

Peru Study Tour Paper

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Introduction

Culture has long been studied by psychologists and the differences between cultures have both been admired and admonished. Cultural psychologists chooses to have an open mind as they analyze different cultures and the psychology behind them. However, it has been argued that one can only be as open as one can make their mind under the opinions and culture that they have been brought up into. In the book *Psychology and Culture*, Lonner states:

Can we ... detach ourselves from our surroundings, our own culture, and form some objective understanding of who we are and what we do, or are the conceptions and explanations that we generate ... inextricably bound by our own experiences? (1994, pg. 129)

In other words, can we really remove our own bias enough to understand a different culture, religion, or even a differing opinion? Understanding culture is much easier to do when one is in it and focusing on understanding the culture you are immersed in. In this paper I will be describing several different points of Peruvian culture that I noticed during my time in various areas of Peru and comparing them with research done on the topics.

Men and women's roles

Throughout the trip to Peru, the fact that sexism is quite prevalent in Peru kept being brought up. The stories told by Professor Teal about the Stahl's in the context of the Peruvians were quite sexist in nature. Teal made sure to state that his opinions were not in alliance with the ones presented by most Peruvians, but often the stories regard Fernando Stahl as more important in the role of bringing the new, positive things to the culture in Peru. The medical clinic, for example, was being dedicated and was going to be presented as the

Fernando Stahl clinic. Not just the Stahl clinic, but a specification of the male head as being the one it was dedicated to. Professor Teal made it a point to tell the people that they had no right to dedicate the clinic to only Fernando, when clearly Ana had been an equal partner, if not more so, in starting up the health clinic there in Iquitos. If I recall correctly it has been appropriately now named the Clínica Adventista Ana Stahl, however the pressure it took to get there was likely much more difficult than it would have been for a man's name to end up on the front door. In many places women are still held as the subordinate sex, one that should not be in powerful positions. The Chinese poet, Fu Hsuan once stated, "How sad it is to be a woman! Nothing on earth is held so cheap" (Lonner et al., 1994, pg. 123). The idea that this can even be said of a human being makes one writhe in disgust, yet it is not an entirely uncommon belief. In Peru, the importance of a woman is not downgraded in such a manner, but the idea that they do not hold as much power as men and are subordinate creatures is a common one. They do not have the same accesses to power and resources as men are allowed to have. Peruvian culture has a highly patriarchal system which often condemns women to a lesser life than they would perhaps desire. Often they have less education, less employment income, which leads to more poverty, and an increased risk of violent behavior being acted out upon them. Unfortunately, this sexism is not only played out in Peru. However, as our main focus is on Peru today, I will move on to discuss the rights of women in Peru.

Contrary to what people may think based on the research presented above, not all of my observations about women in Peru agreed with what I had expected. In fact, much of it seemed to slightly contradict what I expected to see. Often the women were the face of the

places that we would tour. In another way, the positions that the women commonly held were of “lesser” importance. That’s not to say that selling in the markets, which was predominantly women with a few men, all day or watching the kids and making the food is unimportant, but it is to indicate that regardless of the tourism all over Peru and perhaps the push to change things, the roles of women have remained the same. Men, as far as I observed, are still expected to take on the more major tasks of giving tours and informative speeches regarding the history of the country and people and, for the majority, are in charge of security throughout the country.

One interesting aspect that I noticed was that the police, mostly in Cuzco, were predominantly women. Intrigued by this entirely uncommon and unexpected phenomenon, I researched it and discovered that women are thought to be much less corrupt than men in Peru and in the police force. An interesting twist, indeed. In a report done in America’s Quarterly an article was written regarding the uncommon predominance of women in the police force in Lima and throughout other districts of Peru.

Today, 11 percent of the PNP’s (National Police of Peru) police officers are women ... José Abelardo Alvarado Alegre, director of the transit force, says he is happy with the results, since female officers are “more harsh at giving tickets, strict and difficult to bribe.” Studies ... concluded that female police officers were more honest, disciplined, hardworking, and trustworthy than their male counterparts ... Commander Pedro Montoya, who was then training an all-female motorcycle brigade, said it was “undeniable” that women were more honest. One *taxista* summed it up: “We all know that you can’t bribe women.”

The results of this exploration in Lima about the idea that women are less corrupt than men in police work seems to confirm that they are indeed less corrupt in this line of work.

Breaking out of the traditional gender roles is a positive thing for Peru and countries all over the world.

