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## PROVERBS AND CULTURAL CONSONANCE

**Abstract:** The proverbs that are known and used in a given language by some group of interest provide insight into the values, perceptions and experiences of the users. These aspects of collective knowledge contribute to a cultural model that is specific to the group in question. Increasingly, gaps in cultural consonance, the extent to which actual experience conforms to the expectations formed by a person's cultural model, are observed to contribute to wellbeing, psychological and physical health. This article considers the ways in which proverbs contribute to cultural models and how models generated in this way can serve as a baseline for the study of cultural consonance. Examples are provided from American English and Malay, which serve as a comparison with each other as well as with new cultural models disseminated by the media.

**Keywords:** cultural consonance, cultural model, proverbs, American, Malay

### ***Introduction: Cultural Consonance***

Cultural consonance refers to the relationship between an individual's behavior and the ideals of his or her culture. A person who is able to live and act in a way that corresponds to the values and norms of his or her culture of origin enjoys a high degree of cultural consonance, while someone whose lifestyle is at odds with cultural consensus in his or her community experiences a low level of cultural consonance. Increasingly, explanations for differential levels of health in various population groups have focused on social inequalities of various kinds which have been shown to correspond to differences in state of health (Berkman et al., 2014). Differences in culture, and specifically cultural consonance, can also be approached in the context of understanding differences in health in different communities.

It is generally agreed upon that psychosocial factors are significant in the health of individuals and groups and relate to the impacts caused by other social aspects of experience, including income (Lynch et al., 2001; Lynch et al., 2004). Income inequality

had been seen as the most significant impact on health differentials at the level of population, but that relationship now appears to be less clear cut than originally supposed (Subramanian and Kawachi, 2004; Lynch et al., 2004). Instead, psychological processes that arise from interactions between personality and the social environment are now understood to contribute to a range of health outcomes (Marmot and Wilkinson, 2001; Martikainen et al., 2003) and may be especially important in relation to stress, anxiety, and depression which are increasingly common in modern society (Hidaka, 2012; Schwab, 2013). In this context, culture must be considered as a determinant of health because of this known potential to influence the perceptions and emotions people experience as they interact with their surroundings (Lazarus, 1991).

Cultural consonance is directly related to individual and group experience. It has been suggested that each person has a cultural model that comes from his or her personal experiences and also the collective experience of the society in which the person originates (Dressler, 2004). The ability of this model to provide a framework that suggests how a person might act or react in any given situation is the essence of cultural consonance. Social values represent an important aspect of this model because they are integral to individual behavior but may also be manifested in the institutions and structures of society (Eckersley, 2006). Values are part of culture which also includes language, lore, beliefs, and assumptions that tend to be handed down within a society and internalized by its members from infancy (see Corin, 1995; Boyden, 2004). It has been noted that the internalized nature of values and other cultural precepts makes them difficult to study or even ascertain because we tend not to see them (Eckersley, 2006). This suggests that it is necessary to have an empirical means of assessing the most salient aspects of culture that may affect people's behavior and actions but also their psychological state.

#### ***Proverbs as a Cultural Model***

The social information contained within proverbs is well documented within the body of proverb scholarship. For example, proverbs in many societies are used to offer advice, resolve problems between individuals, and indicate comradery and good will (Abrahams, 1968; Burke, 1974; Seitel, 1969; Obelkevitch, 2015). Proverbs also carry the weight of shared experience in the society

in which they are used and hence represent an indication of the way things are done and how members of the society (should) think about things (Mieder, 2014; Norrick, 2015). The values of the group are also transmitted through its proverbs, which makes proverbs an important source of information about basic beliefs that can be applied in contexts outside the study of the proverbs themselves (see, for example, Jackson, 2014; Ademowo and Balogun, 2014; Fernandez et al., 2014).

The proverbs that are widely known and recognized in a given language or community represent a 'paremiological minimum' that is defined by Mieder (2015) as a set of specific utterances recognized by a majority of speakers that represent a kind of cultural baseline that enables appropriate social interaction with other members of the same society. While there are additional proverbs that are known and used, the items that make up the paremiological minimum for any given community describe a set of observations, assumptions and perceptions that contribute to a cultural model that individuals can draw upon as a standard for evaluating their own experiences and determining their behavior and actions.

