

# Culture

**Culture** refers to the beliefs, values, behavior and material objects that, together, form a people's way of life.

**Culture** determines how we view the world around us

**Culture** includes the traditions we inherit and pass on to the next generation

**Culture:** totality of our shared language, knowledge, material objects, and behavior

# Culture and Society

- **Society:** the structure of relationships within which culture is created and shared through regularized patterns of social interaction
  - Society provides the context within which our relationships with the external world develop
  - How we structure society constrains the kind of culture we construct
  - Cultural preferences vary across societies

# Human Culture

Only humans depend on culture rather than instincts to ensure the survival of their kind.

✘ Culture is very recent and was a long time in the making.

✘ What sets primates apart from other animals is their intelligence. Human achievements during the Stone Age set humans off on a distinct evolutionary course, making culture their primary survival strategy.

# Culture and Society

The concept of culture (a shared way of life) must be distinguished from those of nation (a political entity) or society (the organized interaction of people in a nation or within some other boundary).

Many modern societies are multicultural---their people follow various ways of life that blend and sometimes clash.

On this planet our race, homo sapiens evolved 250,000 years ago give or take a few thousand. But the first cities appeared about 12,000 years ago. Think about that. For 95% of human life there were no cities. What kind of culture was there then?

# Components of Culture

All cultures have five common components:  
symbols,  
language,  
values and beliefs,  
norms, and  
material culture, including technology.

**Symbols** are defined as anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share culture. The meaning of the same symbols varies from society to society, within a single society, and over time.

# Components of Culture

**Language** is a system of symbols that allows people to communicate with one another. It can be either written or spoken or both. Language is the key to **cultural transmission**, the process by which one generation passes culture to the next.

Through most of human history, cultural transmission has been accomplished through oral tradition

Don't ignore the non-verbal aspects

# Language and Values

The **Sapir-Whorf thesis** holds that people perceive the world through the cultural lens of language.

- A. For example what sport is football where?
- B. How does anyone translate a concept for which there is no equivalent?
- C. How About chimps?
- D. What is the effect of having English as the dominant language on the Internet?

**Values** are culturally defined standards by which people judge desirability, goodness and beauty, and which serve as broad guidelines for social living. Values are broad principles that underlie **beliefs**, specific statements that people hold to be true.

# Characteristics of American Culture

- The values of American Culture, according to Williams are
    1. Equal opportunity
    2. Achievement and success
    3. Material comfort
    4. Activity and work
    5. Practicality and efficiency
    6. Progress
    7. Science
    8. Democracy and free enterprise
    9. Freedom
    10. Racism and group superiority
  - Other Theorists add education, religiosity and romantic love
- Values within one society are frequently inconsistent and even opposed to one another.
1. Conflict: the more central the value the more intense the conflict. Look at political issues

# Characteristics of American Culture

- Other theorists add education, religiosity and romantic love
  - Economists add “the free market”
- Values within one society are frequently inconsistent and even opposed to one another.
- When central values of different cultures are in conflict, the conflict is more intense.
  - Look at political issues

# Social and Cultural Norms

- Cultures and societies set up norms which are the rules and expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members.
  - Norms can be either proscriptive or prescriptive.
  - Formal norms express values as laws and regulations whose violation is strictly punished
  - Informal norms are those norms which are generally understood but which may loosely defined
  - Mores are widely observed and have great moral/social significance.
  - Folkways are norms that govern everyday behaviors

# Social and Cultural Norms

Sanctions are a central mechanism of **social control**

Sanctions are the means by which society encourages conformity to norms

Sociologists distinguish between cultural ideals, social patterns mandated by cultural values and norms, and real culture, actual social patterns that only approximate cultural expectations

# Material and Non-Material Culture

Material culture reflects a society's values and a society's **technology**, the knowledge that people apply to the task of living in their surroundings.

Examples include books, buildings, physical objects that future generations can use to try and understand us.

Non-Material Culture reflects beliefs, values, concepts, customs

Examples include Beliefs, values, Religions, ethics and philosophies

# Types of Cultures

- **High culture** refers to cultural patterns that distinguish a society's elite.
- **Popular culture** designates cultural patterns that are widespread among a society's population.
  - High culture is not inherently superior to popular culture.  
What'll You Have? Popular Beverages Across the United States. What people consume is one mark of their status as a "highbrow" or "lowbrow.
  - The New "Culture of Victimization." Americans may be becoming increasingly unwilling to accept personal responsibility for their failings and misfortunes
- **Subcultures** are cultural patterns that distinguish some segment of a society's population. They involve not only difference but also hierarchy
- **Counterculture** refers to cultural patterns that strongly oppose those widely accepted within a society. Countercultures reject many of the standards of a dominant culture

# Multiple Cultures –One Society

- When a society is made up of multiple cultures that society has to deal with and somehow reconcile cultural differences and conflicts.
- In addition to the types of cultural variations we've talked about, there are other sources of cultural variations.
  - Most notable are differences based on
    - Race
    - National/Ethnic Origin
    - Religion

# Ways of dealing with multiple cultures

- We will deal with this issue more extensively in the unit on Race and Ethnicity.
- The most common, and oldest ways of dealing with multiple cultures is probably forcing assimilation and/or wiping out minority cultures.
- More recently, we have witnessed the development of pluralistic cultures in which the different cultures tolerate each other.
- Multi-Culturalism is a more recent development that recognizes the cultural diversity of the United States and promotes the equality of all cultural traditions.
  - The United States is the most multicultural of all industrial countries. By contrast, Japan is the most monocultural of all industrial nations
  - Multiculturalism stands in opposition to **Eurocentrism**, the dominance of European (especially English) cultural patterns.

