DIGITAL ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP AT HARVARD
DASH.HARVARD.EDU

HARVARD LIBRARY
Office for Scholarly Communication

The study of national character: Some observations on the American case

Citation
Riesman, David. 1959. The study of national character: Some observations on the American case. Harvard Library Bulletin XIII (1), Winter 1959: 5-24.

Permanent link
https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37363719

Terms of Use
This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. Submit a story .

Accessibility

The Study of National Character: Some Observations on the American Case[1]

I SHALL try in these remarks to put into perspective certain problems in the study of national character. My procedure will not be technical and systematic, but speculative and fragmentary. I shall take my mandate broadly to touch on a variety of styles of thought and thus address myself not only to the sociology of society but also to the sociology of knowledge. My emphasis will be on national character, not as historians have traditionally used the concept, but rather in terms of the inquiries that have resulted from the confluence of psychoanalytic or Gestalt psychology and cultural anthropology. This confluence, going back to Sapir and others in the 1920's, is hardly more than a generation old. It received an enormous impetus in the Second World War when anthropologists, who had examined the relations of culture and personality in small preliterate societies, turned their attention to assessing the morale, the vulnerability, and the approachability of enemy and allied states. Ruth Benedict's book on Japan, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946), is one of the best known examples; work was also done on Burma, on Rumania, and by the psychoanalyst Dicks and others on Germany and the Soviet Union. Margaret Mead's book on the United States, *And Keep Your Powder Dry*, which appeared in 1942, was a wartime effort to understand the sources of American morale as well as part of the perennial effort of a highly self-conscious nation to understand itself. In the War, it was important to know how the Japanese would respond to an occupying army; or in what ways American GIs and British Tommies might misunderstand each other; or how American housewives would alter their food habits under rationing when this involved a break with an ethnic heritage. Such imperative curiosities helped overcome the reluctance of anthropologists and psychoanalysts to enter the areas already preempted by historians, political scientists, and oc-

[1] Inaugural Lecture for the Henry Ford II Professorship of Social Sciences, Harvard University, delivered in the New Lecture Hall, 9 December 1958; here published with minor revisions.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

casionally a sociologist, particularly when they could not make use of their technique of the long-term field expedition and had instead to rely on secondary sources and to infer much more than they could observe firsthand.

Work in this genre, originating with the War, set a pattern or style of study that was continued by the Research on Contemporary Cultures, first directed by Ruth Benedict and then by Margaret Mead.[2] Members of the separate disciplines, including many anthropologists, strongly objected to this approach, partly on justified grounds that it ignored history, was more unsystematic than necessary, and lumped subgroups together on the basis of inadequate sampling. But partly the work seemed just too vague and impressionistic to appeal to young men and women interested in quickly gaining an unequivocal professional identity and in exploring some of the problems, at once technically exacting and intellectually challenging, that have come into prominence recently. Only a few departments of anthropology carry on research in national character or culture and personality at present, and the only sizable project I am familiar with is that being conducted at Harvard by John W. M. Whiting. For the most part, the psychoanalysts have gone back to their patients, the anthropologists to their tribes.[3]

A few historians, however, more venturesome than their fellows, have begun to take an interest in this area. David Potter, in his book *People of Plenty* (1954), has sought to assimilate the studies that have been done on American character by non-historians and to link them to more traditional historical perspectives. Elkins and McKitrick have employed psychoanalytic and anthropological research in their work

[2] See, for general review, Margaret Mead and Rhoda Métraux, *The Study of Culture at a Distance* (Chicago, 1953). This project, of course, was not the only work on national character, but is used illustratively here. Mention should be made of the comparative study by Francis Hsu, *Americans and Chinese: Two Ways of Life* (New York, 1953). A full bibliography can be found in Alex Inkeles and Daniel J. Levinson, 'National Character: The Study of Modal Personality and Socio-Cultural Systems,' *Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. Gardner E. Lindzey (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), II, 977–1020.

[3] It should be noted, however, that at the meetings of the American Anthropological Association in Washington in November 1958, John J. Honigman declared that a survey had shown that as much work in culture and personality had been done in the last few years as in the immediate postwar period. It would be necessary for a fuller appraisal of the true situation to compare these publications, both in scope and number, with work in other expanding fields of anthropological research.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

on slavery in the Americas.[4] A year ago, William L. Langer in his presidential address to the American Historical Association stressed the importance of psychoanalytic studies for the understanding of historical development.[5] Since in larger perspective it does not matter which guild, which discipline, does the work that needs to be done, and since I myself feel that tribal or national character cannot be understood without history, I would be very happy if historians went ahead to make their own a borderland now only laxly tended by other social scientists.