In considering the model that can be discerned from the set of proverbs in common use in a community of interest, it is important to take into account both the content (message) of the items and also their surface structure. Proverbs often contain one or more metaphors that are understood in specific ways by users. These images that are formed by the words of the proverb contribute to what Seitel (1969) has called the 'out-of-context nature' of these utterances and also their status within the folklore of the language. This is part of Arora's (2015) 'perception of proverbiality', which refers to the ability of native speakers to recognize proverbs in their language even if they do not know exactly what they mean. The metaphors that make up the surface structure of proverbs are drawn from imagery that is part of the common experience of the community of use. In other words, the message of a proverb derives from the shared culture of users while the surface imagery refers to the environment and social context in which they live.

For this reason, study of the proverbs in use by a given group of speakers can be used to create a cultural model that encompasses values and perceptions but also relative position, status and importance of certain elements of the physical domain in which people may find themselves. For example, a number of proverbs

that are widely known and commonly used in the United States relate to the value of planning ahead, living within one's means and being economical. They include items like:

Save for a rainy day.  
A penny saved is a penny earned.  
Don't count your chickens before they hatch.  
Money doesn't grow on trees.  
A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

Each of these proverbs is connected to other proverbs and proverbial expressions through their images which form part of a network of meaning. Expressions, like 'Every cloud has a silver lining', 'It never rains but it pours', 'Don't put all your eggs in one basket', 'Penny wise pound foolish', and many more, contain related metaphors. Their message and context for use are different from the set of proverbs above but there are, nonetheless, some consistent elements that can be recognized. For example, chickens represent an animal that has economic value. Their eggs are also worth something but must be handled with care to get the benefit. Weather conditions tend to be associated with fortune or luck and also have affective connections. These networks of meaning and metaphor are part of the unconscious framework of language that allow for appropriate language use and accurate understanding in the society where the items are used.

Consideration of these few proverbs, without taking into account the network of meaning and associated metaphor they fit into (see Fanany and Fanany, 2008, for a discussion of this), suggests that traditional advice holds that people should be careful with money and plan for the future without expecting much from things that are uncertain. This might suggest that living economically and managing one's resources are important values in the traditional context of American society. The fact that these proverbs are still widely known and used today can be taken as an indication that these values are still seen as relevant by many speakers, even if they do not apply them in their daily life. The surface elements of these proverbs also contribute to a cultural model that contains various elements that are (or have been) familiar to Americans and form part of the metaphorical framework of English as it is used in the United States. These elements include weather conditions; the name and nature of money; plants and

animals common in the environment of speakers; clothing and household objects; and so forth. These images have specific emotional and symbolic connotations and are part of the larger framework of meaning that assigns consistent metaphorical usages to certain imagery. An innate understanding of the underlying connections between surface image and customary metaphoric usage likely contribute to the ability of native speakers to identify proverbs even when they have not heard the specific item before (see Arora, 2015) and also fit the values and other social information the proverbs convey into a coherent cultural model.

Not surprisingly, this model may differ considerably between languages. On the one hand, the underlying perceptions, attitudes, norms, and values of two cultures of interest are likely to vary to a greater or lesser degree. On the other, the imagery and its customary metaphorical usage in proverbs will tend to differ to a greater or lesser extent because it derives from the collective experience of the society. It is to be expected, then, that proverbs used by speakers of linguistically distant languages will be very different in this regard. The following examples come from Malay, one of the major languages of Southeast Asia whose dialects include the national languages of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam as well as one of the official languages of Singapore:

Bayang-bayang hendaklah sepanjang tubuh. [Your shadow should be as long as your body.]

Hemat pangkal kaya, sia-sia hutang tumbuh. [Economy is the source of wealth; carelessness lets debt grow.]

Biar titik, jangan tumpah. [A drip is all right as long as it doesn't spill over.]

