed the world by colonialism.
- Andre Guner Frank - If we want to understand why a country remains underdeveloped, we must understand how it is exploited by developing nations.

SOCIOBIOLOGY

- **ALSO CALLED, "BEHAVIORAL ECOLOGY"** THE JOINING OF BIOLOGICAL EVOLUTIONARY PRINCIPLES AND THE SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF ANIMALS, INCLUDING HUMANS
 - **INDIVIDUAL SELECTION:** HOW A CERTAIN CHARACTERISTIC / BEHAVIOR MAY BE ADAPTIVE FOR AN INDIVIDUAL IN A GIVEN ENVIRONMENT
 - **WEAKNESS:** HOW DOES THE THEORY EXPLAIN AWAY CASES OF PEOPLE BEHAVING IN WAYS THAT DO NOT SERVE THEIR BEST INTERESTS; E.G., ALTRUIST BEHAVIOR?

INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES

- The concept that anthropologists choose to interpret the things that occur in their field cultures that are of interest to them.

BOAZ'S HISTORICAL PARTICULARISM

- **FRANK BOAZ (1858-1942)** BELIEVED THAT UNIVERSAL LAWS DID NOT GOVERN ALL OF CULTURE
 - HE DISAGREED WITH CONSTRUCTING THEORY BEFORE DATA WERE SUFFICIENTLY GATHERED IN FOR ANALYSIS
 - IF UNIVERSAL LAWS WERE "OUT THERE," THEN COLLECTING MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF DATA ON CULTURES BEFORE THEY DISAPPEARED WAS THE WAY TO GO ABOUT ESTABLISHING THEM
 - **KEY:** FELT THAT ALL CULTURAL TRAITS (VARIATIONS) SHOULD BE STUDIED FROM WITHIN THE CULTURE IT APPEARS

OTHER THEORIES

• DIFFUSIONISM

• THE BRITISH SCHOOL

- MOST ASPECTS OF HIGH-ORDER CIVILIZATION CAME FROM EGYPT AND WERE THEN DIFFUSED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

• GERMAN-AUSTRIAN SCHOOL

- PEOPLE WERE BASICALLY UNINVENTIVE AND THUS BORROWED FROM SEVERAL DIFFERENT CULTURAL COMPLEXES

• THE AMERICA SCHOOL

- CULTURAL TRAITS WERE FIRST DEVELOPED IN GEOGRAPHIC CULTURAL CENTERS AND WERE DIFFUSED FROM THOSE POINTS

I DON'T KNOW WHERE THE IDEA FOR TAKING NAPS LIKE THIS CAME FROM, BUT IT MUST HAVE BEEN A VERY ADVANCED SOCIETY!



DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

- SOME BELIEVE THAT CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS ARE WASTING THEIR TIME DEVELOPING THEORIES THAT ARE PRETTY MUCH UNTESTABLE
- INTERPRETIVE ETHNOGRAPHIES OFFER INSIGHT, BUT INTERPRETATIONS MAY BE WRONG OR NOT GIVEN MUCH ATTENTION
- THE "HYPOTHESIS-TESTING ORIENTATION" MAY HOLD THE KEY
 - MANY ANTHROPOLOGISTS BELIEVE THAT THEORY IS TESTABLE AND THAT ANY NUMBER OF SCIENTIFIC METHODS SHOULD AND ARE EMPLOYED

DOING
RESEARCH

IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

- **EXPLANATIONS IN SCIENCE**
 - **ONE KIND OF EXPLANATION IN SCIENCE**
 - **ASSOCIATIONS: EXPLANATIONS THAT DISCUSS HOW SOMETHING CONFORMS TO A GENERAL PRINCIPLE OR RELATIONSHIP**
 - **VARIABLES: THE THINGS THAT VARY**
 - **LAWS: HOW TWO OR MORE VARIABLES ARE RELATED OR VARY TOGETHER**
 - **STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION: MEANS THAT THE OBSERVED RELATIONSHIP IS UNLIKELY TO BE DUE TO CHANCE ALONE**

THEORIES

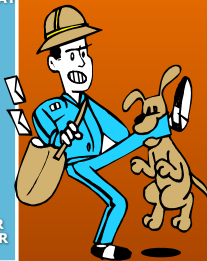
- **EXPLANATIONS OF LAWS AND STATISTICAL ASSOCIATIONS, OFTEN CONTAINING A SERIES OF COMPLEX STATEMENTS WHICH CAN DISCUSS OBJECTS THAT ARE NOT EASILY DIRECTLY OBSERVABLE**
 - **A "THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT" IS SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE OBSERVED OR VERIFIED DIRECTLY**
- **FALSIFICATION IS A TERM THAT MEANS THAT THEORIES CANNOT BE PROVEN, BUT THEY CAN BE REJECTED IF THE DATA SUGGEST DOING SO IS THE CORRECT PATH TO FOLLOW**
- **HYPOTHESES ARE THE PART OF THEORY THAT IS TESTED BY COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA**

