

# behavioral sciences

From our reporter at the 70th annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in New York

## Culture history vs. social science

Anthropological archaeology is in ferment. Debate has become heated between adherents of the old and new schools. The old school (culture history, idiographic, particularist) reacts violently to the systems approach of the new school (culture process, nomothetic, generalist, social science). The new school reacts as strongly to what it terms the old line, narrow, individualistic approach. An old school archaeologist, for instance, finds a particular piece of pottery, dates it, uses it as a piece of historical evidence and relegates it to a museum shelf. The new school says this isn't enough. Each piece of pottery potentially represents all aspects of a society (not just its chronology) and new scientific techniques must be used to confirm or disprove general laws about the internal and external dynamics of that society.

Patty Jo Watson of Washington University in St. Louis summed up these arguments. For practical reasons (training in or commitment to either method and competition for research money), she feels the conflict must come to a head in the 1970's. But she says "there is no logical conflict between the two." One must coexist with the other, and, "with meaningful interchanges between individuals of different orientations and with the encouragement of students to develop both particularist and generalist research skills" she feels a mean can be reached.

## Social unawareness

If a person could provide accurate descriptions or explanations for his behavior and the behavior of those around him, he could serve as his own social scientist and there would be little need for disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and economics. But most persons can't, and Trevor Denton of Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario, says the reasons why are relatively understudied and not well understood.

As a social anthropologist, carrying out a census in a Canadian Indian village, he noted that in almost every home the front door was blocked and the back or kitchen door was used instead. When asked why, the Indians at first denied the pattern existed. When confronted with the evidence, they had to grope for reasons.

Freud has suggested that social unawareness of this type is determined by unconscious defense mechanisms. Levi-Strauss says it has to do with the logic of unconscious thought structure. Marx argues that a man's economic position determines the way he describes his life. Denton says, "I doubt that any of the existing explanations of differential social awareness can help us here." The problem is one of fundamental importance to social scientists, he feels, and should be more studied.

## Missionary failure in Africa

The job of the missionary—making conversions—has never been easy, and social scientists have put forward a number of theories to explain why. One particular theory says the Catholic mission approach tends to isolate individuals from their society. This theory was tested by Frank A. Salamone of the State University College in Brockport, N. Y., who studied relations between Cath-

olic Dominican missionaries and the Dukawa, an ethnic group in Nigeria.

He cites the example of a young male convert who was engaged to be married. Before the ceremony could take place the boy's brother died and, according to tribal custom, the boy was obliged to marry the older, less attractive widow. Having two wives, a sign of prestige in the tribe, is unacceptable to the Dominicans; the boy had to give up his chosen bride in favor of the widow. Instead of an active young convert (expected to help in converting his peers) the Dominicans were left with one unhappily married near-outcast from the tribe.

The Dominicans are philosophically committed to an approach that is anthropologically based, and they attempt to present Catholicism as culturally and structurally compatible with traditional systems. But, suggests Salamone, unless they make a greater adjustment to tribal values converts are going to be few and far between.

## An ecological theory of female status

In attempting to escape from existing stereotypes and to remove traditional barriers, women's liberation groups have attempted to find basic causes for the female's predicament. The most widespread explanation has been that women's roles stem from their reproductive abilities. Peggy R. Sanday and Daniel Rosen of Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh have another input.

They say that status is a function of the degree of participation in subsistence activities and the sex that performs these activities is more likely to control the property involved. Analyzing cross-cultural data from 748 societies around the world, they find a considerable variation in women's contribution to subsistence (from 24.5 percent in Mediterranean areas to 43.5 percent in Africa) that correlates with their position in society. They conclude that "regional area and type and intensity of agriculture indicates that ecology must be considered with the same seriousness accorded to biological explorations."

## Political conflict and social change

Political anthropology takes a microscopic look at political conflicts and from this describes various social allegiances. Eugene N. Cohen of Wayne State University in Detroit, is trying to look beyond the dimensions of any one political conflict to analyze the relations between a series of conflicts.

Describing two long-range political conflicts (the location of a government-built school and the reopening of a mine) that took place in a Central Italian commune during the past 15 years, he shows a shift in the relations between the villages of the commune. The town that won both conflicts became the seat of communal government and was in a strategic position to obtain a local monopoly over the resources of the central government. A new middle class grew up and the town developed a life-style greatly different from that of its agricultural neighbors.