# Cultural Diversity in the US

- Language Diversity across the United States. The 2000 U.S. Census reports that 18 percent of people over the age of five speak a language other than English in their home
- Some call for **Afrocentrism**, the dominance of African cultural patterns in people's lives.
- Supporters of multiculturalism argue that it helps us come to terms with our diverse present and strengthens the academic achievement of African-American children.
- Opponents of Multiculturalism argue that it encourages divisiveness rather than unity.

# Cultural Relativity

- **Counterculture** refers to cultural patterns that strongly oppose those widely accepted within a society. Countercultures reject many of the standards of a dominant culture.
- **Cultural relativism** views the behavior of a people from the perspective of their own culture. There are distinctive subcultures within cultures and even organizations within a culture
- Earlier, Anthropological studies differentiated cultures on a different basis
  - A. Margaret Mead's study of Asiatic islanders.
  - B. Repressed vs expressive
  - C. Dyonesian

# Characterizing Cultures

- Currently we tend to consider societies and cultures as :
  - Preindustrial (aka 3<sup>rd</sup> world)
  - Industrial (aka 2<sup>nd</sup> World)
  - Post industrial based on computers and new information economy (aka 1<sup>st</sup> world)
- What is the problem with these formulations?

# Cultural Change

- If Cultures goes through these different phases , then they have to change
- As cultures change, they strive to maintain **cultural integration**, the close relationship among various elements of a cultural system.
  - William Ogburn's concept of **cultural lag** refers to the fact that cultural elements change at different rates, which may disrupt a cultural system.
  - Three phenomena promote cultural change
    - Inventions, the process of creating new cultural elements.
    - Discovery, recognizing and understanding an idea not fully understood before.
    - Diffusion, the spread of cultural traits from one cultural system to another

# Ethnocentrism, Cultural relativity and Globalization

- Ethnocentrism is the practice of judging another culture by the standards of one's own culture.
- Sociologists tend to discourage this practice, instead they advocate cultural relativism, the practice of judging a culture by its own standards.
- Some evidence suggests that a global culture may be emerging.
  - Three key factors are promoting this trend:
    - Global economy: the flow of goods.
    - Global communications: the flow of information.
    - Global migration: the flow of people.

# Limitations of the Global Theory

- Global culture is much more advanced in some parts of the world than in others
- Many people cannot afford to participate in the material aspects of a global culture
- Different people attribute different meanings to various aspects of the global culture

# Is Technology promoting a global culture?

- New and emerging communications, computer, and other technologies. Don't forget bio tech
  - It provides a set of concepts that both material and non material culture need to adapt to.
  - It can span the globe, but not all cultures will accept or adopt to these technologies and the changes they cause/impose at the same rate.
  - East and West have different bases and adopt at different rates

# Virtual Culture

Today's children are bombarded with virtual culture, images that spring from the minds of contemporary culture-makers and that reach them via a screen. Some of these cultural icons embody values that shape our way of life. But few of them have any historical reality and almost all have come into being to make money.

# Theoretical Analysis of Culture

- The structural-functional paradigm depicts culture as a complex strategy for meeting human needs.

Cultural universals are traits that are found in every known culture.

With all the differences in cultures are there ANY UNIVERSAL STANDARDS of behavior?

How do we know when to apply which standard?

- The strength of the structural-functional analysis is showing how culture operates to meet human needs.
- The weakness of the structural-functional paradigm is that it ignores cultural diversity and downplays the importance of change.

# Theoretical Analysis of Culture

- The social-conflict paradigm is rooted in the philosophical doctrine of materialism and suggests that many cultural traits function to the advantage of some and the disadvantage of others.
- The social-conflict analysis recognizes that many elements of a culture maintain inequality and promote the dominance of one group over others.

It understates the ways that cultural patterns integrate members of society.

- Social Interaction offers little in the way of explanation
- Emerging theory-- Sociobiology is a theoretical paradigm that explores ways in which human biology affects how we create culture. Sociobiology has its roots in the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin

It's weakness is that Sociobiology may promote racism and sexism. Further, Research support for this paradigm is limited.

# Theoretical Analysis of Culture

The United States and Canada: Are They Culturally Different?

- Canada and the United States differ in two important aspects.
  - Historically, Canada has two dominant cultures, British and French.
  - Politically, people in the United States tend to think individuals should take care of themselves.
  - Canadians have a strong sense that the government should look after the interests of everyone.