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Michael Jay Diamond and Michael H. Bond
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Native Japanese, Japanese-American, and Caucasian American students at universities in Japan and Hawaii were compared on their acceptance of Barnum personality statements. The Barnum descriptions were filled with personality clichés and were presented to the subjects as having been interpreted by "several clinical psychologists" from the Ss' Rorschach protocols. The results indicated that all three groups were equally and highly likely to endorse these descriptions as being true of themselves even when attempts were made to control for compliance effects. The findings were discussed with reference to similar acculturation influences in terms of mass media and course content self-concept learning experiences among university students. Finally, the utility of intra- and intercultural personality assessment was considered in terms of the high base rate Barnum statement acceptance.

THE ACCEPTANCE OF "BARNUM" PERSONALITY INTERPRETATIONS BY JAPANESE, JAPANESE-AMERICAN, AND CAUCASIAN AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

MICHAEL JAY DIAMOND
University of Hawaii

MICHAEL H. BOND
Kwansei Gakuin University (Japan)

Previous research has demonstrated that a vast majority of college undergraduates will accept bogus personality interpretations as being an accurate interpretation of their personality (Forer, 1949; Snyder and Larson, 1972; Ulrich et al., 1963). These personality interpretations have been called

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"Barnum statements" (Meehl, 1956), as they are descriptions worded in very general and ambiguous terms. Despite receiving an interpretation filled with personality clichés, Ss tended to congratulate the examiner for his penetrating insights.

One problem in research on Barnum statements is the confounding of the accuracy of assessment with the tendency to defer to the judgment of prestigious authorities (the examining psychologist). Using a variety of procedures, researchers have reported differences among Japanese, Japanese-American, and Caucasian American student subjects on such deference-related variables as dominance-deference patterning (Arkoff et al., 1964, 1962), locus of control (Bond and Tornatsky, forthcoming), masculinity-femininity (Blane and Yamamoto, 1970), and obedience, deference, and lack of autonomy (Fenz and Arkoff, 1962; Meredith and Meredith, 1966). However, Price-Williams, et al. (1971) failed to find differences between Japanese-Americans and Caucasian Americans on cognitive attitudes and abilities as well as hypnotic responsivity.

Thus, there may be a greater tendency for Japanese and Japanese-American Ss to defer to authority in evaluating Barnum personality descriptions, but the evidence is only suggestive. As a precautionary control, however, measures were taken to assess this compliance effect during the collection of the Japanese data. Discounting a possible compliance effect, it was hypothesized that there would be equal and high acceptance of the Barnum personality description by all three cultural groups. Similar acculturation influences among these three groups in terms of mass media influences and psychology course content would suggest such a pattern of Barnum response. In this way, the study was designed to provide evidence for the cross-cultural applicability of such generalized personality statements.

METHOD

SUBJECTS

The Ss were 56 male and female students in an undergraduate personality course at the University of Hawaii and 34 male and female undergraduates in an introductory psychology course at Kwansai Gakuin University in Nishinomiya, Japan. All participated voluntarily. There were a total of 23 Japanese males, 11 Japanese females, 14 third generation Japanese-American males, 18 third generation Japanese-American females, 11 Caucasian American males, and 13 Caucasian American females.

PROCEDURE

The experimenter (instructor) administered cards II and X of the Rorschach Inkblot Test and solicited Ss' written responses in a classroom setting. For Japanese Ss, the cards were administered by a research assistant in the presence of the class instructor. The Ss were told that "several clinical psychologists" would score and interpret each of their tests and return the interpretations to them in one week.

All Ss were given an identical interpretation with the appropriate S's name on the top. For the Japanese Ss, the interpretation was translated into Japanese by the junior author and one of his students. The following interpretation, adapted from Ulrich et al. (1963), was used:

You have a strong need for other people to like you and for them to admire you. You have a tendency to be critical of yourself. You have a great deal of unused capacity which you have not turned to your advantage. While you have some personality weaknesses, you are generally able to compensate for them. Your sexual adjustment has presented some problems for you. Disciplined and controlled on the outside, you tend to be worrisome and insecure inside. At times you have serious doubts as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing. You prefer a certain amount of change and variety and become dissatisfied when hemmed in by restrictions and limitations. You

pride yourself as being an independent thinker and do not accept others' opinions without satisfactory proof. You have found it unwise to be too frank in revealing yourself to others. At times you are extroverted, affable, sociable, while at other times you are introverted, wary, and reserved. Some of your aspirations tend to be pretty unrealistic.

Ss were asked to consider the interpretation carefully and rate its accuracy on the following 5-point scale: excellent (5); good (4); average (3); poor (2); and very poor (1). They were also asked to add any additional comments appropriate to the interpretation and experiment as a whole. Two American Ss who were suspicious of such a manipulation (as stated in their additional comments) were excluded.