Kalah membeli, menang memakai. [Lose when you buy (it), win when you wear (it).]

Ada emas, semua kemas; ada padi, semua menjadi. [If you have gold, everything is all right; if you have rice, everything works out.]

These proverbs show a somewhat different attitude towards money and spending behavior than the English examples. 'Your shadow should be as long as your body' is comparable to 'You must cut your coat according to your cloth' that is known by some English speakers. The Malay expression is used as advice to avoid spending beyond one's means. The second Malay example,

'Economy is the source of wealth; carelessness lets debt grow,' contains a similar sentiment. 'A drip is all right as long as it doesn't spill over', however, suggests a small loss of money (as a result of a business deal, debt, and so forth) is acceptable as long as it isn't too large. The metaphor is of a container of liquid which is still useful if mostly full, even if some of the contents spill. 'Lose when you buy (it), win when you wear (it)' uses a clothing metaphor and suggests that it is acceptable to splurge under certain circumstances if the value of the item is going to justify the cost. Finally, the last example, 'If you have gold, everything is all right; if you have rice, everything works out', which refers to the two main forms of wealth in the traditional Malay context, gold and rice, which can be stored for use in times when the harvest is poor, states a truism that holds that wealth allows people to do whatever they wish. As is the case with the English examples, each of these items is part of a network of related expressions that use the same and associated metaphors to express similar ideas. This contrasts with the English item, 'Money can't buy happiness', which suggests wealth is no guarantee everything will work out.

A comparison of the general sentiments expressed by these expressions in English and Malay shows a different orientation toward a set of similar issues. For example, the English items (and others like them) indicate the importance of planning ahead in anticipation of future need. The Malay, items, by contrast, do not show this type of anticipatory sentiment and seem to indicate that debt, while to be avoided, is a usual and expected state. On the other hand, both languages have a proverb that encourages hearers to match their spending to their income. The metaphors used are different – cloth and clothing in English, one's shadow compared to one's height in Malay – but the intent of the two proverbs is the same. This emphasizes the fact that similar images may have very different interpretations in different cultures. Gold, as an image, is an interesting example of this. In Malay proverbs, *emas* [gold] always refers to wealth that symbolizes the ability to achieve one's desires. There are a number of English proverbs that make reference to 'gold' as a metaphorical image, such as 'Silence is golden' and 'All that glitters is not gold'. In contrast to the Malay expressions, these English proverbs use gold as the measure of value but do not use it to represent 'wealth' in the economic sense; 'money'

generally appears in that usage, as in 'Money talks' or 'Money is the root of all evil'.

A further example can be seen in the groups of proverbs that relate to children and the relationship between parents and offspring. Several items of this type are widely known in the United States and include:

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.  
Boys will be boys.  
The child is father to the man.  
Children should be seen and not heard.  
Spare the rod and spoil the child.  
Little pitchers have big ears.

Taken together, these items suggest a view where children are acknowledged to engage in behavior that would not be acceptable in adults ('Boys will be boys'; 'Little pitchers have big ears') and to take after their parents, whether for good or bad ('The apple doesn't fall far from the tree'). The risk of not correcting bad behavior in children is also recognized for the impact it might have when the child reaches adulthood ('The child is father to the man'; 'Spare the rod and spoil the child'). Desirable behavior for children is also spelled out and suggests that children should be kept out of the way of adults and not permitted to make a nuisance of themselves ('Children should be seen and not heard'). There is a set of corresponding proverbial expressions that are part of this same cultural model. Many of these items associate badly behaved youngsters with animals ('[be] born in a barn') and include use of the term 'kid' to mean 'child' and 'black sheep of the family' for a child whose behavior violates social or cultural norms. Other expressions portray children favorably as 'the apple of [the parent's] eye', 'little angels', or 'a chip off the old block', which also suggests the likeness between parent and offspring. The idea that children grow into the type of adult they are guided to become is strong and fits with the forward-looking American worldview discussed by Dundes (1969).

In Malay, however, the view of children portrayed in proverbs is somewhat different although there is overlap with the American perception. Proverbs relating to children include:

Anak kambing takkan menjadi anak harimau. [A kid will not become a tiger cub.]