EVIDENCE

CHECKING OUT INTERPRETATIONS


- **OPERATIONALIZATION**
 - **OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS - A DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCEDURE THAT IS FOLLOWED TO MEASURE THE VARIABLES (DEFINING TERMS IN SUFFICIENT DETAIL)**
- **MEASUREMENT**
 - **HOW A VARIABLE COMPARES WITH OTHER THINGS ON SOME SCALE OF VARIATION (ASSIGNING NUMBER VALUES)**
- **SAMPLING**
 - **RANDOM SAMPLING IS DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH, BUT NONRANDOM STRATEGIES ARE AVAILABLE AND CAN WORK ADEQUATELY IF THE RESEARCHER DOES NOT SELECT THE PARTICIPANTS OR FOCUS GROUP**

PERMIT ME TO OFFER MY OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF BAD DOGGIE BEHAVIOR!



USING STATISTICS

- GENERALLY, STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF DATA FALLS UNDER WHAT IS CALLED "QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY"
 - THERE ARE VARIOUS STATISTICAL TESTS THAT CAN INDICATE THE PROBABILITY (OR P-VALUE) WHICH IS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE OBSERVED RESULT OR A STRONGER ONE COULD HAVE OCCURRED BY CHANCE ALONE
- STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE
 - IS REACHED IF STATISTICAL ANALYSIS INDICATES THERE IS LESS THAN A 5 OUT OF 100 CHANCE THAT THE RELATIONSHIP OBSERVED IS PURELY ACCIDENTAL (P=.05)

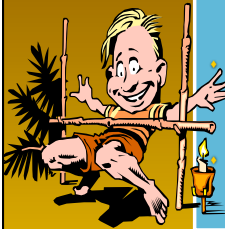


DOING AN ETHNOGRAPHY

- DECIDING UPON ROLE USING PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AS A FIELDWORK METHOD
 - COMPLETE OBSERVER
 - OBSERVER AS PARTICIPANT
 - PARTICIPANT AS OBSERVER
 - COMPLETE PARTICIPANT
- ETHNOGRAPHIC STRATEGIES INCLUDE
 - DETAILED NOTETAKING
 - FIRST-HAND ACCOUNTS AND STORIES
 - MAPPING, KINSHIP TRACING, AND SO FORTH
- DATA IS HIGH IN VALIDITY, BUT LOW IN RELIABILITY
- DUE TO THE DEPTH AND WEALTH OF DATA, ETHNOGRAPHERS OFTEN TAKE PART IN THEORY BUILDING THROUGH INTERPRETATION PROCESSES (EXTREMELY USEFUL IN GENERATING EXPLANATIONS)

ETHNOGRAPHY AND COMPARISONS

I JUST LOVE FULL PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION STUDIES!



- WITHIN-CULTURE
 - INVESTIGATING DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES WITHIN A GIVEN SOCIETAL SETTING (INDIVIDUAL, FAMILIES, HOUSEHOLDS, COMMUNITIES)
- REGIONAL CONTROLLED
 - COMPARING INFORMATION FROM SOCIETIES WITHIN A GIVEN REGIONAL AREA
- CROSS-CULTURAL
 - ETHNOGRAPHIC RECORDS CAN REVEAL INFORMATION ABOUT WORLDWIDE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SOCIETIES
- HISTORICAL COMPARISONS
 - ETHNOHISTORIES CAN PROVIDE DESCRIPTIVE DATA CONCERNING ONE SOCIETY ACROSS TIME PERIODS

SCIENTIFIC LIMITATIONS

- **OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE**
 - WHAT SCIENCE STRIVES FOR; BEYOND PERSONAL BELIEFS, VALUES, BIASES
- **SUBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE**
 - INFORMATION THAT STEMS FROM A PERSON'S BELIEFS, VALUES, AND BIASES; TAINTS OBJECTIVENESS
 - **PARADIGMS**
 - SETS OF BELIEFS, ASSUMPTIONS, TECHNIQUES, IDEALS, AND RESEARCH STRATEGIES THAT SHAPE A PERSON'S OBSERVATION AND CONCLUSIONS

OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE IS A GREAT GOAL. BUT IS IT (SHOULD IT) BE SOMETHING FOR WHICH SCIENTISTS STRIVE IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES?



