An Exploratory, Cross-Cultural Study of SocioPsychological variables (OPI) Comparing Selective American, Canadian, Hawaiian and Philippine College Students in Education Faculties

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To the psychologist interested in cross-cultural studies and higher education in general, and college students more specifically, attitudes and belief systems can be seen as being fundamental in order to appreciate and understand any person, subculture or society. "Attitudes" denote the way in which people "feel" about aspects of the world in which they live, and "beliefs" the way they "think" about them. These terms are, of course, hypothetical constructs - as is "personality" under which they are subsumed. How such variables are defined, the theoretical traditions on which they are based, and the conceptualisations of personality which is adopted particularly complicates cross-cultural, psychological research and interpretation. This paper explores a possible approach.

Instrumentation and Subjects

In the 1970s the opportunity was available to sample college students on a number of different campuses using the Omnibus Personality Inventory (OPI).[1] This instrument was developed over a period of fifteen years at the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, University of California at Berkeley, and is probably the best instrument especially constructed to assess selected attitudes, values and interests relevant to normal ego-functioning and the socio-intellectual experiences of college students per se. Conceived and refined within the general theoretical framework of personality development, the inventory consists of 385 statements which the subject responds as generally applying or not applying to him/herself. These generate a profile of 14 scores interpretively useful for understanding the individual (self) in terms of the comparative college student norms. Thus these OPI variables arbitrarily will define the constructs to be used as described in its manual.

This particular exploratory sample consists of a total of 528 students, all undergraduates and enrolled in Faculties of Education (Teacher Preparation), of which 76% were female, on four selectively diverse coampuses, geographically and culturally: (1) Luther College as an example of continental, mid-western, American students; (2) the University of British Columbia to represent a Canadian student sample; (3) the University of Hawaii to typify the mid-Pacific American students — of which 60% were of Japanese extraction and 30% Caucasian, the two major ethnic groups of this sample of students; and (4) the Philippine Normal College to represent the Philippines.[2]
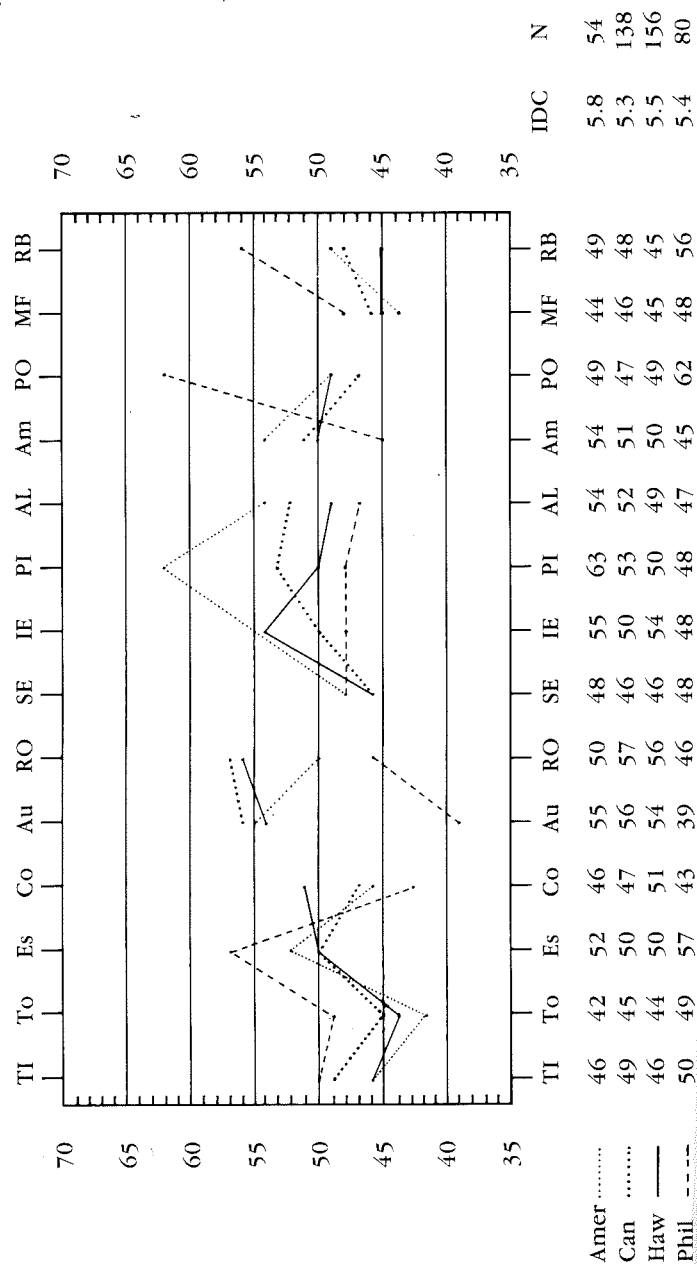
The assumption is made that the items included in the OPI are equally relevant to the individuals in the four subsamples because of the basic factors they have in common. The subjects are all English speaking and that tongue is the language of instruction on their respective campuses (and thus the inherent problems of translation were unnecessary); they are college students (who also have common professional career goals) experiencing many of the same "universal" joys and struggles of a social, psychological and intellectual nature typically encountered at this time in their lives and to which the OPI was especially constructed to relate; and lastly, the general, eclectic aspect of the theoretical basis of the instrument avoids the highly unique approaches and experiences in order to focus on the more commonly accepted and recognised psychological variables pertinent to human development in the college student. For such reasons it is assumed that the OPI should tap relatively valid factors and that any pronounced subgroup differences that might be generated could be considered to transcend commonalities and therefore be of contrasting cross-cultural interest.

