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Commentary

Differently embodying different relationships

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Cohen and Leung offer an interesting hybrid perspective on the embodiment of culture, and they summarize relevant studies whose publication we look forward to. We focus our comments on their conceptualization that body comportments (actions, postures, gestures) are ''hard-wired'' so as to be ''conducive'' to ''basic'' cognitions and affects that are ''consistent with'' the comportments. When a comportment ''triggers'' a ''basic'' psychological state, culturally and situationally mediated associations in turn ''prime'' ''complex representations'' such as norms. The authors integrate an evolutionary perspective with Mauss's concept of body techniques and Bourdieu's derivative concept of *habitus*. In particular, they posit that when people enact specific comportments they are ''embodying accessible moral discourses of universalism and particularism,'' or of honor. They also posit that culture and situation moderate the effects of these embodiments on complex moral imperatives and scripts. Indeed, Cohen and Leung point out that culture affects how people move their bodies and how people interpret these movements and their associated affective responses, so that culture suffuses the whole system from body comportments, through evolutionarily prepared responses to these comportments, to complex representations. The crux is that Cohen and Leung astutely recognize that the core of culture is present in everyday lived experience, rather than consisting primarily of abstract norms or values.

This formulation felicitously highlights key issues about evolution, psychology, social relations, and culture, including the core issue, ''How is culture transmitted?'' Culture can be defined in innumerable ways, but the most useful approach is to define culture as whatever is transmitted through social interaction in a specific community—what a person ''picks up'' through their interactions with others, including ideas, practices, skills, motives, modifications of the body, artifacts, and innumerable other tangible and intangible things and patterns that cannot be defined *a priori*. While there is no doubt that procedural knowledge, skills, and habits are important components of culture, to posit that basic psychological states or complex representations are ''embodied'' does not explain how culture is transmitted. Crucially, it does not explain how it is possible for infants and other cultural novices to learn the culturally informed social structures of their specific community. This is no trivial question, but the cultural equivalent to what is known as the poverty of the stimuli problem in linguistics: Just as it is impossible to learn a language through the association of sounds and referents alone in the absence of any innate ''grammar'' or ''theory'' (Chomsky, 1968), there are infinitely many inductions about social meanings that one could make from any given social event or sequences of events. Without prior implicit constraints and potentiating orientations, actions are no easier to understand than abstract symbols. This makes socio-cultural learning logically impossible without some *a priori* assumptions about what to look for and where and how to look for it.

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In other words, embodiment does not solve the ''picture-copy-of-the-world-in-the-mind'' problem that Wittgenstein (1953) raised: Simply having a perfect picture-copy of the world inside one's head does not help a child discover the *meaning* of the actions—or anything else—in the picture. Likewise, simply being able to observe and imitate actions is not sufficient to permit the child to discover how actions are used to constitute or communicate social relationships. Children cannot learn how to understand their social world nor develop the capacity to interact in culturally meaningful ways unless they innately know both the social primitives (that is, the basic forms of social relationships), and the manner in which each form is constituted and communicated.

There is diverse and copious evidence that the social primitives with hard embodiments (to use Cohen and Leung's terminology) are the *basic kinds of social relationships* that have evolved in conjunction with specific vertebrate comportments (Fiske, 1991; Fiske & Haslam, 2005). Three of the four fundamental relational models are embodied, each in a distinctive modality, enabling children to discover the structure of meaning of their social world through innately specified intuitive understandings of how people constitute and communicate about each relational model. Moreover, these three forms of embodiment are inherently motivating and morally binding: They evoke the social motives and moral emotions that sustain the relationships, and they are felt to entail commitments.

Conformation theory (Fiske, 2004, 2009) posits that each of the four elementary relational models consists of a cognitive relational structure, potentiated by specific emotions and motives, constituted and communicated in a distinct medium. Communal Sharing (CS) relationships are constructed out of the sense that participants share some common essence, so people base CS on actions that substantively connect their bodies: Giving birth, nursing, feeding, commensalism, grooming, cuddling and huddling, empathic sex, dancing or drilling in rhythmic synchrony, or marking identity through the body as in coiffures and modifications such as tattoos and genital modifications. These constitutive processes correspond with cognitive representations of participants as equivalent in their substantial essence. Hence these processes of *consubstantial assimilation* are also intuitively communicative and emotionally evocative, not merely to adults but also to infants learning their identity and developing attachment and belonging. In CS the equivalence or transmission of body substances, the contact between bodies, and the similarity of surfaces or synchrony of movement *indexically* represent the equivalence of social persons. These consubstantial bonds evoke the feeling of 'oneness' and entail obligations of mutual care.

In contrast, Authority Ranking (AR) is *iconically* represented in physical dimensions: People actually or metaphorically position their bodies *above–below*, *in-front–behind*, *preceding–coming later*, or construe their bodies as *bigger–smaller*, *more–fewer*, or as *stronger–weaker*. These dimensions are the naturally meaningful way to iconically constitute and communicate AR—which infants children intuitively recognize, enabling them to understand and participate in the hierarchical relationships in their society. This iconic physics is also intrinsically evocative: It makes people feel *higher* or *lower*, motivating them to be respectful or pastorally responsible. And when people take positions on these physical dimensions, they feel morally and normatively committed to the social positions they are constituting.