History is often said to be an ideographic or descriptive study, as distinct from the nomothetic or generalizing social sciences. In preference to these rather formidable terms, I want to fall back on the old dichotomy between the romantic and the classic, though I shall use these labels in a somewhat special way, one which, however, is applicable not only to the study of national character but to almost any sort of study of man. What I shall call the 'classic' approach aims primarily at generalizations that could in principle be true at any time and place, whereas the 'romantic' is concerned with a particular people, in a particular time and place. The problems that bother the classicist tend to be given him by his discipline and hence often appear to be 'objective,' while the romanticist is apt to allow the problems that bothered the people he is studying to bother him also. The historians and other humanists who have for a long time been interested in national character have been attracted to the particular, even the parochial; they may have a yearning for wider generalizations in a more classical mode but they manage to resist it. The yearning may be an element in their frequent resentment of interlopers from alien fields who talk about 'the' Russian or 'the' German or 'the' American character, as well as the often much greater resentment against Spengler or Toynbee who seek to impose a grand design on history and to cultivate categories that are trans-national and go beyond the common sense that serves the average historian for a psychology.

In contrast, the 'classic' approach focuses on social forms rather than content (a fragile distinction at best). The classic mode tends to be detached from time and place and generally in the past (though not

[4] Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, 'Institutions and the Law of Slavery,' *American Quarterly*, IX (1957), 3–20, 159–179.

[5] William L. Langer, 'The Next Assignment,' *American Historical Review*, LXIII (1958), 283–304.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

inevitably) has surrendered the attempt to cope with social change. We see this approach in one of its purest forms in the work of economists who build models under which all deployment of resources and all choices among them in any society can be subsumed. As Carl Kaysen put it the other day at a meeting, the input-output scheme of Leontief could in this way handle the choices Eskimos make, or even that seals make, assuming we could infer the preferences and energies of seals from observing their behavior.

Talcott Parsons has been much influenced by such models used by economists and has, in turn, influenced them; and while much of his work deals with very concrete problems of contemporary America, his book *The Social System* (1951) and other writings comprise an effort to find categories within which any society in any historical period could be described — such categories, for instance, as those of universalism versus particularism, or of achievement versus ascription. Other scholars have written in a similar vein. Thus Florence Kluckhohn's distinctions between 'being,' 'becoming,' and 'doing' represent an effort to embrace all possible societies in terms of their orientation towards time and towards movement and achievement [6] — although, to be sure, being and doing are concepts particularly suitable to the American experience and the present American ambivalence. Likewise, one finds in a paper by Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry Murray on the determinants of personality formation the typically classic statement that every man is in some respects like all other men, in other respects like some other men, and in still other respects like no other man.[7] Such a statement clarifies what one might discover in any conceivable society; and pushed to its extreme the classic approach becomes a set of abstract logical statements.

No doubt, this dichotomy between the classic and the romantic approaches is itself classic. Correspondingly, none of the writers I have mentioned is, of course, a pure case of either type, for all are very much concerned with what is happening now in these United States. I think we need both the classic and the romantic approaches to the study of national character, or rather we need the dialectical tension between them; and in that sense the not wholly integrated or

[6] See Florence L. Kluckhohn, 'Dominant and Variant Value Orientations,' in *Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture*, ed. Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry A. Murray, 2nd ed. (New York, 1953), pp. 342–357.

[7] *Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture*, p. 53.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

assimilated pressure for concreteness from historians on the one side, and for generalizations from more neophyte social scientists on the other, can be as productive as it is often contentious and dismaying.

This dialectical tension can be felt in the way others have used Freud's own originating concepts in the study of national character. And Freud *is* the originator here, not because his is the soundest and safest guide among the available systems of psychology, but because his is the most provocative and alive. His assumption that all men pass through a series of psychosexual stages — principally, the oral, anal, and genital — led in the hands of his disciple, Karl Abraham, to the further development of the concept of the anal character, the concept, that is, of a person who is frozen at or who has regressed to the anal state, and who continues to live as an adult in a metaphorical image of that state. The biological universalism of Freud is 'classic' in its style and, although it is dynamic when applied to an individual life cycle, the same universalism is often static when the organic metaphor of the individual life is extrapolated to the culture at large and one speaks of a whole culture as 'anal' or 'oral' as the case may be.

Freud himself, however, in *Moses and Monotheism*, one of his last works, sought to deal with what was for him a concrete historical problem in national character, namely, why the Jews had maintained for centuries a particularly ascetic religion, with only one God, and severe inhibitory rituals. And he sought to answer his own question in terms of a reconstructed historical event, the killing of the Egyptian leader, Moses, by rebellious Jews, and the remorse that followed from this, recreated anew in each generation of Jews by quasi-Lamarckian and quasi-cultural processes. *Moses and Monotheism* is thus a study in the origins and present import of Jewish national character. In its cavalier way of handling data, both about Biblical history and comparative religion, this book illustrates a highly characteristic procedure whose vices are evident enough but whose virtues need also to be understood. For the psychoanalysts have had the temerity to tackle whole cultures in an effort to link the creation of a particular type of character structure in childhood to the adult society's mode of production, love, war, folklore. Indeed, in the sensitive hands of Erik Erikson, this high-handed method becomes a way of explaining how two American Indian tribes have organized the psychosexual stages on life's way, perpetuating themselves through time by inculcating in the children the orientations that will 'make sense' in the natural and human en-

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

vironment the adults must cope with.[8] Thus, for example, he shows how the Yurok Indians, living by and preoccupied with a salmon river on the Northwest Coast, construct their houses, their view of the world, and their day-to-day imagery on the 'oral' analogy of the river's mouth.[9] In all such work, there is an effort to see what goes with what, what hangs together, how a society channels its drives of sex and aggression, and it is this that has been a factor in the encouragement given historians (as Richard Hofstadter points out) [10] to think in terms of configuration and style, and thus to delineate patterns as well as to describe events. (To be sure, historians have worked this way in the past when they have allowed themselves to refer to a period as 'baroque' or to speak of the 'romantic era,' but psychoanalytic impetus involves a more explicit linking of individual motives to large societal forms.)