Bapak borek, anak rintik. [(If) the father is potted, the offspring will be speckled.]

Air dari atap jatuh ke pelimbanan jua. [Water from the roof falls under the eaves.]

Anjing kepada orang, raja kepada kita. [A dog to other people (is) a king to you.]

Getah meleleh ke pangkal, daun melayang jauh. [Sap sticks to the trunk; leaves fly far away.]

Apa guna bunga ditanam jika tidak diberi kumbang menyerinya? [What is the use of planting flowers if you don't have bees come to pollinate them?]

The first example suggests that children will not be very different in nature from their parents and, in particular, are not likely to be outstanding (represented by the tiger) if they come from ordinary stock (represented by the goat). The second example refers to chickens, where *borek* refers to a particular feather color which is dark with white spots or flecks, and notes the relationship in color between parents and offspring and is used in the same contexts. The next example is similar as well and is exactly comparable to 'the apple doesn't fall from the tree'. The next two examples, 'A dog to other people (is) a king to you' and 'Sap sticks to the trunk; leaves fly far away', describe the way parents see their own children. Dogs are considered to be dirty and dangerous animals in Malay culture and often appear metaphorically representing people who are crude, antisocial, and of questionable background. The proverb suggests that parents always see their own children favorably, even when others do not. In 'Sap sticks to the trunk; leaves fly far away', a tree metaphor represents the family. Sap refers to one's own children, while the leaves are one's nieces and nephews and other young members of the extended family. The proverb comments that, even in the traditional family context where there may be networks of obligation that involve the children of siblings and cousins, people favor their own children. The final example makes use of a very widely used metaphor in Malay where the flower refers to a young woman and the bees to young men. This proverb is used to point out that daughters are not useful to the family unless they are married off to appropriate husbands.



In contrast to the examples of items used in the United States that focus on the development of children as individuals, the Malay expressions relate more to the view of children as part of the extended family and reflect the social responsibilities of parents within that context to balance the needs of their children with those of other family members. The Malay items also reflect a view of individuals as fitting into specific, delineated social roles that are defined by their family origins. There are many non-proverb expressions that relate to the same cultural model and are widely known and used by Malay speakers. These expressions and others like them reflect a broad concern among Malay speakers for the family, its reputation, and social responsibilities between relatives. The extended family was the most important social institution in the traditional context and remains very important in modern society as well. The idea common to many proverbs about children used in the United States that suggests children have to be raised in such a way that they develop desirable adult characteristics is not part of the Malay cultural model, while the existence of children as an asset to the family that is central in the Malay items is absent from the American ones. The few examples presented here relate only to one aspect of people's values and outlook, but there are numerous other sets of items exist that address other values, situations, perceptions, and experiences that characterize the experience of each society as a whole.

Despite the existence of sets of proverbs that reflect a given cultural model in a language of interest, it is often possible to identify proverbs that suggest a very different or even opposite idea. For example, American usage contains both 'A penny saved is a penny earned' and 'Easy come, easy go'; 'There's no time like the present' and 'All things come to he who waits'; 'Too many cooks spoil the broth' and 'Two heads are better than one'; and so forth. The same is true in Malay and undoubtedly in most other languages as well. The existence of opposing proverbs, however, does not reflect an inconsistency in the cultural model. Rather, these expressions can be seen as indicating the existence of more than one view about a particular circumstance or situation. It is up to speakers to determine which model best fits the specific context in which a proverb is to be used. Since the details of situations are rarely identical but their general nature may be consistent, speakers can choose an appropriate proverbial item that makes reference

to the most relevant model. It is worth noting that there often seem to be two main models (hence the existence of proverbs that seem to offer opposite advice or observations) that represent socially validated responses in a given culture. It has been noted that proverbs do not conflict in use because the context determines which available cultural model an item can appropriately be drawn from (see Mieder, 2004, p. 133-4, for a discussion of this point). The existence of apparently conflicting proverbs in Malay has also been described as an aspect of proverbial reality in that culture (see Fanany and Fanany, 2008).

