The essays in this volume focus upon the relationship of individual experience to culture, and chart a new research agenda for psychological anthropology in the twenty-first century. Drawing upon fieldwork in diverse cultural settings, the authors use a range of contemporary perspectives in the field, including person-centered ethnography, activity theory, attachment theory, and cultural schema theory, to describe the ways in which people think, feel, remember, and solve problems. Fascinating insights emerge from these fine-grained accounts of personal experience. The research demonstrates that it is possible to identify cross-cultural universals in psychological development and mental states, and that individual psychology is not determined solely by unique cultural patterns.

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The Psychology of Cultural Experience

Edited by
Carmella C. Moore
University of California, Irvine

Holly F. Mathews
East Carolina University
To Ruth Munroe (1930–1996)
– Scholar, mentor, and friend

Yet all experience is an arch where-thro’
Gleams that untravell’d world, whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.

Tennyson,
_Ulysses_
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Preface

The idea for this collection originated at the 4th Biennial Meeting of the Society for Psychological Anthropology held during early October, 1995 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. At the meeting, SPA President and Program Chair, Naomi Quinn, chose the sessions and selected the papers to be presented, with the goal of assessing the state of the field of psychological anthropology. One thematic interest emerging in several sessions was the relationship of individual experience to culture. We identified key contributions by authors Brown, Danziger, Hollan, Leavitt, LeVine and Norman, and the Munroes and asked them to revise and expand their meeting papers to address this theme more explicitly. Author Westen was the featured speaker at the meeting banquet, and he agreed to develop a contribution for this volume based upon his presentation. Finally, we invited papers from Garro and Ratner because their research on individual experience derived from theoretical perspectives different from those of the other contributors to this volume.

Our aim in developing this volume was to represent the theoretically diverse and methodologically sophisticated analyses emerging from the study of culture and experience and to demonstrate that a renewed commitment to careful, empirical analyses and the comparative perspective can yield important data essential to outlining an agenda for research in psychological anthropology in the twenty-first century. We also hope these chapters will demonstrate to graduate students with psychological interests that there are many “researchable” questions to be both asked and answered, and that the research process is both contemporary and cumulative.

These chapters have necessarily undergone numerous transformations since their original inceptions as kernels of ideas presented at a meeting, and we thank our authors for their efforts and tolerance during the revision process, as well as the three anonymous reviewers who made very helpful comments and criticisms on the manuscript. We especially thank SPA Book Series Editor, Naomi Quinn, for her guidance through this process and for her assistance in revising the manuscript. We also thank Professor Roy G. D’Andrade and Professor Robert L. Munroe for their suggestions and
encouragement during the preparation of this volume, as well as Ti-lien Hsia, Sarah Miller, and Amy Willoughby for editorial assistance. In addition we thank Jessica Kuper and Cambridge University Press for invaluable help in the publication process. We also appreciate the support for the volume provided by our respective universities as well as assistance from National Science Foundation grant SBR-9730831 to C. C. Moore.

During the course of producing this volume, one of our authors, Ruth H. Munroe, a distinguished psychologist, passed away after suffering from a long illness. Ruth was a dedicated scholar and scientist, as well as a mentor and friend to many contemporary psychological anthropologists. She will be greatly missed. We hope that her message of sensitivity to the cultural context, coupled with an openness to the comparative method, will provide an example and an inspiration to all of us as we move into the twenty-first century and into the next century of psychological anthropology.