

Cross-cultural Value Differences: An Experience with Methodological Implications for Applied Psychology

Robert J. Gregory

*Department of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand
Fax: 64 06 3505673 E-mail: R.J.Gregory@massey.ac.nz*

KEY WORDS Cross-cultural. Vanuatu. Study of Values. Values. Methods.

ABSTRACT A cross-cultural project incorporated numerous research efforts to gain understanding of the social and cultural situation of the "Kastom" people on the island of Tanna, Vanuatu. Interest in indigenous value orientations, as contrasted with the value orientations of Western colonialists, led to the use of the Study of Values questionnaire. Differences were revealed, not only in values, but also by a culturally sensitive methodology encouraged, indeed, enforced by the indigenous people themselves. These differences carry significance for applied psychology investigations in cross-cultural arenas.

INTRODUCTION

A cross-cultural project incorporated numerous research efforts to gain understanding of the social and cultural situation of the "Kastom" people on the island of Tanna, Vanuatu. Interest in indigenous value orientations, as contrasted with the value orientations of Western colonialists, led to the use of the Study of Values questionnaire. Differences were revealed, not only in values, but also by a culturally sensitive methodology encouraged, indeed, enforced by the indigenous people themselves. These differences carry significance for applied psychology investigations in cross-cultural arenas.

BACKGROUND

Tanna, a small remote island in Melanesia, has gained prominence as the home of the John Frum Cargo Cult (Guiart, 1951). On aspect of the cult was a return to the use of kava, a drug obtained from a plant in the pepper family (*Piper methysticum*, Forst.). The author spent some eighteen months in the field studying the use of the drug, the formation and maintenance of the cult, and related issues pursuant to a research grant from the U.S. National Institute of Drug

Abuse (Gregory et al., 1978). The Tannese people are subsistence gardeners, with a rich set of beliefs and myths an extensive history dating back more than a thousand years (Shutler and Shutler, 1967).

The missionary effort to convert the Tannese was an attempt to implant new values and beliefs in the people (Patterson, 1864; Gregory et al., 1983). Guiart (1956a, 1956b, 1962) for example, saw the resistance to the Presbyterian beliefs and the reappearance of the myth of Karapenamun and the cult of the ancestors, as central to the development and maintenance of the John Frum Cargo Cult. The old values and beliefs were never extinguished. It was a matter of time, plus changing economic, social and political circumstances, until the initial approval of and enthusiasm for Presbyterian led change began to fail. The people then turned dramatically against these new Presbyterian inspired and imposed beliefs (Gregory and Gregory, 1984). The cult enabled the Tannese people to improve their material positions (cargo) and political status, *vis a vis* the British and French colonial powers, as well as return to their treasured myths and ways of life of the past.

Continuing Guiart's argument, the Tannese were and are divided between those seeking westernized ways and those clinging to the old ways. Observation revealed that a few Westernized New Hebridean people worked in government, schools, hospitals, shipping, stores and co-operatives. They dressed in Western styles, and spoke English or French, and Bislama, the local trade or pigeon language. Observation also revealed that with Western ways came the frequent use of alcohol, particularly by young men after paydays. Obviously some Tannese adopted Western ways and chose that value system. The more traditional Tannese, and especially those

following "Kastom" in the Southwest part of the island, used the mystic John Frum to regain power, via myth and beliefs (Gregory, 1993). Guiart claimed that the myth of the ancestors, the cult of the dead, was not only associated with John Frum but was also strongly associated with ancient values, including the use of kava. These Tannese people follow custom and drink kava. The questions this situation raises are: 1) Are the values of the Tannese following custom different from those of the Western world? 2) Is there a link between kava use and the maintenance of different values?