Taken together, all the sets of proverbial items in a given language form a cultural model of values, attitudes, and perceptions that gives an indication of what constitutes the underlying cognitive framework for people in the society of use. The exact nature of this framework will of course differ depending on the language and community of use, and it is possible to see various kinds of social orientation embodied in sets of proverbs and proverbial expressions. The social orientation of given societies has been of interest to scholars for some time because knowledge of how individuals and groups see themselves and what they feel is important has many practical applications in a range of disciplines from marketing and business to psychology to the study of civics. In fact, a number of authors, such as Aberle et al. (1950) and Hofstede (2001), have attempted to identify a set of domains that can allow comparison of culture in terms of certain perceptions that are felt to be characteristic of all societies. Hofstede's very influential work proposed five dimensions, namely individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, and long term-short term orientation (added to the original four dimensions later; see Hofstede and Bond, 1988).

Hofstede's work specifically has been most widely applied in the context of international business and marketing, areas for which it was originally developed under the auspices of IBM where the author worked at the time. While proven useful in country to country comparisons, it has been noted that Hofstede's categories overlook cultural values not covered by the five dimensions of interest, do not account for values unique to a society of interest, and do not address how individual perception might relate to the application of values (see, for example, Kirkman et al., 2006; Taras et al., 2010). This suggests the difficulty of trying to find a

general form that adequately describes the cultural model used by given individuals or groups as a way of understanding and interpreting their individual and collective experiences.

The study of proverbs, which are accepted as containing values, observations, and advice that are important in their community of use, can provide an alternate method for identifying the cultural model that is most relevant in a group of interest. Rather than offer a generic pattern that can be fit to every society, using the body of proverbs known to be in use by some set of speakers to derive the desired cultural information has many advantages. This method allows the specific attributes of the group to be identified based on objective information that can be checked. While it may be difficult to infer values and perceptions even from detailed observation, proverbs, as examples of traditional literature, have been collected and documented in many languages. If no such collection is available, native speakers can always provide examples and tend to see these expressions as independent, separate from any application to which their underlying meaning might contribute. This means that a level of uncertainty is removed from the development of a cultural model because the proverbial items can be taken as hard data that can be checked and cross-checked. Interpretation is still required, but it is possible to seek input and advice from speakers of the language in which the items exist. Another advantage exists in the fact that proverbs that are known at any given time represent a type of general knowledge in the community of use and are screened by speakers themselves. Items that are no longer relevant fall out of use and others come into circulation, perhaps eventually attaining proverbial status. In this, it is possible to rely upon members of the group of interest to judge what proverbs should be considered and can be applied to the situations they experience. Finally, by their nature, proverbs are generally known to all members of their community of use. For this reason, the information about values, perceptions, and experience they contain can be taken as a kind of baseline about what constitutes shared culture in the group of interest. This may be very difficult to determine by other means, but proverbs provide a kind of shorthand representation of this shared background and can be taken to signify certain concepts all members of a group are aware of, even if they do not agree with them or act in other ways. The present authors have used this method of ascertaining the prevail-

ing cultural model in situations where there had been no prior study of a community's values and have shown that the precepts contained in proverbs are often the starting point for individual interpretations of experience (see, for example, Uker and Fanany, 2011; Tas'ady et al., 2013; Fanany et al., 2014).

### ***Proverbs and Cultural Consonance***

Returning to the question of cultural consonance which relates to the extent to which a person's experience accords with what he or she expects, based on the values, norms and perceptions of the society of membership, an understanding of the nature of the cultural model used by the group of interest is vital in making some kind of assessment of consonance. Much of the pioneering work in cultural consonance in the area of health and psychology has used a very general comparison of traditional lifestyle versus modern lifestyle and has related to groups for whom this distinction can be made more or less unequivocally (see, for example, Dressler and Bindon, 2000; Reyes-Garcia et al., 2010; Dressler et al., 2012).

