

This Week's Citation Classic

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Berry J. W. Temne and Eskimo perceptual skills. *Int. J. Psychol.* 1:207-29, 1966.
[University of Edinburgh, Scotland]

Cultural and ecological characteristics of two populations (agricultural Temne in West Africa and hunting Eskimo in Baffin Island) were analysed; these provided a basis for predicting differential development of spatial-perceptual and related skills. Testing with two samples in each field area confirmed these predictions. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 155 publications since 1966.]

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"An interest in psychological and cultural differences among human populations was stimulated early while growing up as an English Canadian in a predominantly French Canadian milieu, and was nurtured later by travels as a teenage merchant seaman to Africa and the Arctic. After undergraduate courses at Sir George Williams University with J.W. Bridges (who appeared to ignore the conventional distinction between psychology and anthropology), I was given the opportunity by James Drever at the University of Edinburgh to attempt a rather freewheeling doctoral thesis comparing peoples from these two contrasting culture areas. The choice of perception as a focus for these studies derived in part from a century of anecdotal and ethnocentric observations concerning the 'sensory prowess of savages,' and in part from my own prior experience of the contrasting life-styles and survival strategies of Arctic hunters and African farmers.

"Fieldwork was conducted under anything but 'standard laboratory conditions': some test data were collected under extremes of temperature and humidity (in steamy and dripping huts during tropical torrents, and in igloos while sitting on a bear

rug to separate flesh from ice). In contrast, the paper itself was typed in a camper van mired in a beach in southern Spain. Somehow, such a strange collection of material found its acceptance in the new IUPS journal whose mandate was to internationalize psychology.

"Why the paper has been cited is not at all clear to me. There are some factors which seem to provide some positive indications, but others which suggest that it should have been ignored. On the citation side, there are two possible reasons: one is that the study was one of the first to try to demonstrate the existence of specific psychological characteristics of differing peoples, based upon an analysis of the 'ecological demands' of carrying out a life under varying conditions; this enabled a functional or adaptive approach to the differences found, rather than one based upon notions of intellectual deficit. (In fact, on some spatial-perceptual tasks, no differences were found in comparison to a Scottish control sample, thus further questioning the appropriateness of a global deficit-type interpretation.) Another factor is that the 1966 study was one of the first of a long series by myself¹ and others, rather than a one-shot study; this generated a cumulative research domain (one which became aligned with the cognitive style work of H.A. Witkin²) leading inevitably to citation by researchers in the field.³

"On the 'ignoring' side, the paper was published in the first volume of a new journal, in a field (cross-cultural psychology) which was not fully established or accepted by psychology, by a novice researcher who as a matter of personal preference has published outside the 'mainstream' of psychology. This profile does not suggest that the paper would even be read, never mind cited! However, continuing interest in the work suggests that the approach taken in this early paper may have created two distinct citation advantages over other psychological studies: interdisciplinary and international attention which is paid to work done by Western researchers may be directly proportional to the 'universality' (in the anthropological sense) of the topic; it may be that culture-bound research in psychology may be on its way out."

1. Berry J. W. *Human ecology and cognitive style: comparative studies in cultural and psychological adaptation*. New York: Sage/Halsted, 1976. 242 p.
2. Witkin H. A. & Berry J. W. Psychological differentiation in cross-cultural perspective. *J. Cross-Cult. Psychol.* 6:4-87, 1975.
3. Triandis H. C., Lambert W. W., Berry J. W., Lonner W. J., Heron A., Britlin R. & Draguns J., eds. *Handbook of cross-cultural psychology*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1980. 6 vols.