Results

The resultant scale scores and mean group profiles are graphically shown, along with a brief description of the OPI scales, on the following two pages. The data are in standard T-score format compared to the norming population (where the mean is 50 and the standard deviation is 10, i.e., approximately 34% fall between 50 and 60 and also between 40 and 50, 14% between 60 and 70 and between 30 and 40, and 2% beyond 70 and below 30). For the sake of simplification of the data presentation, the sexes have been combined. Except for the MF scale where sex difference is expected and was obtained in the obvious direction, differences due to sex alone are not pronounced on the other scales because of the compounding of other factors such as academic major, for example. There was a tendency for females

An Exploratory Comparison of OPI Mean T-Score Group Profiles of "American" (Luther College, Decorah, Iowa), "Canadian" (University of British Columbia, Vancouver), "Hawaiian" (University of Hawaii, Honolulu), and "Philippine" (Philippine Normal College, Manila) Education Students of the 1970s.

	TI	To	Es	Co	Au	RO	SE	IE	PI	AL	Am	PO	MF	RB	IDC	N
Amer	46	42	52	46	55	50	48	55	63	54	54	49	44	49	5.8	54
Can	49	45	50	47	56	57	46	50	53	52	51	47	46	48	5.3	138
Haw ———	46	44	50	51	54	56	46	54	50	49	50	49	45	45	5.5	156
Phil - - - -	50	49	57	43	39	46	48	48	48	47	45	62	48	56	5.4	80

to be slightly lower on TO, Au, RO, IE, PI and AL (i.e. slightly more anxious) and higher on Am compared to males. Similarly, regardless of sex, there was a tendency for secondary, versus elementary, student teachers to be higher on the first six scales, although this division was also collapsed for simplicity of this overview. The standard deviations for each of the listed mean scores vary somewhat but are generally about 7 points and are available on request.

TI, TO, Es, Co, and IDC

The first four scales, TI to Co, are so grouped as they encompass an intellectual syndrome or disposition. One is rather struck with the basically similar pattern of relationships of the scales to each other within the four subgroups. The generally higher Es reflects the somewhat negative correlation with MF. These first four scales, and to a lesser extent the next two, Au and RO, are utilised to place individual subjects along a continuum arbitrarily divided into eight categories where

(TI) Thinking Introversion: Persons scoring high on this measure are characterised by a liking for reflective thought and academic activities. they express interests in a broad range of ideas and in a variety of areas, such as literature, art and philosophy. Their thinking is less influenced by generally accepted ideas than that of lower-scoring thinking extroverts. Most extroverts show a preference for overt action and tend to evaluate ideas on the basis of their practical, immediate application.