Evaluating cultural consonance may be much more difficult, however, for individuals and groups for whom change over time has been more gradual and less clear cut. This is often the case for groups that are part of the cultural mainstream and tend to be seen as contributing to the pace of change, rather than suffering the effects of it. There has been some work on this (see Eckersley, 2001, 2005), but much of the study of cultural consonance has related to societies that are at least somewhat removed from their own national mainstream or the global cultural environment. In the United States, for example, which like many western nations is currently experiencing unprecedented levels of mental illness (Weissman et al, 2015), little attention has as yet been given to the role decreasing cultural consonance may play in creating wellbeing and building and maintaining resilience, both important aspects of mental health.

This is a context in which the identification of a cultural model based on proverbial wisdom would be very beneficial in providing a standard by which cultural consonance could be measured. It is often stated, for example, that the influence of the media is significant in a wide range of contexts that relate to health and wellbeing and contributes to negative body image (Tiggemann, 2014),

the glamorization of unhealthy behavior (Robinson et al, 2013), and a consumerist mentality (Solomon et al., 2014). These aspects of media are easily identifiable from advertising material, television and movie imagery, intense focus on the activities of celebrities, and so forth. To some extent, these themes can be objectively evaluated using a number of methodologies that have been developed in various disciplines. However, the judgment as to whether and how the impacts of these sources relate to the cultural models held by the public that derive from more traditional precepts is often little more than a feeling or impression on the part of the researchers.

While that impression may, in fact, be accurate, the more clearly the cultural model that is the basis for individual perception can be elucidated, the more accurately cultural consonance can be measured and evaluated. For example, it is frequently noted that the conceptualization of personal beauty depicted by the media can have negative consequences on the perceptions of individuals, especially for girls and young women (see Diedrichs et al., 2011; Markey and Markey, 2012; and many more). However, while the content of media portrayals has been explicated in detail, the nature of the traditional cultural model this new depiction seems to be replacing is rarely considered. A consideration of relevant proverbs can provide the material for comparison. The following proverbs are some of the items that describe the nature and role of personal appearance in the traditional cultural model of speakers of American English:

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.  
Beauty is only skin deep.  
Clothes don't make the man.  
Handsome is as handsome does.  
You can't judge a book by its cover.

These items are a small sample of proverbs that relate to beauty and appearance. Their meaning and usage all suggest that beauty and looks are comparatively unimportant, relative and superficial and do not give an indication of more important qualities associated with character that may be invisible on first glance. As is generally the case, these proverbs contain surface images that reflect the experience and living environment of users and refer to common items – body parts, animals, household items and clothing –

that all speakers should be familiar with. They are connected to other items, like 'You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar' and the Biblical 'Charm is deceptive, beauty is fleeting', that suggest the importance of character and the transience of beauty through a network of meaning and metaphorical connections. It remains to be seen whether the new cultural model created largely by advertising and media images will replace the more traditional cultural model described by proverbs and proverbial expressions wholly or in part. Many scholars believe this new model is extremely pervasive and influential, but the proverbial items that make up the traditional model are part of the way language is used and occur regularly in numerous communicative contexts, not just the media.

The traditional cultural model created by proverbs and other customary usage in English does not fit well with the new model that can be discerned in the media material that many are concerned about. This new model seems to suggest, among other things, that appearance is far more important than character, that it is reasonable to go to great lengths to achieve a certain appearance, that the conceptualization of beauty is standard and generally agreed upon, and that beauty is strongly associated with youth. The psychological dilemma that results for many individuals comes about because the traditional cultural model, which is internalized by speakers gradually from infancy as they learn their native language, is in place long before a child is old enough to be aware of media representations, take an interest in them and understand the ideas they convey. As individuals become more familiar with the new cultural model, which is very visible in the English speaking world, the contrast with the traditional model becomes more pronounced, although it is likely that most people are not consciously aware of this gap. Instead, it may manifest as the dissatisfaction with self that is of such concern among girls and young women and which has been associated with mental illness and many kinds of negative patterns of behavior aimed at achieving an unreachable ideal. These psychological impacts can be seen as direct results of lack of cultural consonance, the mismatch between the cultural model that is the basis for perception and interpretation and the influences observed through personal experience.