Moreover, the psychoanalytic contribution not only introduced new and often grandiose styles of generalization; it also insisted on the importance of previously neglected aspects of day-to-day life — underprivileged data, we might say, which only a few of the more social social historians had concerned themselves with. Fleeting memories, dreams, the games of children, the modes of weaning — all became the stuff of history. And I think we see here one reason why so many anthropologists found in Freud, despite his obvious ethnocentric biases, a compatible figure, for they, too, had an interest in underprivileged orders of data — data from tribes without writing, without a navy, without what used to be called 'culture.' Furthermore, anthropologists had necessarily been forced by the nature of their one-man expeditions into a kind of amateurism in which the art, the economics, the mythology, the child-rearing practices, the legal system, and the kinship system were all within their purview, needing to be organized in some holistic way. When anthropology was poor, it could not afford to send more than one person to one place, and the tribes, too, were poor in the sense that they could not protect themselves against white contact and could not be assumed to remain intact for the next field trip. Moreover, when anthropology was poor, anthropologists were autocratic and aristocratic; by this I mean that,

[8] See Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York, 1950), Chapter 4.

[9] See Erikson, *Observations on the Yurok: Childhood and World Image* (University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, Vol. XXXV, No. 10; Berkeley, Calif., 1943).

[10] In *The Varieties of History*, ed. Fritz Stern (New York, 1956), p. 362.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

like the early psychoanalysts, they were prepared to generalize on the basis of scanty evidence even when they could have no assurance that another research worker might automatically duplicate their account. They practiced an art requiring confidence in themselves and imagination as well as ability to observe and record. Today, I suspect that this is changing. Neither anthropologists nor psychoanalysts are an esoteric elite seeking to rub the noses of their fellow men in what is common or vulgar. What was esoteric has become part of our daily life, and anthropologists, now belonging to a stronger and more well-endowed profession, are also burdened with observational and analytic games at which any number can play, if they have bought their chips at the proper graduate school.

At the same time, of course, it has become possible to rectify some of the excesses of the early enthusiasts. Scholars are, for the most part, not so sure as Freud was that they know what is 'basic' in a particular culture. To be sure, the psychoanalyst Abram Kardiner and his anthropological co-workers have developed a concept of 'basic' personality in which what is basic depends on psychoanalytic preconceptions as to what is most important to man in his culture. If one deals with a small tribe or enclave, the shortcomings of this approach are apt to be covered up by the ability to relate everything to everything else, so that religion, for instance, may appear, not as the heritage of a specific tribal history, but as the reflection of childhood training and parental aggression. But as soon as one moves into a more complex and differentiated society, what is basic for one group may not be basic for another, and groups may struggle to define what is to be regarded as 'basic' for the society as a whole. To understand such a struggle, one needs not only life histories, but history, as a number of anthropologists are aware. Irving Hallowell, for example, in studying Canadian Indian tribes, has gone back to the early Jesuit accounts, the so-called Jesuit relations, concerning the same tribes he has worked with in the field, in order to discover what is truly basic in the sense of more or less permanent and what, though it may strike the field worker as significant, may perhaps be ephemeral.[11] Likewise, when Erich Fromm was working (with the late Ralph Linton) on materials from Truk, he went back to the accounts of early Spanish and later German visitors

[11] See A. Irving Hallowell, 'Aggression in Saulteaux Society,' *Psychiatry*, III (1940), 395–407; and the essays collected in his *Culture and Experience* (Philadelphia, 1955). Work by A. F. C. Wallace could also be cited.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

to Truk in order to show that the 'hoarding' or anal-sadistic orientation he found in the contemporary Trukese reflected, not presently prevailing conditions of peace and plenty, but earlier conditions of famine and warfare that, through parental transmissions, had left their mark in the tribal character and social institutions.[12] So, too, Geoffrey Gorer, for his recent book, *Exploring English Character*, not only employed an elaborate questionnaire among Englishmen now alive, but also sought to discover through historical evidence how and why the British became a law-abiding people.[13] Works such as these are more sober than the earlier works, but they have not surrendered either the concern for underprivileged data or the effort to relate the rivulets of individual motives to the turbulent streams of history.

At the same time, the introduction of new materials, such as poll data, when combined with an interest in history, presents us anew with the problem faced by the social historians: that records are largely the product of the more articulate strata and that it is never an easy task to infer and reconstruct how ordinary people in an earlier time were brought up to think and feel. We cannot interview the dead. We can see what this means when we examine two studies, *The Authoritarian Personality* and *The Lonely Crowd*, as I should like to do now.[14] Neither of these (despite the subtitle of *The Lonely Crowd*) can quite be termed studies of *national* character, because their focus is on salient strata within a population rather than on a total population, but they do attempt to make the linkage between a more or less psychoanalytic approach to individuals and certain historical questions.