(TO) Theoretical Orientation: This scale measures an interest in a more restricted range of ideas than is true of TI. High scorers are interested in science, including a preference for using the scientific method in thinking. they are generally logical, analytical and critical towards problems.

(Es) Estheticism: High scorers endorse statements indicating diverse appreciation of artistic matters and activities. The focus of their interests tends to extend beyond painting, sculpture and music and includes literature and dramatics.

(Co) Complexity: This reflects an experimental orientation rather than a fixed way of viewing phenomena. High scorers are tolerant of ambiguities and uncertainties; they are generally fond of novel situations and ideas. Most high scorers very much prefer to deal with diversity and are disposed to seek out and enjoy such events and experiences.

(Au) Autonomy: The characteristic measured is composed of non-authoritarian attitudes and a need for independence. High scorers are independent of authority as traditionally imposed through social institutions.

They are tolerant of viewpoints other than their own and tend to be nonjudgmental, realistic and intellectually liberal.

(RO) Religious Orientation: High scorers tend to be skeptical of traditional religious beliefs and practices, expecially those that are very orthodox or fundamentalistic in nature. Persons scoring above the mean are manifesting a liberal view of religious beliefs and low scorers tend to be more traditional in general and skeptical of contrasting viewpoints.

(SE) Social Extroversion: This measure reflects a preferred style of relating to people in a social context. High scorers, displaying a strong interest in being with people, seek social activities and gain satisfaction from them. The lower-scoring, social introverts need more privacy and tend to find this range of social interaction less fullfilling.

(IE) Impulse Expression: This scale assesses a general readiness to express impulses either in conscious thought or in overt action. High scorers have an active imagination, value sensual reactions, and their thinking and behaviour have overtones of feelings and fantasies.

(PI) Personal Integration: The high scorers experience few attitudes or situations that characterise socially self-critical persons. Low scorers, on the other hand, are aware of their self-perceived asocial tendencies and often express feelings of solitude.

(AL) Anxiety Level: High scorers respond that they have few feelings of anxiety or that they are nervous or worried. Low scorers respond that they often feel tense and high-strung and expeience tension in their social environment.

(AM) Altruism: High scorers are affiliative persons and trusting in their relations with others. They exhibit concern for the feelings and welfare of people. Low scorers tend to be much less concerned about others and are able to view people from a more objective perspective.

(PO) Practical Outlook: High scorers on this measure are interested in practical, applied activities and tend to value concrete accomplishments. The criterion they most often use to evaluate ideas and things is the one of immediate utility.

(MF) Masculinity-Femininity: This scale assesses some of the traditional, conventional differences still found in attitudes and interests between men and women. High scorers (masculine direction) deny interests in esthetic matters and admit to few personal problems or feelings or anxiety. They also tend to be somewhat less socially inclined and more interested in scientific matters. Low scorers (feminine direction), besides stronger esthetic and social inclinations, also admit to greater sensitivity and emotionality.

(RB) Response Bias: This measure may represent an approach to assess the individual's test-taking attitude. Very high scorers may be responding to this measure in a manner similar to persons who were explicitly asked to "make a good impression" by their responses to the items on the instrument.

Category One indicates a very strong orientation towards abstract thinking through to Category Eight which indicates a limited intellectual interest and an essentially pragmatic outlook. This categorisation was individually calculated and the mean group categorical score listed under the abbreviation IDC, for Intellectual Disposition Category, along with the 14 mean scale scores. As might be expected from a visual perusal of the initial scale profile, the IDC means are rather similar, ranging from 5.8 to 5.3 in categorical terms. Individuals falling into the extreme categories are quite rare. Students, in general, tended to fall in the middle range of a rather pronounced bell curve distribution and all four subgroups showed this array, skewed somewhat towards the pragmatic. Although a minority of this total sample fell in the upper third of the distribution, the means suggest that typical education students in this survey are not extremely intellectually disposed.