Related to this is an interesting phenomenon that is increasingly observed, namely the use of this new media-generated cultural model in marketing around the world as many companies that operate in different locations attempt to standardize their advertising for use in multiple markets (see De Mooij, 2013). The degree of cultural fit between the new model and the traditional model associated with the culture of use may be less than expected (although efforts are made to ensure advertising and other marketing communication is appropriate for the culture of use). The resulting discrepancy may also be different in nature than the gap in cultural consonance in the culture of origin. For example, the following proverbs come from Malay and relate to beauty like the American items above:

Sungguhpun lemak santan akhirnya bau juga. [Even though it is coconut extract, it will eventually spoil.]

Segar dipakai, layu dibuang. [(When it is) fresh, use it; (when it) wilts, throw it away.]

Gombak gemilang kutu banyak, bibir hitam gigi kotor. [Shiny hair has a lot of lice, black lips have dirty teeth.]

Hitam-hitam kendi, putih-putih sadah. [Black like a kettle, white like lime.]

Tunggul kayu kalau ditarah pelicin, elok juga. [A tree stump planed (smooth) with oil will become fine.]

The first two items above relate to the connection between youth and beauty. Coconut extract is widely used for cooking in the Malay world and is considered a requirement for delicious food. In the first proverb above, it represents the beauty of a young woman that is not expected to endure over time. The second proverb uses a flower metaphor; as noted above, flowers often represent young women in traditional Malay literature. The item suggests that beauty is transient, and relationships based only on appearance are likely to end badly for the woman. The third proverb suggests that an attractive appearance can conceal an unpleasant personality. The term *bibir hitam* [black lips] refers to one of the effects of chewing betelnut, a practice that is rarely seen anymore but used to be common among women in the Malay world and was seen as an aspect of attractiveness. Betelnut is a mild euphoric. Chewed with lime wrapped in the leaves of a plant of the Piper species, over time it blackens the teeth and dyes the lips a very dark, black-

ish-red. The next proverb, which contains the image of a kettle, reminds hearers that something that seems unattractive may be more valuable than something that looks nicer. The lime mentioned is used to chew betelnut, as noted. The color white is often used to represent, not just fairness of coloring, but also desirable characteristics like truthfulness, innocence, cleanliness and quality. The final item, using a metaphor of a tree stump, suggests that an unattractive woman will appear beautiful if properly dressed and made up, implying that beauty is illusory.

These proverbs, which are highly metaphorical and whose images derive from the Malay context, are also associated with a large set of proverbial phrases that describe a traditional conceptualization of beauty in terms of the elements of traditional Malay life. These include *pipi seperti pauh dilayang* [cheeks like slices of mango]; *alis seperti semut beriring* [eyebrows like a line of ants]; *mata seperti bintang kejora* [eyes like the morning star]; and so forth. These items, along with the proverbs above and others like them, are part of a very detailed cultural model of beauty that is specific to the Malay world in terms of image as well as content. There is a point of intersection between this model and the sentiment expressed by a number of American proverbs suggesting that beauty is only skin deep. The Malay model intersects at a different point with the new model expressed in advertising that implies beauty is an attribute of youth. However, there are significant gaps between the Malay model and both the old and new cultural models of speakers of American English.

### ***Discussion***

It must be noted that, while language (and the expressions that are commonly known by speakers) is an important factor in shaping the cultural model, it is also the case that multiple models may exist among speakers of the same language, especially in a nation like the United States where so much of the population originated fairly recently in other locations, often speaking another language. Nonetheless, over time, it is to be expected that many elements of the cultural model associated with American English that are identifiable through proverbs will be internalized by immigrants as the language is learned. Over several generations, it might be expected that the cultural model of individuals will become more like the model among that predominates among speakers of the



language in question. This is the basis for the assumption that language is a proxy for culture.