The Authoritarian Personality took off from the near-contemporary scene of fascism in Germany and the possibility of incipient fascism in America; but its method is primarily clinical, focused on the psychodynamics of individuals as revealed in interviews and projective tests.

[12] The work was done in a seminar at Yale in 1948/49 at which George P. Murdock and Ward H. Goodenough reported on their observations in Truk. I speak here of my own recollections of the seminar, which I attended, as Fromm has not published his work on Trukese character.

[13] Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (London, 1955). See especially Appendix I.

[14] Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, 1950); and David Riesman, with the collaboration of Reuel Denney and Nathan Glazer, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, 1950).

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

From these individuals a picture is in turn built up of the structure of authority in the family, with overbearing but conventional authority in childhood seen as the basis for sadomasochistic and intolerant dispositions in later life, and in the larger world of politics. Thus, the family is seen as the microcosm of society, as well as the transmission belt for its imperatives. Yet we wonder in reading this book whether the authors, had they had access in their sample to seventeenth-century Puritans in New England, would have regarded them as authoritarian and, if so, how they would explain the rise of political democracy in just such a setting. And we might conversely ask to what extent tolerant and permissive families, highly democratic, arising in twentieth-century America, might seem quite pliable in the face of an authoritarian political and cultural regime. For the historian realizes as a matter of course that institutions mediate between the family and society. And, if that is so, individual character structure may not necessarily be the most salient element for historical development at a particular time. Anonymous individuals possessing certain character orientations in common may provide both an active and a passive audience for a dictator, and thus play a part in his rise to power. However, any large-scale industrial society, whatever its numerically preponderant national character, is bound to have somewhere, standing in the wings, enough sadists and bureaucratic authoritarians to do the dirty work of totalitarianism, provided other historical conditions are present. Correspondingly, within wide limits a totalitarian movement can create its own audience, and destroy or intimidate the rest. It is unduly complacent of Americans to assume that 'it can't happen here,' and that Hitler's rise to power can be attributed to 'the' German character and hence 'the' German family; this assumption is also an historicist fallacy, for there were many accidents in Hitler's rise to power and his stay there, as he himself well realized, and the authoritarianism that surely existed in sections of the German lower-middle class (as it exists in sections of the American working and white-collar classes) was but one predisposing factor among many.

Many published criticisms of *The Authoritarian Personality* have been made,[16] my own among them, and I do not want to add to them here, for the book deserves the great impact it has had; it did try to link the most intimate and the most impersonal realms of contemporary

[16] See particularly *Studies in the Scope and Method of "The Authoritarian Personality,"* ed. Richard Christie and Marie Jahoda (Glencoe, Ill., 1954).

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

life, a very worthwhile and important task. Had the book been written to the mandates of all-inclusiveness that might have saved it from criticism, it would have been so 'classic' as to lose interest for us. The point is rather to see what next steps can be taken, on the one hand to bring institutions into the picture, and on the other to look for comparative cases, both historically and cross-culturally, where a similar pattern of child rearing coexists with a different set of institutions and a different social climate in the culture at large.

The Lonely Crowd resembles *The Authoritarian Personality*, which appeared at the same time, in its effort (far less systematic, to be sure) to deal with a historical problem that is broader than genitality and narrower than fate. It is a 'romantic' book in the sense that its focus is less on man in general than on specific social strata in a specific historical setting. Just as *The Authoritarian Personality*, as a study in the social and psychological sources of prejudice, transcends the American case, though its interviews and tests happen to be with Americans, so *The Lonely Crowd* aims at understanding the social and psychological consequences of the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial culture — a shift most pronounced among the highly educated and urbanized members of the American middle classes, but one that could in principle be traced in other affluent or near-affluent societies elsewhere than in America. Nevertheless, in its tentative suggestions linking demographic, technological, and cultural patterns, *The Lonely Crowd* touches on a theme more characteristic of classic than romantic works; so, too, in its discussion of three modes of adaptation: autonomy, adjustment, and *anomie*. Even so, this latter typology, influenced as it was by the writings of Erich Fromm, moves quite far from the biological base of many typologies, whether we think of Freud's oral, anal, and genital, or, at a different (non-psychoanalytical) level, of Sheldon's mesomorph, endomorph, and ectomorph. For, by beginning with the problem of conformity and autonomy, the typology is already a socially-patterned one, and of course it reflects the very specific preoccupation with socialization, conformity, and individualism found in the educated and sensitive strata in the United States today.