Au and RO

As mentioned above, these two scales are secondarily involved in the calculation of the IDC. They are of interest as individual scales. However, they are grouped together as tapping a second syndrome, characteristic of the non-authoritarian continuum. The Philippine sample appears comparatively low on RO, yet near the mean for the norms, but lower still on Au. Although this subgroup was almost totally female, which might also explain its high Es score, cultural factors are probably the main influence here in terms of the degree of homogeneity of adherence to traditional conventions in this subsample. (Because of the purely exploratory nature of this research, statistical tests of significance have not been applied as trends only are of interest here. A difference of approximately half a standard deviation, five T-score points, would generally indicate statistical significance with these Ns.) It is interesting to note that Luther College with a middling RO score, had a denominational origin, and perhaps mid-west cultural factors partially explains also its relative position.

SE, IE, PI and AL

These next four scales comprise a socio-emotional component. Most of the scale scores obtained hover around the mean with the exception of the mid-American Luther subsample on PI whose students appear comparatively most self-accepting, most socially adjusted, integrated. This trend is followed

by the Canadian subsample but to a far lesser extent. The same ordering trend is noted on AL within the four groups, the American sample tends towards having less anxiety, then the Canadian, the Hawaiian, and then the Philippine sample who admit to comparatively more feelings of anxiety. Interestingly the four groups have very similar scores on SE, slightly shifted towards the social introversion direction but rather typical scores in respect to the norms of the instrument.

Am and PO

The last four scales are basically unrelated and merely grouped into two subprofiles by convention for visualisation. It is interesting to note that Am subgroup ordering is similar to the previously observed PI and AL comparative arrangement, suggesting that the more self-accepting and less anxious can be more concerned about others. However the main finding is the Philippine contrast with the pattern of these two scales compared to the other three subgroups, especially the high PO, the pragmatic viewpoint of these students.

MF and RB

As mentioned previously, the greater proportion of females in all subgroups accounts for the obtained MF scores. With increased education, male scores tend to move downward from their higher levels and female scores move upward which explains why these combined sex mean scores are not even lower still towards the Feminine direction. The last scale, RB, is one of particular interest only if the scores are quite extreme which is occasionally found for individual students and requires special interpretation. Naturally, because of the effect of averaging, mean scores on this variable are particularly difficult to interpret for a group. That the Philippine mean score tends to be comparatively the highest, and the only score above the norm mean, nevertheless again might be due to local social expectations of appropriate attitudes and behaviour - a cultural explanation of the findings. In this case it is interesting to hypothesise that there could be a negative co-relationship operating with the obtained low Au unique to this subgroup within this study that is specifically influenced by Philippine culture. A perusal of the items included in these two scales suggests this possibility though the manual indicates no correlation in the norming sample. It is for such reasons as this that cross-cultural research using such instruments is of interest to psychologists and test constructors. The point could be made that such findings are both reliable and valid (i.e. the instrument measures what it purports to measure) in cross-cultural comparisons and, more importantly by far, it illustrates the important need for the development of local norms.

Conclusions

The use of the OPI in this exploratory cross-cultural study did suggest certain socio-psychological commonalities as well as differences within the four subsamples of college students in teacher preparation. If cultural factors operable might partially explain the contrasts found, it would be expected that the Philippine subgroup would appear somewhat more diverse in comparison to the three other subsamples which have closer geographical and cultural interconnections. Certainly the directions of the contrasts found seem understandable and strengthen the argument for the validity of the instrument in such studies. The similarities and differences are also of interest and are correspondingly indicated.

Regardless of the assumptions of validity of the OPI with subpopulations of varying cultural differences from the norming sample, the useful interpretation of the results can be greatly extended by the establishment of local norms. It is hoped that this study will encourage other researchers to use the inventory with unique subgroups that have not been assessed and that specialised norms be initiated for local use.

Aside from the theoretically objective research interests, the resulting profiles at the individual level encourage better self-awareness and self-understanding by the student in the context of college life as well as an exposure to such a measurement technique and the concomitant issues involved. Similarly, such data help educators in more clearly understanding, and therefore better meeting the needs of, individuals and subgroups of students from both a counselling and academic point of view. In this respect, the results given here indicate from one point of view the kind of students four different colleges of education drew. This has ramifications for the respective professions of teaching.

This standardised and educationally useful measure is highly recommended to other researchers of post-secondary students and further cross-cultural efforts using the OPI as a common instrument would add a consistent and socio-psychological thrust to such multicultural research in higher education.