The Japanese Ss were each administered an additional typed form designed to detect endorsements resulting from compliance with the demand characteristics of the experiment (Bowers, 1966; Orne, 1962). The instruction were as follows:

The formal part of the experiment is now over. We would like to find out some information from you about your reactions to the experiment. The Sociology Department is eager to have this information, so please help us. Many subjects in experiments try to please the experimenter by answering as they think the experimenter wants them to answer. It is important for us to know if you said your personality description was accurate to please the experimenter; not to insult the experimenter; because he is a psychologist and he must be right; and/or, the like. Please check the response that applies to you: The above reasons influenced my response to the personality description:

- ___ a) a great deal
- ___ b) pretty much
- ___ c) a little
- ___ d) not at all

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean accuracy scores and standard deviations (in parentheses) by groups and sex were: Japanese males = 3.91

(.65); Japanese females = 4.09 (.66); Japanese-American males = 3.82 (1.21); Japanese-American females = 4.00 (.57); Caucasian American males = 4.00 (.60); and Caucasian American females = 3.54 (1.27). A 2 x 3 analysis of variance for unequal n 's yielded no significant effects due to cultural group ($F, 2/84 = .48$), to sex ($F, 1/84 = .03$), or to their interaction ($F, 2/89 = 1.20$).

Of the Japanese students, the majority (20 Ss or 59%) indicated that they were not at all influenced by compliance concerns. A t -test indicated that the influenced group did not rate the personality description any differently than the group that reported not being influenced ($\bar{X} = 3.86$ versus $\bar{X} = 4.06$, $t = .86$, N.S.). This implies that compliance effects did not exert a powerful influence in this situation.

It is of course possible that all Ss were influenced, but only 41% reported the fact. If this were the case, previous research would suggest that compliance effects would most strongly affect Japanese Ss. The fact that Japanese Ss rate the description at the same high level as other Ss again implies that compliance effects were not operating here.

The present findings replicated previous data showing that college students strongly accept general personality interpretations. The overall mean accuracy score for this sample was 3.94. The modal rating for all subjects was 4, indicating a "good" level of accuracy in all cultures. As reported in previous research, some subjects wrote comments about the particular astuteness of certain parts of the assessment, and often, of the assessment as a whole.

These results indicate that native Japanese students and both Japanese-American and Caucasian American students are equally likely to endorse highly general personality impressions as being true of themselves. This suggests that such clichés are perceived as being similarly applicable to members of all three groups. Conceivably, however, these findings can be qualified by some methodological problems. For example, any Japanese tendency to defer to a prestigious

authority figure could have been obviated by the fact that the psychologist and his interpretation were not presented in person. Similarly, the scale used to assess acceptance maximized the chances that ceiling effects would preclude any group differences in that its upper limit was frequently endorsed.

The absence of cultural differences may be attributed to these students sharing a larger metaculture characterized by the changing values of the 1970s. Undergraduates both in Japan and Hawaii have been exposed to quite similar vicarious and direct learning experiences as provided by television and cinematic role portrayals as well as psychology course content. While transcultural differences do emerge on certain attitudinal and value-oriented variables (Arkoff et al., 1964; Berrien, 1965), it appears that individual self-image descriptions are highly similar in Japan, Hawaii, and the mainland of the United States (Ulrich et al., 1963). Future investigations can provide answers to questions concerned with the cross-cultural generality of such self-image descriptions, particularly among less industrialized cultures. Moreover, the role played by specific self-concept learning experiences as mediated by mass media influences can be systematically investigated across separate generational groups by means of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies.

One final implication of these findings concerns the utility of "sophisticated" personality assessment devices. The high base rates for personality clichés both in Japan and the United States suggests that elaborate projective and standardized testing procedures might be unnecessarily costly. Perhaps a good part of the variance in test responses across cultures might be accounted for by Barnum statement responses just as within the American culture (O'Dell, 1972). Certainly, investigators employing transcultural testing procedures would be wise to consider more carefully simpler and more easily administered self-report and base rate expectancy measures in their efforts to both assess personality characteristics and experimentally influence subject responding.

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Michael Jay Diamond received his Ph.D. in both Clinical and Experimental Psychology from Stanford University. He is currently an Assistant Professor in the Clinical and Social-Personality Divisions of the Psychology Department, University of Hawaii, Honolulu. His main research interests include hypnosis and cognition, psychotherapy and encounter groups, and educational innovation. He will be on leave during the Spring 1974 semester, when he will be teaching aboard World Campus Afloat.

Michael H. Bond was born in Canada and educated at the University of Toronto and Stanford University (Ph.D., 1970). For the past three years he has taught and been involved in research at the Department of Sociology, Kwansei Gakuin University in Nishinomiya, Japan. His major research interests are in cross-cultural person perception and nonverbal communication. The work is currently supported by the Social Science Research Council.