To my way of thinking, typologies are scaffoldings, good for a single building only, and needing to be scrapped when the movements of history and of thought present us with different problems and different ways of perceiving problems. I am reminded of a letter I received

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

recently from a sociologist in Ethiopia who was trying to apply the scheme of *The Lonely Crowd* to developments in that country. I know almost nothing about Ethiopia, but I have felt, perhaps unfairly, that there was at work here the attraction that schemes of any sort hold, if they are at all plausible and if they have either two or three or some other magic number of boxes. I felt that if one were beginning work in Ethiopia undistracted by America, one would almost certainly develop a different typology to deal with what was most important there. For one thing, different traditions are differentially fragile to the inroads of the modern industrial world, and I would like to see studies of national character in the so-called underdeveloped countries that took account of this. At any rate, the typological concepts of *The Lonely Crowd* — 'ideal-type' concepts, in Max Weber's sense — were framed in terms of what seems to be presently happening in those countries where industry is already well established, where the physical plant and the social organization for mass production and mass consumption have been installed, and where, consequently, the character structure necessary for developing such organization may no longer be so essential. I think of the United States today as the chief exemplar of post-industrial culture (Sweden may be another), and my concern is with what this means for the development of character and of institutions, especially those institutions that, through the family, the mass media of communication, and the schools, influence the training of the oncoming generation.

In contrast to most of the studies I have mentioned, my collaborators and I in *The Lonely Crowd* did not move outwards from individuals toward society, but rather the other way round; we started with society and with particular historical developments within society. We did not concern ourselves, moreover, with all classes of society, but primarily, as already indicated, with the upper social strata, particularly with what has been called the 'new middle class' of salaried professionals and managers. We assumed that there would be consequences for individual character in the loss or attenuation of the older social functions on the frontiers of production and exploration and the discovery of other frontiers in the realm of consumption and personal relations. We did not assume that an individual would be the replica of his social role, but rather that there might be great tension between an individual's search for fulfillment and the demands of the institutions in which he had a part, or from which he felt alienated.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

It is implicit in what I have just said that the inwardness of individuals is only awkwardly if at all captured by a typology designed for the understanding of large-scale social change. It is easier to classify individuals by means of typologies developed by psychologists for just this purpose, and thus we can say of someone that he is an 'oral' or 'receptive' type, or a 'sadomasochistic' one, and take account of much that is relevant about him as an individual in doing so. But it is much harder, if not impossible, to classify a particular individual as other-directed or inner-directed, and when we have done so, we may have made a statement that helps explain his social or occupational role but not much else about him, not what we would know about him if we were his friend.

Now I would like to illustrate some of these problems of relating work on national or group character to concrete situations and concrete individuals by drawing on several recent studies in which social scientists have attempted to develop tests or measures for inner-direction and other-direction in individuals. Thus, a few years ago Jacob W. Getzels developed what he termed the I-O, or inner-other, scale, and administered it to a group of Air Force officers who were teaching at an Air Force academy.[16] What he did was ask them to respond to a group of statements or slogans that expressed inner-directed or other-directed ideologies, as the case might be. At the same time he collected psychological and behavioral data on these same individuals. But when he compared the way they answered the I-O scale to what he knew of them personally, he was perplexed — until he discovered that those who, on the basis of other evidence, he would classify as principally other-directed, had answered *all* his slogans in the affirmative, including those designed to betoken inner-direction. Conceivably this says something about certain types of career officers or 'organization men,' as well as about the ways in which other-direction might manifest itself in a certain social stratum. I am fairly sure that Harvard students or University of Chicago students would not manifest other-direction on the same scale.

In this connection, an investigation reported by Michael S. Olmsted is interesting.[17] He asked a group of Smith College students to say

[16] Personal communication. Getzels' collaborator in this work was Egon Guba.

[17] Michael S. Olmsted, 'Character and Social Role,' *American Sociological Review*, LXIII (1957), 49–57. I am indebted to Professor Olmsted for helpful suggestions.

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

whether they considered themselves more inner-directed or other-directed than their parents, 'most of the boys you know,' the 'average' girl at Smith, and their particular friends at the College. They tended to regard themselves as considerably more other-directed than their fathers (and slightly more so than men in general), and as more inner-directed than Smith girls in general. Olmsted has suggested that there may be differences based on sexual role at work here. While Smith girls would like to think of themselves (in my judgment, not inaccurately) as more independent than the majority of women, they are fully alive to the pressures towards compliance that young women — and their mothers as well — are under. However, when they interact casually with other girls, they are apt to be aware only of the compliance, and not of the underlying resistance to it that they themselves and their close friends often harbor — one reason, Olmsted proposes, why the girls who label themselves as 'inner-directed' (forty per cent of the respondents) believe themselves to be more atypical than in fact they are; they may, of course, also enjoy regarding themselves as more independent than the 'average' even of Smith girls. However, the image the Smith girls have of their fathers is blinkered by the fact that they do not see them at work, in the world in which they interact with other men, but only at home, and probably infrequently at that. Likewise, the fact that they see boys as slightly less 'other-directed' than girls may reflect the fact that they see boys mainly on dates, when the culture places the initiative in the latter's hands. Consequently, they may somewhat overestimate the independence of the men folk, at least vis-à-vis other men — and then we must ask whether this overestimation, when the men are aware of it, may help foster the very independence it attributes to them, or in some cases, when they cannot live up to feminine expectations, weaken them further.

