

# Culture and Mind: Cultural Models in Cognition

**Giovanni Bennardo** (bennardo@niu.edu) - **ORGANIZER**, Northern Illinois University, USA

**David B. Kronenfeld** (david.kronenfeld@ucr.edu), University of California, Riverside, USA

**Dwight W. Read** (dread@anthro.ucla.edu), University of California, Los Angeles, USA

**Bradd Shore** (anthbs@emory.edu), Emory University, USA

**Douglas L. Medin** (medin@northwestern.edu) - **DISCUSSANT**, Northwestern University, USA

## Motivation

In 1989, the anthropologist Roy D'Andrade stated: "The study of cultural cognition then is the study of cultural information and cultural programs that interact with the more general programs of intelligent systems." (1989: 825). His statement and invitation was based on the concept of a 'cultural model' that he defines as "a cognitive schema that is intersubjectively shared by a social group." (1989: 809). His main suggestion was that "...much of the reasoning that people do depends on *cultural models*..." (1989: 823).

His article has been very influential in anthropology and led to extensive research on the interrelationship between culture and cognition. This work has reinforced D'Andrade's view that culture plays an integral part in human cognition and has broadened his notion of a cultural model beyond its original formulation as a cognitive schema.

This symposium will provide a critical assessment of this endeavor. The papers read are based on the acquisition of empirical observations and the development of new methodologies for the formal representation and analysis of linguistically (and behaviorally) expressed conceptualizations that are central to the way individuals cognize and think about the world on which they operate. New proposals that modify, enrich, and expand the "cultural model" notion introduced by D'Andrade will be discussed by the participants. The goal is to elaborate and expand the research agenda on "cultural models" so as to be able to incorporate new impetus, focus, and direction.

## David B. Kronenfeld

Kronenfeld sees *cultural models* as variously shared and distributed cognitive structures relating behavior to knowledge, values, goals, emotional states, context of action, context of the presumed knowledge of other involved parties, and so forth. He suggests that they have the form of prototypic scenarios that are applied to particular concrete situations. He illustrates the nature and workings of cultural models in two examples: one from work on romantic love; and one on perceptions and evaluations of rangeland within ranching and conservation communities.

## Dwight W. Read

Characterizing cultural models as schema does not fully capture the way the cultural framework within which behavior is embedded is itself constituted. Formal modeling of cultural domains as varied as ritual, kinship, and counting systems make evident commonality across these domains. It is shown how each of these domains is grounded in a logically constituted structure that provides a framework for producing mutually meaningful behavior and messages.

## Bradd Shore

One of the issues facing an adequate cognitive theory of culture is to locate a "unit of culture" that can account both for the diversity and richness of cultural knowledge, on the one hand, and the experiential coherence of a cultural system. The notion of schema or model is a good candidate for a working unit of culture, but by itself does not suggest the source of experiential coherence. This paper suggests and illustrates a number of sources of cultural coherence, including the existence of highly abstract and configurable "foundational schema" that is shared by a family of distinct cultural models.

## Giovanni Bennardo

Bennardo proposes radiality as a cultural model for Tongan. He suggests a structural homology between various cognitive modules, such as spatial representations, conceptual structure (e.g., kinship, social networks), and action (e.g., exchanges, political choices). Social network, experimental, ethnographic, and linguistic data are presented as supporting evidence for the hypothesis.

## Discussant: Douglas L. Medin

## Reference

D'Andrade, Roy G. (1989). Cultural Cognition. In M. I. Posner (ed.) *Foundations of Cognitive Science*, pp. 795-830. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press