Culture and re-entry shock

Based on my experience in Peru, adapting to the differences in culture was not an extremely difficult thing to do. However, I know that each person's experience is different and it depends on the environment in which you are traveling. For me, the group setting and tourist like feeling did not set me up for a huge culture shock. I expected especially to be more primitive in the Amazon jungle house, but the lodge even had wifi. Even though we were placed in an entirely new situation and community of people (except for our travel group), the commodities of our own cultural world were still available, even if they were in a different context. Not only this, but as we were only spending a week in Peru I had the mindset of a sojourner: one who is in a new and different place only temporarily, with no plans to settle down in permanence. This mindset definitely had an impact on how I regarded the cultural differences that I encountered. That being said, by the time we were ready to leave Peru and being our journey back to the United States, I was exhausted and ready for some familiar landmarks, which is indicative of the homesickness pull factor of culture shock. During our time in Peru I definitely looked out of the bubble and was able to see the differences in culture that would make it difficult to assimilate within the Peruvian culture that is so different from our own. Much of the cultural difference that I noticed was not speaking the language of the place we were in. My Spanish is very limited and Being in

a country where nearly every word, printed or spoken, is in a different language, was a sometimes unsettling experience. This is similar to the push factor of feeling helpless of yourself. Knowing the language is a very important part of integrating within a culture.

Re-entry shock was definitely recognized in my experience. It wasn't long before my telling stories about my experience in Peru began to feel to me like a burden on other people, or that they were not so interested as I thought they should be. Lonner writes:

... You are still faced with a good deal of uncertainty. How can you “connect” with those in your land of birth who, when learning of your move to a foreign country can only think to say, “What did you do that for?” How can you explain that “that” was not *destructive* but *instructive*? ... Trying to communicate your vision means to experience communication apprehension.

Although it is easy to see that people wondering why you moved away is applied mostly to a longer term of absence, the idea is the same. Many will ask what it was like, but will not stay to hear the full details of what you experienced. It is another play out of how experiencing a foreign country and culture for ones self is one of the only ways to understand what is beyond the walls of your own home and culture.

Adaptation and different types of intelligence

Adjusting to each different climate in Peru is not a task to be taken lightly. Not only is there the common altitude sickness problem, but transferring from dry, arid regions, such as Lima, to the damp rainforest of the Amazon, and then again to the high and much colder mountain ranges of the Andes is an adjustment that the average North American is not prepared for.

An article on the website of Cultural Survival publications stated:

Until recently, anthropologists routinely characterized the Aymara of the altiplano (high Andean plateau) around Lake Titicaca in southern Peru as almost pathologically inflexible and fatalistic. Yet during the last few decades, these people, who live in a flood- and drought-prone region at an altitude of 12,500 ft., have shown a remarkable ability to adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

The people of Peru are constantly facing the challenges that the climate brings them. It is impossible to be in Peru and not experience some drastic weather change. For example, on Machu Picchu the temperature is often low and the weather rainy. At these times one would need to be amply prepared for the cold and wet. But on the occasional days it is quite warm and very sunny. In such cases, one would have to guard against sunburn. Not to just mention the changes within one district, but the very different places, as mentioned above, of desert, mountains, and rain forest are another thing one has to cope with.

In the desert the heat becomes unbearable during the day and the night time brings much more cold. The mountains are typically cold regularly, while the rain forest brings an entirely different surprise of weather. The rain is often falling, and furious wind and thunderstorms also pour out upon the residents. Peruvians must have a different type of intelligence in adaptation and practicality when these conditions hit. They must adapt to each situation in a very different way from how one would deal with these things in the United States. For example, a Peruvian living in the rain forest and threatened by flooding will most likely choose to build his or her house on stilts so that it hovers over the highest floodwaters. This adaptation and adjustment required for the variety of regions throughout

Peru reminded me of the example given in the book *Psychology and Culture* in which Zambian children and North American children were both tested in different areas of intelligence, such as building a wire car. This action is unknown to a child of North America — they play with Lego's and other such building blocks. However, in Zambia a child has never seen a Lego block before. In this situation, their intelligence is neither lower or higher than the other, it is simply pointed in a different direction. This difference from the average North American or European type of intelligence should be recognized as an intelligence and an important one.

Religion and culture

The religion and culture of the Andean people combines to make a truly unique and amazing system. The indigenous religion has combined their culture with the worship of the sun, moon, and stars. During one of our early tours in Cuzco, Peru, the tour guide pointed out in the Qurikancha temple of Inti, the sun god, all of the integral parts of the Andeans forms of worship and ways of telling the time of year. Their monthly calendar was successfully detected through perfectly spaced out windows in smaller rooms off of the courtyard. I have often heard of the ancient people's different ways of telling the time of year — the time of planting or of harvesting, etc. — but actually being able to enter their ancient sun temples where this took place was incredible.