I think we can see, both in this and in the previous study, that it is extremely difficult empirically to separate character structure from behavior, and to sort both out from the haze, the fog, of ideology that clouds our perception of ourselves and others. There is also the problem, when the Smith girls compare themselves with their parents, of distinguishing between those generational differences that are due to chronology and those that bespeak a genuine historical shift. Thus, it would appear that the adolescent may go through a stage in which he is becoming independent of his parents by what seems like over-dependence on his peers — a stage of other-direction and role-diffusion;

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

when he in turn becomes an adult, he will appear to be more independent of peers, with values closer to those of inner-direction.[18]

Some interesting empirical confirmation of this hypothesis has recently been provided by a questionnaire study of 2,500 ninth- and tenth-grade students in middle-class New Jersey high schools.[19] In this research the students were asked to respond to a series of vignettes of which the following is an illustration:

> Helen and Dick are what you would call all-round. They're pretty smart, but not too smart, good-looking, but not exactly the movie type. They play on the teams but aren't top athletes. In short, they seem to be pretty good at almost everything although not outstanding in any one way.

Or, another example:

> George and Lucy each live pretty much in a world of his (or her) own. Each feels that his (her) own thoughts and own reading are in a way more important than the day-to-day struggle to do well in school.

The students were asked to judge many such vignettes in terms of their own values, what they thought the popular members of the class would want their friends to be like, what their parents would expect of them, and what qualities they thought would be helpful to them as adults. I cannot go into all the complexities of this work, or into the problem of separating professed values from character structure. One conclusion, however, emerges that is quite striking: perhaps a majority of the teen-agers are not geared wholeheartedly to the values they attribute to the peers with whom they are attending school, but have also incorporated adult values, both those they attribute to their parents and those they expect to hold themselves when they in turn are adults. They possess, as it were, a double consciousness of themselves now and themselves later, living at once in the present and in the future, and sharing both the good-time and popularity goals of their peers and the more achievement-oriented and studious goals of their adult mentors. It seems to me that they can do this in part because they have eliminated from what a sociologist would call their reference groups any models that unequivocally challenge the prevailing compromise on values in

[18] Cf. Erik H. Erikson, 'Ego Development and Historical Change,' *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, II (1946), 359–396.

[19] Matilda White Riley, John W. Riley, Jr, and Mary E. Moore, 'Adolescent Values and the Riesman Typology: An Empirical Analysis,' in the forthcoming *Studies in the Scope and Method of "The Lonely Crowd,"* ed. Seymour M. Lipset and Leo Lowenthal (Glencoe, Ill.).

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

which the parents give their sanction to teen-age frivolities up to a point, while the teen-agers in turn accept adult goals up to a point. Thus, George and Lucy who live in their own private world are rejected (though not by any means overwhelmingly), but the person with mediocre aims is also, while not rejected, not highly approved of. In this system, people can be both popular and studious up to a point, both compliant and independent up to a point — as I interpret the results, the rough edges of all character types and all ways of life have been smoothed down, and a wide tolerance is extended to values that, in an earlier day, might have been more sharply polarized.

Possibly, we see at work in these questionnaires some of the reasons why we refer to adolescents today as teen-agers rather than simply as 'youth': the latter term has a futuristic ring, implying that youth will do things and change things, while the term 'teen-ager,' used by teen-agers themselves, has a highly self-conscious but also patronizing quality, referring as it does to a kind of protected or encapsulated and not quite real life, and used as it also is to justify what an earlier generation would have considered inane, while making clear that it is but a stage, like being a sophomore, that will pass with time.[20] In this case, the researchers concluded that the high-school students are, for the most part, neither inner-directed nor other-directed but both at once — carefully uncommitted occupants of the middle way.

Let me mention just one other study, also done with young people, because it brings us back by another route to Freud's heroic efforts somehow to link the biological with the psychological and both with culture. In this research, two psychologists (Elaine Graham and Harriet Linton) worked with forty-two freshmen at Brooklyn College, administering both an attitude test, by which one might differentiate inner-directed from other-directed attitudes, and also a test of spatial orientation, the so-called Witkin tilting-room-tilting-chair test, which measures a person's ability to respond to inner cues as against environmental ones. In this test, a person is put into a tilting chair in a tilted room, and asked to move the chair until he feels upright. Some subjects are deflected or distracted by the tilted room, and these are termed field-dependent, whereas others show little influence and are termed self-orienting. The investigators found that those who were other-directed in terms of their psychological tests were also likely to be field-

[20] I owe to a conversation with Eric McKitrick my awareness of the importance of the substitution of the term 'teen-ager' for that of 'youth.'

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

dependent, while those who were psychologically more inner-directed were also among those who were able to use bodily cues in adjusting the tilting chair.[21] I would expect that this seemingly physiological reaction is itself part of a complex syndrome, not unrelated to childhood training and cultural norms.

Moreover, all such work that deals in an intensive way with living respondents gives rise to problems similar to those we discussed in connection with *The Authoritarian Personality*. We would like to know, for example, how in the nineteenth century young people might have responded to the Witkin test and whether in fact more people today than in an earlier day are field-directed, either somatically or psychologically. What my co-workers and I did when we were working on *The Lonely Crowd* was to look for individuals who might in some way speak for the nineteenth century — those who, by reason of location or occupation, were less directly in the path of modernization, people who were not in the new middle class, people who were not yet members of the affluent society. But obviously we could not assume that such people are always preserved specimens from an earlier era. If they still cling to traditions, they are apt to do so self-consciously rather than to take them for granted. Their relative isolation compared with that of others changes their situation, hence, in all likelihood, their attitude and eventually their character structure.