In the Malay world, the situation is slightly different. The modern nations that use Malay also have a large number of local languages, especially Indonesia which has more than 700 other languages in use today. Each of these languages is associated with an ethnic group with its own culture and unique elements. Some of these groups/ languages are linguistically and culturally related to Malay, while others are not. This means that the population has numerous cultural models with different elements that derive from the shared experience of each of the ethnic groups involved. Nonetheless, each of these nations has made an effort to support and facilitate the development of a national culture using the national language. Interestingly, the study of proverbs is part of classes in the national language in the schools of the Malay-speaking nations because these items are seen as a vehicle for understanding the traditional literature of the region and also for depicting traditional values that are considered relevant in the modern context.

It must be assumed that every community has a cultural model that is associated with its language, culture and history. The traditional form of this model is discernable through the proverbs and proverbial expressions that are known and used by modern speakers, and study of these items can provide valuable information about the values, attitudes, and perceptions of the group. Nonetheless, cultural models are subject to change, as the influence of new models such as those created by popular culture and the media demonstrates. While it is not out of the question that new models such as this will ultimately dominate, the counterweight of the traditional models is considerable because they are embedded in language use. The ordinary language of daily interaction changes rapidly, but metaphorical items are more enduring, and proverbs specifically are known to retain archaic terms and syntax that no longer occur in other communicative contexts. While the surface structure and imagery may not be understood by modern speakers, the underlying meaning tends to be known, and the items continue to be used.

The persistence of the traditional cultural model is supported by its close connection to language which allows it to be absorbed along with social and linguistic rules for appropriate use as individuals learn to speak early in life. The deep seated nature of this

framework, within which the interpretation of experience takes place, contributes to the significance of the lack of cultural consonance as a factor in psychological health. The situation where a person's experience seems to conflict with his or her cultural expectations, including values, has been shown to relate to individual adaptive factors like resilience and coping, happiness, and also physiological health. Significant change in population health around the world in recent years suggests that new approaches to understanding its mental and physical aspects are required, and this is where cultural consonance as a contributing factor is of increasing importance.

However, as noted, the study of cultural consonance can be greatly enhanced by comprehensive knowledge of the relevant, traditional cultural model that can serve as a comparison with this observable or self-reported experience of the individuals or group of interest. It may be difficult, though, to elucidate the salient elements of the cultural model without an objective indication of the principles and values that contribute to it. It is here that consideration of the body of proverbs that are in use by members of the group is of great value. The fact that proverbs are known and understood by individuals is an indication that their meaning and application are still socially relevant and, by extension, have contributed to the associated cultural model. Proverbs, which are extremely stable, can provide a generally agreed upon indication of the nature of this model as well as the principles that form the core of a culture's worldview.

The use of proverbs and proverbial phrases as a means for identifying worldview is discussed by Dundes (1969; 1971) who notes that every culture has a set of assumptions or premises that serve as the base for its interpretations of experience. These concepts, which he refers to as 'folk ideas' (1971: 95-96), tend to be identifiable across genres of folklore and represent a pattern of consistent views that derive from the shared experience of the group. It has been noted that worldview defined in this way serves as a cognitive tool with which people determine their actions, behavior, and interpretations of experience (Dundes, 1971; Degh, 1994; Toelken, 1996). People often have no conscious awareness of the worldview that shapes their perceptions, even though it is implicit in their actions and reactions to their surroundings (Dundes, 1969; Jones, 1972). For this reason, it is often the indirect

results of accord or discord with this internal understanding of how things should be that people feel and that allow for an evaluation of cultural consonance.

The significance of cultural consonance as a measure of psychological health is likely to increase in the future as populations change to become more multicultural and multilingual, and individuals find that the mainstream culture of the community is becoming less like the specific cultural model associated with their own background. The phenomenon of population ageing that has been observed around the world is also related to cultural consonance, and unmet expectations due to social change that is not compatible with the cultural model of older individuals is increasingly observed (see Stanaway et al., 2011; Avgoulas and Fanany, 2012; Fanany et al., 2014; among others). For this reason, the models developed within the field of paremiology for the study of proverb meaning are highly relevant in evaluating and characterizing cultural consonance as a means of elucidating cultural models and can provide an important interdisciplinary approach to a range of psychological and health phenomena.

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