

Mirror for Humanity

Chapter 3
Culture

Overview

- Concept of culture
- Cultural universals, generalities, and particularities
- Mechanisms of cultural change
 - Diffusion, acculturation, and independent invention
- Globalization

Culture with a big “C”

- What is culture?
 - Tyler’s definition of culture: “...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”
 - **Enculturation** – the process by which a child learns his or her culture

Examples of Enculturation

- Pledge of Allegiance
- Remembering to say “please”
- Learning which symbols on bathroom doors belong to you!
- Washing your hands before you eat
- Unfortunately, can also learn things like racism from a VERY young age.

Culture is LEARNED

- Culture is learned
 - Cultural learning depends on use of **symbols**
 - Symbols – signs that have no necessary or natural connection to the things they stand for or signify
 - Example: US materialism
 - People internalize (through enculturation) a **system** of meanings and symbols that guides their behavior and perceptions
 - Culture is learned through direct instruction, observation, experience, interaction with others, conscious and unconscious behavior modification

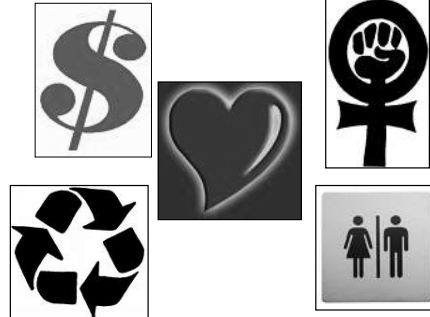
Culture is SHARED

- Culture is shared
 - Culture is shared by individuals as members of society
 - Enculturation tends to unify people – shared beliefs, values, memories, and expectations
 - Parents as agents in the enculturation of their children
 - Some other agents in the enculturation of children?

Culture is SYMBOLIC

- Culture is symbolic
 - Symbolic thought is unique to humans, essential to cultural learning
 - Symbol – something that comes to stand for something else within a particular language or culture
 - Associations between symbols and the things they symbolize are arbitrary and conventional
 - Both verbal and nonverbal symbols
 - Every human population has the ability to use symbols, and thus to create and maintain culture
 - Chimpanzees and gorillas have rudimentary cultural abilities, but no other animal has elaborated cultural abilities comparable to those of humans

Some Examples (there are billions!)



Culture (“nurture”) is linked to nature

- Culture and nature
 - Culture teaches humans how to express natural biological urges in particular ways
 - Natural acts become cultural customs
 - Culture affects how we perceive nature, human nature, and what is “natural”
 - Example: Maya links between land and work
- Culture is all-encompassing
 - Anthropological concept of culture encompasses all aspects of human group behavior
 - **All** people are “cultured”

Culture is almost subconscious

- Culture is integrated
 - Cultures are integrated, patterned systems
 - Change in one aspect of a cultural system leads to changes in other parts of the system
 - **Core values** – integrate each culture and help distinguish it from others (Ex. Bill of Rights)
 - Black boxes
- Culture can be adaptive and maladaptive
 - Reliance on social and cultural means of adaptation has increased during human evolution
 - Cultural traits, patterns, and inventions can also be maladaptive – threatening the survival and reproduction of a group

Culture is also individualized

- Culture and the individual: **agency and practice**
 - People use culture actively and creatively
 - Culture is contested
 - Common symbols may have radically different meanings to different individuals and groups
 - Ideal vs. real culture
 - Ideal culture – what people say they do and should do
 - Real culture – actual behavior
 - Agency – actions that individuals take, both alone and in groups, in forming and transforming cultural identities

Agency & Practice

- Culture and the individual: agency and practice
 - Practice theory
 - Individuals have diverse motives and intentions and different degrees of power and influence
 - Focus on how individuals influence, create, and transform the world they live in
 - Relationship between culture (system) and the individual
 - Culture shapes how individuals experience and respond to external events
 - Individuals also play an active role in how society functions and changes
 - NAPA

Culture has MULTILEVELS

- Levels of culture
 - **National** culture – beliefs, learned behavior patterns, values, and institutions shared by citizens of the same nation
 - **International** culture
 - Extends beyond and across national boundaries
 - Results from diffusion (borrowing), migration, multinational organizations, common histories or interests
 - **Subcultures** – different symbol-based patterns and traditions associated with particular groups in the same complex society