Consequently, the best that we could do in our study was to examine secondary sources, historical writings and travelers' accounts, and to infer from these some hypotheses as to whether American national character has changed in substantial segments of the population in the last generation or so. Talcott Parsons and Winston White have recently written a paper arguing that fundamental orientations have not changed, that the American is still, as he was in Colonial times, oriented to performance and achievement, not to hedonism or consummatory pleasures.[22] What appears as change, they suggest, is the altered situa-

[21] See Elaine Graham, 'Inner-Direction, Other-Direction, and Autonomy at Brooklyn College,' in the forthcoming *Studies . . . of "The Lonely Crowd"*; also Harriet B. Linton, 'Dependence on External Influence: Correlates in Perception, Attitudes, and Judgment,' *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, LI (1955), 502–507, and Harriet B. Linton and Elaine Graham, 'Personality Correlates of Persuasibility,' *Personality and Persuasibility*, ed. Carl I. Hovland and Irving L. Janis (New Haven, in press).

[22] Talcott Parsons and Winston White, 'The Link between Character and Society,' in the forthcoming *Studies . . . of "The Lonely Crowd."*

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

tion in which these drives manifest themselves. The home no longer is the seat of a family firm engaged in producing agricultural commodities or in running a small business. It is, rather, engaged in the 'production' of children who must be trained and encouraged to take their places in the demanding professional and managerial system; and the parents must seek to succeed in this more intangible realm as they might once have sought to show a profit, to increase the acreage, or to build up an inheritance for their children. The American, Parsons and White believe, still judges himself by his output; it is only that a different kind of output is in demand — and is permitted — today.

Similarly, when one reads Tocqueville or the accounts of other nineteenth-century observers, one often has the impression of meeting the contemporary American, for these observers commented on our gregariousness, our lack of arrogance or hauteur in the European sense, the hegemony of children, the love of comfort, and many other things that seem to us characteristically contemporary. No doubt, these observers were struck by the differences from the Europe they knew, and this may have alerted them to incipient trends that have become much more pronounced with time.[23]

In considering such questions, we must ask ourselves what it is we are most interested in, that is, what do we regard as most important for us at the moment — and these, as I have indicated, are questions of a romantic rather than a classic order. We know that, when we deal with Americans, we deal with people who, at least outside the South, lack feudal traditions, a strong established church, and extended family ties. We know that we deal with people who believe themselves to be pragmatic and sometimes are, who, on the whole (again outside the South), are optimistic, for themselves, their children, their fair city, and their country; and with people who are extremely mobile both in terms of rank and of region. The American of today and his ancestor of a hundred years ago are much alike if we range them for example against the South American, the Asian, or the African.

[23] In an earlier discussion of some of these themes, 'Psychological Types and National Character: An Informal Commentary,' *American Quarterly*, V (1953), 325–343, I raise the question whether social-class differences or national ones are more important today in comparing groups within the Western industrial world. Recent comparative studies indicate that, contrary to imagery and ideology, social mobility is no less great in Europe than in the United States; and of course there is much evidence that similar cultural tendencies, often labeled 'Americanization,' are occurring among young people in Europe. See, for example, Karl Bednarik, *The Young Worker of Today: A New Type*, tr. Renée Tupholme (Glencoe, Ill., 1955).

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

But if we concentrate on the differences, I think we find important ones both in outlook and in situation. The American of the nineteenth century was, I suggest, oriented towards people because his attitude was (in the terms of Erich Fromm in *Man for Himself*, 1947) exploitative, or if a woman, receptive: whereas the upper-middle class educated American of today tends increasingly to be oriented towards people, not because he wants something specific of them, but because he wants direction, resonance, response. If this be exploitation, it is of a very intangible sort, like that of roommates who take turns in discussing their problems and love affairs with each other. There has been a general tendency, facilitated by education, by mobility, by the mass media, towards an enlargement of the circles of empathy beyond one's clan, beyond even one's class, sometimes beyond one's country as well. That is, there is not only a greater psychological awareness of one's peers but a willingness to admit to the status of peer a wider gamut of people, whether in one's own immediate circle or vicariously through the mass media. The problem for people in America today is other people. The social and psychological landscape has been broadened in a sense because those other people are more in number and possibly in heterogeneity than ever before. But other figures in the landscape — nature itself, the cosmos, the Deity — have retreated to the background or disappeared, with the result that aspects of character that were always in some sense 'there' or available become more salient, and other aspects recede.

Many people have read *The Lonely Crowd* and other similar writings to mean that things were better before the day of relative material abundance, permissive child rearing, progressive education, and the omnipresent mass media. Such books, too, have become involved in the usual and age-old trans-Atlantic arguments about the supposed superiority of European culture. It is an unavoidable dilemma of romantic research that it confronts us with ourselves in this direct way, whereas research in the classic tradition, which treats what is happening now as merely an instance of a general case, seems less likely to make for self-consciousness, although at its deadpan worst it may make for unconsciousness.