Certain values led to use of particular chemicals and prohibit or inhibit use of others, enabling people to achieve physiological and psychological states appropriate to those values. Thus the influence of western ways, as introduced by the missionaries and extended by the government, traders, and visitors, only superficially modified the life styles, beliefs and culture of the Tannese who turned to John Frum. When these forced weakened, old values, as well as practices, reasserted themselves. Kava use, not alcohol, was one symbol that was in accord with the older values.

As one aspect of studies on the cult, the author sought a better understanding of the values held by the Tannese people. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) studied value orientations in five different cultural groups in Southwestern United States, in the early 1950's. The four value orientations used by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck were relational, time, man-nature, and activity. Relational concerned the importance an individual placed on his lineage, his collective group, or individualism. Time concerned the relative emphasis on past, present or future. The man-nature orientation concerned whether man was subject to nature, a part of (with) nature, or was seeking to overcome nature. Finally, activity referred to the relative importance of doing versus being revealed significant variations among the residents in one ecologically similar area.

One group, Texans, is perhaps representative of modern technologically complex society, the Western world (see page 355). The following results for Texans were found. Individualism was more important than collectivism, which was more important than lineage. The future was

more important than the present which was more important than the past. In man's relation to nature, overcoming nature was more important, being with nature second and subject to nature third. In terms of activity, doing was more important than being. Presumably these values are important to "making it" in western culture, or in simply fitting in. Comparison with these "Western" values were sought in the field on Tanna.

The Study of Values Questionnaire, Form D, was administered to a group of about 50 men in the Custom John Frum area of Tanna. Questions were translated from English to Bislama to the Nvhaal language, several times back and forth until there was agreement. Then, several efforts to interview individuals both with and without interpreters failed. Each person contacted requested that any such questions should be, indeed, must be, discussed by an assembly of "big men" and local leaders. They refused to give answers on their own. Accordingly, one of those contacted, a headman from a village, arranged for a meeting of several "big men". At the meeting, the fifty men who assembled discussed heatedly and at length, the possible options for each query. The questions were dealt with much as riddles might be. There was strong interest in figuring the "right" or "correct" answers. About 20 of 25 questions were discussed at length in this all day meeting. For five questions not answered in this session, several of the leaders later assembled to provide answers, after they had sufficient time to examine the questions among themselves or in consultation in greater depth with other "big men".

The answers given by the custom John Frum people were in sharp contrast with those of the Texans. The results are presented in table 1. The past was more important than the present, and the future was least important. Being was more important than doing. A person's lineage came before his collective group, which was more important than individualism. In nature and may relationships, being with nature was most important with being subjected to nature second. Overall there was a strong difference with the values of the Texans as reported. It may be then, that the move to custom and John Frum was a reassertion of the values of earlier times, in

Table 1: The study of values for custom John Frum people

	Value orientation	
	Tannese	Texans
Time	Past Present Future	Future Present Past
Activity	Being Doing	Doing Being
Relational	Lineage Collective Individual	Individual Collective Lineage
Man-Nature	With Nature Subject to Over Nature	Over Nature With Nature Subject to

marked opposition to the values of the west. Today, the custom John Frum people maintain their traditional value orientations, while other Tannese have turned and are turning to the Western world.

Among the custom John Frum people, a high level of consumption of kava and a low consumption of alcohol is observable, in contrast with some of the more Westernized Tannese on other parts of the island. A connection does seem to exist between kava use and the maintenance of values of the custom John Frum movement values which differs significantly from values prevailing in the Western world.

Of interest to those dealing with issues of values research on a cross-cultural basis, the findings were of use. However, the importance of methodology is of perhaps even greater significance. Reports of research on values sometime reveals differences in methodology, for example, Fogarty and White (1994) indicated that their methods for collecting survey results from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students at the University of Southern Queensland differed in that Aboriginal students were asked individually to participate. Bijnen and Poortinga (1988) argued that cross-cultural comparisons with the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire were biased. Part et al. (1988) found that disparities were found between interview and self-report data for East Asians, but found it difficult to establish clearly the cause of such disparities.