Ethnocentrism

- Ethnocentrism
 - Tendency to view one's own culture as superior and to apply one's own cultural values in judging the behavior and beliefs of others
 - Contributes to **social solidarity** among people sharing a cultural tradition
 - Cultural **universal** (all people are ethnocentric)

Cultural relativism

- Cultural relativism
 - Principle that behavior in one culture should not be judged by the standards of another culture
 - Extreme cultural relativism is problematic – there is no superior, international, or universal morality
 - Notion of **human rights** – challenge to cultural relativism
 - Justice and morality beyond and superior to the laws and customs of particular countries, cultures, and religions
 - Cultural rights – right of a group to preserve its culture, language, and economic base
 - **Indigenous** intellectual property rights (IPR) – conservation of each society's core beliefs, knowledge, and practices

Universal, General, Particular

- Universality, generality, and particularity
 - "Psychic unity of man"
 - All human populations have equivalent capacities for culture
 - People can learn any cultural tradition
 - Cultural **universals** – features found in every culture
 - Cultural **generalities** – features common to several but not all human groups
 - Cultural **particularities** – features unique to certain cultural traditions

Some Examples

- Universality, generality, and particularity
 - Biologically based universals:
 - Long period of infant dependency (guess why?)
 - Year-round sexuality
 - Complex brain that enables people to use symbols, languages, and tools
 - Social universals:
 - Life in groups
 - Some kind of family
 - Cultural generality: nuclear family (kinship group consisting of parents and children)

Patterns of Culture

- Universality, generality, and particularity
 - **Particularity**: patterns of culture
 - Cultures are integrated and patterned differently – display tremendous variation and diversity
 - At same time, cultural particularities are becoming increasingly rare because of cultural diffusion (borrowing)
 - Borrowed cultural traits are modified to fit the culture that adopts them
 - Examples: Linguistic enclaves, McDonaldization (Royale wit cheeze!) and the farting machine.

Culture Change

- Mechanisms of cultural change
 - Diffusion
 - Borrowing of traits between cultures
 - Has gone on throughout human history
 - Can be direct—between two adjacent cultures—or indirect—across one or more intervening cultures or through some long-distance medium (e.g., mass media, information technology, migration)
 - **Forced diffusion** – one culture subjugates another and imposes its customs on the dominated group
 - Countee Cullen's "Heritage"

Acculturation

- Mechanisms of cultural change
 - Acculturation
 - Exchange of cultural features that results when groups come into continuous firsthand contact
 - May occur in either or both groups engaged in contact
 - Parts of cultures change, but groups remain distinct
 - Example: pidgin – a mixed language that develops to ease communication between members of different cultures in contact (e.g., in the context of trade or colonialism)
 - Creole: Maya religion, Santa Rita.
 - Lots of acculturation taking place in Serpent & the Rainbow!

Assimilation

- Read Countee Cullen's Heritage!
- Process whereby members of an ethno-cultural group, typically immigrants, or other minority groups, are "**absorbed**" into an established, community.
- This presumes a loss of all or many characteristics which make the newcomers different.
- A region or society where assimilation is occurring is sometimes referred to as a "**melting pot**".
- May be by choice or by force.

Independent Invention

- Mechanisms of cultural change
 - Independent Invention
 - Process by which humans innovate, creatively finding solutions to problems
 - Comparable inventions in different societies result in cultural generalities (e.g., the independent invention of agriculture in both the Middle East and Mexico)
 - To explain these inventions, the concept of "psychic unity" was formed. (A common set of modes of thinking and characteristics that transcend individuals or cultures).

Globalization

- Globalization
 - The accelerating interdependence of nations in a world system linked economically and through mass media and modern transportation systems
 - Forces of globalization: international commerce and finance, travel and tourism, transnational migration, the mass media, and high-tech information flows
 - Increasingly, local people must cope with larger regional, national, and international forces
 - Indigenous peoples and traditional societies have devised strategies to protect their autonomy, identity, and livelihood

Globalization from "Above"

- Includes:
 - globalization of production, markets and finance
 - global restructuring of corporations and work
 - development of new technologies
 - a new role for the state
 - dominance of **neoliberal ideology**
 - large-scale tourism
 - poverty-induced migration
 - worldwide media "domination"
 - concentrated control of poor countries in the hands of First World investors. (neo-imperialism)

Globalization from "Below"

- Changing the direction of globalization
- Focus on the individual group/community/family that globalization affects
- Celebrates action (agency) and practice
- Resistance to structural adjustment, globalized market control, and indifference to social problems.