The wartime studies of national character ran these risks only in an incidental way, for they were undertaken in the hope of being able to cope better with our enemies, our allies, and ourselves. After the War, the State Department realized that men who were to represent

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

this country abroad should understand not only the language and culture of the country to which they would be assigned but also should become more self-conscious about American culture, and be aware of what sorts of biases they would typically carry with them, and what sorts of culturally-patterned dangers, such as despising the natives or wanting to go native. Thus, the Foreign Service Institute began some searching studies of American culture. Work of this sort, while beginning with very concrete and even chauvinistic aims, has also tended to transcend its military or Cold War origins and to add to the traditional ways in which we as a people have sought to understand who we are and how we compare with and differ from other countries.

I can imagine a future, however, in which we shall begin to worry less about the specifically American identity and the American character — a worry that among other things exhibits on the international scene feelings of rivalry and even inferiority engendered by domestic conditions. And in that case we shall begin asking whether nations are the most appropriate boundaries for investigating what it is that social groups have in common. It is in some ways convenient and it is certainly topical to do research on 'the' Americans or 'the' Russians, but a wider perspective might lead us to highlight, for example, the possible similarities in character structure of Russian *and* American managers and technicians, or in the character of factory workers in Australia, Sweden, and the United States. Men like Barrington Moore, Jr, and Alex Inkeles, in making comparative studies of the institutions of the whole industrial world, already are moving in this direction.

Let me make clear that I am not recommending here the planetary perspectives of the classicist. It would be premature to say that nations are no longer important, when they have the power of life and death over us all; and when, since social character is the legacy of history, there will remain for a long time differences in national character just as great as differences in character arising from occupation and class. It is only the fantasy of a 'brave new world' that there is no national character but only a group character, conditioned in the laboratory to order and to be ordered, and where a relic of individualism and parochialism is merely the result of an oversight.

Still, as we all know, fantasies when believed in sometimes have a way of making themselves come true. Social science today is increasingly feared as a hidden persuader or manipulator of men, while a generation ago it was primarily admired as a liberator. The study of

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

national character, as of other motivational patterns, can be put to manipulative use, to be sure; the best defense against this that I can see is inoculation by greater knowledge. Moreover, it is no longer possible for people, especially in this country, to remain unselfconscious about personal and group identity; and it is not desirable, for I believe that such knowledge, as well as knowledge of social science in general, can still be liberating.

But it is in this last regard that social science, as presently practiced, seems to me weakest. We find it easier to describe the limits on human conduct than the areas of freedom and amorphousness. Studies of national character tend to strike a deterministic note, even when, if they are grounded in history, they show how great and dramatic have been the changes in a nation's ethos within the period of a century or less. It is frequently said that the world is getting more homogeneous and that enclaves, whether national or regional, are bound to disappear, provided we do not all disappear. There is truth in this, of course. But it is also true that the differences among men that will increasingly matter will not arise from geographical location and will hence be more within the realm of the individual. Indeed, the importance of the individual in setting a model for the character of a group has been insufficiently studied by social scientists, though we all know in a general way how identification with great historical figures is one way by which we avoid the parochialism of our particular birth in a particular family. We are only beginning to understand the power of individuals to shape their own character by their selection among models and experiences. I can envisage a world in which we shall become more different from each other than ever before, and in which, as a result, national character will be an even more elusive concept than it is at present.

DAVID RIESMAN

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)

Honorary Degrees at Harvard: Corrigenda

In the list of 'Honorary Degrees 1930–1958,' Harvard Library Bulletin, XII (1958), 348–353, the following corrections should be made:

1936

for Frederick Maurice Powicke, LL.D. *read* Frederick Maurice Powicke, Litt.D.

1942

delete: Ronold Wyeth Percival King, A.M.
George Widmer Thorn, A.M.
insert: Paul Joseph Sachs, Art.D.

1955

for Luis Mundz-Marin, LL.D. *read* Luis Muñoz-Marin, LL.D.

1958

for Neil Hasler McElroy, LL.D. *read* Neil Hosler McElroy, LL.D.
for William Adolf Visser 't Hooft, S.T.D. *read* Willem Adolf Visser 't Hooft, S.T.D.

List of Contributors

David Riesman, Henry Ford II Professor of Social Sciences, Harvard University

R. J. Roberts, Assistant Keeper, Department of Printed Books, British Museum

George Sherburn, Professor of English, Emeritus, Harvard University

Walter Grossmann, Specialist in Book Selection, Harvard College Library, and Lecturer on General Education, Harvard University

Eleanor M. Tilton, Associate Professor of English, Barnard College, Columbia University

Madison C. Bates, Professor of English, Emeritus, Rutgers University

Laurent LeSage, Professor of Romance Languages, Pennsylvania State University

Arthur Stanley Pease, President, Emeritus, Amherst College, and Pope Professor of the Latin Language and Literature, Emeritus, Harvard University

Renato Poggioli, Professor of Slavic and Comparative Literature, Harvard University

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XIII, Number 1 (Winter 1959)