Not only this, but the intricacy of their building details and the effort put into each sculpture, whether a window or a statue, was phenomenal and yet another trait to be admired. The time taken to chisel out each window so that the sun could shine in the right spots, or so that a certain alignment was reached at a certain time of the year was incredible. Each

calculation was done perfectly. The indigenous people never had classes in math, physics, or sculpting, yet the pieces that they created were incredible. This is another reminder to me about the intelligence of other cultures and nations and that each one should never be underestimated. The Andean people were very serious about their development of religion and in building what the world now looks at as one of the wonders of the world.

Then, the Spanish took over and pushed Catholicism into the culture of the Andean people. Yet the culture of the Andean religion was not to be overturned. The cultural resiliency of the Andean people caused them to be able to merge their beliefs about the sun, moon, and stars into the Catholic beliefs. This resiliency alone is one to cause people to be amazed by the unique culture of the Andean people, even in the face of conquest and such a change of what had been part of their culture for many, many years.

Another part of the religion and culture of the Andean people that amazed me was the unforgettably astounding Incan ruins called Machu Picchu. Although there are several different theories attached to this site on top of the mountains, it was undeniably used for worship of the elements at some point in time. For example, there is a rock on top of the mountain that is perfectly sculpted out to mimic the mountain in its background, indicating and sense of wonder and worship for the jutting rocks surrounding them. There are also altars of worship and sacrifice dotting the mountaintop among the pathways, houses, and other such structures.

The construction of Machu Picchu alone is one to make people hold the creators of such a place in awe. Each terrace up the steep mountain slope was not cut into the mountain. Instead, it had been built, ever so carefully and with extreme precision, into the

mountainside. Each terrace had layers of sand, stone, and dirt to promote the best drainage for heavy rains. The buildings and walls all over were carefully smoothed and carved to fit each other like a specifically designed glove. Upon seeing the vast amount of rocks that were used and needed to build each part of the mountain, whether it be a terrace, a building or a wall, one question was where these rocks were gathered from? Maybe they were conveniently on the top of the mountain, all ready to be sculpted and slid into place. However, with the amount of stones and boulders present, it can only be decided that the Incan people actually spent time hauling rocks from miles away. This means they would have to carry them through other mountains in order to get to this specific one. I believe this can validly define a culture, at least what it was then, as one of the most hardworking and extraordinarily dedicated to their cause. A younger person with a cultural heritage of the Incan empire could and should be truly proud to call the indigenous Incan's their ancestors.

While we were on top of the mountain we were overtaken by a rainstorm. While the rain plummeted from the sky and pounded the stone and earth on the mountain, I was able to witness firsthand the incredible drainage system that the Incan people built into this mountain. There were pipe-like formations to the side of every staircase, once again formed out of solid granite stone, to carry the water off the top of the mountain and onto the layered terraces below. Observational studies conclude that analyzing behavior across culture is an important study and one that should be undertaken with each culture in its everyday environment. Each environment has a different effect on the people who live there. It affects the way their culture is then developed. As I witnessed this intelligently designed system at work, I couldn't help but think what an amazing culture had developed here and

had shown the hard work and intricacy of stone masonry and developed such an incredible city on the mountaintop.

Conclusion

The experience of going to Peru was an unforgettable and irreplaceable one. Being able to visit the historic sites that one usually only hears of and get the experienced tour guide's insight and knowledge of the places that you visit was incredible. The culture of Peru is a truly unique one. The people are strong, steady and very amiable. Their collectivism makes for a very pleasant experience and a culture that perhaps is more welcoming to outsiders. I feel that I have a better grasp on how, when studying other cultures, to try to keep an open mind and be able to understand better how the people believed, why they believed that way, and how each environment affects the development of the culture.

Analyzing cultures is important in our day because the people that we interact with all have differing opinions and beliefs that are reflected by their culture. Having empathy and respect for their culture, even though it is different from our own, is important. However, we can analyze culture and understand them only as far as our "conceptual baggage" will allow us. This is not a bad thing, however. It is a way for us to know and remember what we have in our culture as well. Every person looks at the world with a different view and we should recognize those different views as important parts of the individual. Visiting the country and living with the people, even just for a week, was an experience that could never be replaced by simply studying about a culture. It's about the experience: trying to learn their language,

communicating with the people non-verbally, and visiting their landmarks to understand their culture in a deeper sense.