The conformation of Equality Matching (EM) consists of *concrete operations* such as taking turns, flipping a coin, lining up on a starting line and starting simultaneously, casting a ballot, or matching shares in one-to-one correspondence or by side-by-side alignment. When a pan balance is level, the two portions are equal; likewise when the level of our drinks are even. These ostensive procedures of even balancing are operational definitions of equality, and as such they bind participants to the relationship, telling everyone the relationship is equal as they make it so. By early childhood, children intuitively recognize the meaning and compelling legitimacy of the social equality these procedures create.

These are three entirely different forms of embodiment: CS relations are constructed through consubstantiation, the sameness of bodies; AR relations are constructed by positioning bodies along dimensions of physical space, magnitude, time, and force; EM relations are constructed by manipulating tangible objects or taking concrete actions, such as alternating turns. In contrast, the fourth fundamental type of relationship is *not* embodied: Market Pricing (MP) relationships operate through arbitrary conventional *symbolism* such as numerical representations of ratios, fractions, rates, prices, salaries, fines, proportional justice, penal sentences, or moral utilities. MP relations are constituted by symbols whose relation to their referents is arbitrary and culture-specific; the prototype is money and the meta-symbolic oral, written, and electronic representations of funds.

Making these distinctions is essential to understanding cultural transmission, because these four conformation systems provide distinct channels of cultural transmission: Children learn who is equivalent to whom by observing the consubstantial assimilation of bodies. They learn who ranks *above* and *below* whom by observing people positioned along dimensions of space, time, magnitude, and force. Children learn who is equal to whom by observing concrete operations that manipulate things or persons so they match in one-to-one correspondence; when our bodies or our portions are lined

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up evenly so they match, we are equal. In contrast, children learn ratios such as wages, prices, or cost-benefit and utility calculations through symbol systems that are culturally determined; there in no other way to do so because the ratios that coordinate MP are intrinsically abstract.

Relational models are innate, motivated structures that determine the relations and operations that are socially meaningful. But they are not sufficient to coordinate interaction: They require cultural complements that specify with whom, what, when, where, and how they are implemented in specific domains. These cultural specifications of the models vary across communities and history. Hence relational models are the universal bases for cultural diversity. In short, people use four innate templates, realized and combined in diverse and specific ways, to construct their particular societies. Children learn to participate in their societies by intuitively recognizing the specific sign systems that show them how each relational model is culturally implemented. For example, nursing and cuddling evoke a strong attachment between mother and child mediated by oxytocin; later the child attends to who feeds her and who eats with whom on what occasions, enabling her to infer the primary CS groups in the community. Without innate knowledge that the conformation system of CS is consubstantial assimilation, the child would have only an implicit idea of equivalence groups, with no way to identify socially meaningful groups or discover who is in which groups.

Thus, conformation theory posits that hugging indexically embodies CS, which should indeed make us especially consider the needs of people with whom we share this relation, even if this means covering up for a criminal brother as in the previewed study. As the authors write, ''For humans as with other primates, the hug is a gesture of bonding. It is what we give to our nearest and dearest, pulling those people close to us and creating a small circle separating those in our embrace from everyone else.''

Likewise, conformation theory posits that an upright position represents standing up in AR, which should indeed make us feel bound to obey laws prescribed by authorities. So a hug and an upright position are different types of embodiment, functioning in two distinct conformation systems to communicate and constitute two different kinds of social relationships that in turn are the foundations of distinct moral systems. In the terminology of statistical analysis of cognitive measures, we predict that CS and AR should mediate the effects of hugging and standing erect on moral behavior and attitudes. We think also that although the specific movements of a sign or dance can be specific to a cultural group and thus foreign to those outside of that group (i.e., a totem embodiment), synchronous movement is a powerful universal group marker that allow cultural novices such as infants and anthropologists to discover and delineate the important groups in any culture they enter. In other words, we predict that examples of 'totem embodiments' should also be mediated by the CS relationship these body comportments evoke in often universal ways.

Cohen and Leung suggest that body comportments ''push us invisibly (and without argument) toward certain psychological mindsets and a certain outlook on the world.'' We think that sometimes people *are* aware of either their own comportments or the effects of these comportments on their own affects and cognitions or their complex representations. And for that reason sometimes people resist the comportments or their effects. Drill sergeants and officers often demand ram-rod postures and perfect synchrony in marching and drill in part because they intend to evoke a disciplined, obedient, communally identified mind-set. Recruits may stiffly comply or slackly resist. Future research and theorizing should address when people are reflectively aware of their own or others' comportments or the psychological effects of these comportments. Likewise, we need to understand how people strategically and tactically deploy, transform, or reject comportments and their psychosocial effects.

We also need to understand the ''push'' of comportments—the social motives and moral emotions they evoke, and the obligations they make people feel committed to. Conformation theory posits that the evolved core conformation system specific to each relational model evokes the particular emotions, motives, and normative commitments that are functionally necessary to sustain that relational model. The push of these conformation systems has evolved out of mammalian parental and pair bonding (mediated by oxytocin and arginine vasopressin), vertebrate dominance hierarchies (mediated in part by testosterone), and primate tit-for-tat grooming and alliance exchanges. In addition, the species-specific human capacity to construct symbolic conventions to mediate Market Pricing relations has evolved along with the often weaker but nonetheless often effective emotions and motives that abstract symbols evoke and the commitment systems that symbols invoke.

It is a core challenge for the cultural embodiment perspectives to identify the fundamental, evolved primitives of social relational meaning, together with the innate proclivities to constitutive and communicative them in specific sensorimotor or symbolic modalities. The theory of the Conformation Systems of Relational Models offers one framework for this—one which is well supported by ethnological and experimental evidence.

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