In conclusion it would seem that cross-cultural research methodology must be carefully considered, and though comparatively across situations is desirable, cultural sensitivity to

questionnaire, surveys and other measurement efforts should be addressed and when and if possible, maintained.

NOTES

1. The article includes information gained during 15 months of field work and 3 months research in various archives and libraries, under provision of United States Public Health Service Research Grand NIDA DA 01129. Field work on the principle research endeavour on the relationships between use of kava and the formation and maintenance of the cult was conducted in 1976 and 1977.
2. Acknowledgment of the help of the trades, Bob and Kath Paul, and the British District Agent, as well as the sharing of their way of life by the Tannese people is given. The author is responsible for this account.
3. The name Vanuatu was adopted in 1980 upon independence. The island chain was previously known as the New Hebrides.

REFERENCES

- Bijnen, Emanuel J. and Poortinga Ype H.: The questionable value of cross-cultural comparisons with the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*, 19: 193-292 (1988).
- Fogarty, Gerard J. and White, Colin: Differences between values of Australian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Students, *Journals of Cross-cultural Psychology*, 25: 394-408 (1994).
- Gregory, Robert J., Gregory, Janet E. and Peck, John G.: *The Relationship of Kava to a Cultural Revitalization Movement*. Final Report DA 01129 for the National Institute of Drug Abuse, Durham, NC (1978).
- Gregory, Robert J., Gregory, Janet E. and Peck, John G.: Kava and prohibition in Tanna, Vanuatu, *British Journal of Addiction*, LXXVI: 299-313 (1981).
- Gregory, Robert J., Gregory, Janet E. and Peck, John G.: Vanuatu: Kava and the Conflicts of Colonialism, In: *Drug Use and Misuse: Cultural Perspectives*, Griffith Edwards, Awni Arif and Jerome Jaffe (Eds.), London: Croom Helm, 232-240 (1983).
- Gregory, Robert J. and Gregory, Janet E.: John Frum: An indigenous strategy of reaction to mission rule and the colonial order, *Pacific Studies*, VII: 68-90 (1984).
- Gregory, Robert J.: *Yo Kaleek: Another I: Life on a South Seas Island*. Levin, New Zealand: National Training Resource Centre (1993).
- Guiart, Jean: Forerunners of Melanesian Nationalism, *Oceania*, XXII: 81-90 (1951).
- Guiart, Jean: *Un Siecle et demi de Contacts Culturels Tanna, Nouvelles-Hebrides*, Publication de la Societe des Oceanistes, No. 5, Paris Musee de l'Homme (1956a).
- Guiart, Jean: Culture Contact and the 'John Frum' Movement on Tanna, New Hebrides, *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, XII: 105-116 (1956b).
- Guiart, Jean: The millenarian aspect of conversion to Christianity in the South Pacific, In: *Millenial Dreams in Action*, Sylvia L. Thrupp, (Ed.), The Hague, Mouton, p. 122-128 (1962).

- Kluckhohn, F.R. and Strodtbeck, F.L.: *Variations in Value Orientations*. Evanston, IL: Row and Peterson (1961).
- Park, Kwang B., Upshaw, Harry S. and Koh, Soon D.: East Asians' Responses to Western Health Items, *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, **19**: 51-64 (1988).
- Patterson, George: *Memoirs of the Rev. S.F. Johnston, the Rev. J. W. Matheson and Mrs. Mary Johnston Matheson: Missionaries on Tanna, with Selections from their Diaries and Correspondence, and Notice of the New Hebrides, their Inhabitants and Missionary Work Among Them*, Philadelphia: W.S. and A. Marten (1864).
- Shutler, Mary E. and Richard Shutler, Jr.: Origins of the Melanesians, *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania*, **11**: 91-99 (1967).
- Sadowsky, Gargi R., et. al.: World views of the white American, mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and African students: An investigation into between-group differences. *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, **25**: 309-324 (1994).