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Notes

- entirely exhausting being up and flying all over and being hyper aware of my surroundings because of being in such a new place
- looking at and taking in everything
- deep breath and open mind to all the crazy cultural differences about to flood my way
- catholic churches all over the place
- catholic churches and SDA churches right next to each other in the middle of the Amazon. Crazy how they seem to clash. I wish we could see more of the “insider” stuff. Go to an SDA church on Saturday and then a Catholic one on Sunday. See maybe how everyone interacts. Too bad only here a week.
- Crosses all over with Catholic symbolism
- Apparently there are tons of Mormons. That was unexpected
- Understanding culture is so much more interesting when I am focused on it. I love that that’s the entire purpose of this study tour— just to see and experience the culture of an entirely different people.

- Housing and adaptation is crazy. Flooding and then decrease in water gives people the time to repair their houses.
- A lot of sexism — Fernando vs. Ana Stahl being named at the clinic
- Amazon living is amazing. So many new foods and the sounds of the jungle are a wild, crazy thing to sleep in.
- huge thunderstorm woke me up—people must be used to this who live here
- San pedro market was one of the most disturbing places I've been in a long time. The blood all over the meat market while walking in flip flops was one of the most revolting things I've ever seen. The fact that people are accustomed to that made it that much worse. What kind of sickness resides in your heart and what kind of sickness do you have that the sickeningness of it does not make you hurl your insides out...
- Meat market destroyed the whole San Pedro experience for me. All i remember now is the smell of sweet bread mixed with heat and blood.
- Incas were super intelligent — squares of windows for the sun to shine through and create the monthly calendar.
- intelligence differs per culture
- the Incan's could build and sculpt rocks using other rocks, but maybe couldn't operate a high tech machine. Put a North American out in the mountains of Peru and they may die...
- Food was pretty good, but wish there could be more authentic. Maybe hard to get being a vegetarian.

- The sun and the Incan religion combined is pretty awesome
- Then catholicism stepped in and took over—but not for long! The Incan culture has a resiliency and combined their religion into catholicism.
- Incan's fit the stones in the Sun temple to Inti together perfectly — what amazing builders without ever seeing a tool that is used for carving. They built rocks on rocks and carved them out with other rocks.
- The development of carrying these rocks all over must have been intense. Did they just use man power? I mean, just lifting!?! That seems impossible. Did they create wagons and have them pulled by llamas?
- The fitting together of stones focuses a lot on fertility. I wasn't expecting that at all! Makes me wonder why — were they afraid of becoming extinct?
- The street walls are so closely designed and fitted together as well.
- Went to El Truco for supper. Sun moon and stars were focused on in the detailing and decorations of the restaurant. All over the ceiling and picture on the walls with combination of Catholicism.
- Sat on the holy place above some Incan ruins — really makes you think about what was here and how important it was to people then and how important it is to the descendants now.
- White Jesus overlooking Cuzco was pretty cool to see. The predominance of Catholicism makes me wonder why they have a Jesus, not to mention there were three crosses on the hill that were empty. Kind of strange, but interesting none the less.

- walked back from the Jesus statue on the old Incan trail. Hard to imagine or remember that it is so old. Cuzco is quite the tourist attraction. So many modern people take away a little bit, but the overall is still incredible to experience.
- Market experiences were not really that hectic, as I expected them to be. Majority of sellers are women, but interesting that the expensive stores seem to be run by men. Another form of sexism maybe.
- Police throughout Cuzco are predominantly female. A twist to the sexism stream?
- Machu Picchu is an incredible place. The history, solemnity, and religion is so thick on that mountain you can feel it.
- This culture is crazy — they built a city on the mountain. This city is incredible. Even though it's tumbling down, the structures are still able to be made out readily.
- the building is amazing — they carved these stones and dragged them for miles to get them up on this mountaintop. Drainage system very effective.
- I love hearing about everything and then being able to come and see it.
- In Puno there are 16 SDA churches. Isn't it a pretty small place? I feel that there should be more spread. There are big clumps and then spaces and spaces of no churches... Well what has been done is really good, too.
- Lake Titicaca: one of the most beautiful places on the trip. I downplayed what it would be because it's "just a lake".
- Floating islands seemed like the epitome of Peruvian culture. Traditional clothes, houses, and living.

- Seemed like a bit of a show for nothing, too. They go on land to get supplies and do this for tourists, so it seemed a little bit fake.
- the night life experience in Puno was similar (on a very small scale) to one that might be found in north america. We found ourselves at some kind of teenage Catholic mass, though, so I guess it wasn't too similar.