

Culture

Chapter 2

What is Culture?

- Def.-The language, beliefs, values, norms, behaviors, & material objects that are passed from one generation to the next
- Material Culture- tangible objects of a culture. Examples?
- Nonmaterial Culture- a group's ways of thinking (beliefs, values, & other assumptions about the world). Examples?

Taken-for-granted Orientations to Life

- We, naturally, assume *our* culture is ‘normal’ and other cultures are not
- *Culture is the lens through which we perceive & evaluate what is going on around us*
- Culture Shock- the disorientation that people experience when they come in contact w/ fundamentally different culture & can no longer depend on their taken-for-granted assumptions about life

- Ex. Of culture shock- Africans brought to America as slaves, some foreign exchange students, or if you suddenly woke up in Northern Africa
- Ethnocentrism- the use of one's own culture as a yardstick for judging the ways of other individuals & societies, generally leading to a negative evaluation of their values, norms, & behaviors. Huh? My culture is better than yours b/c you do weird things. Can help bind a people together- since they share culture.

Cultural Relativism

- Def- not judging a culture but trying to understand it on its own terms
- Used to counter our tendency to use our own culture as a yardstick
- Is very difficult to do. I.e.. Many early middle/south American tribes practiced human sacrifice. In our culture that is not acceptable, but if you look at the reasoning behind it the sacrifice makes sense.

- How far does cultural relativism go?
 - Should we not judge cultures that practice gang rape, wife beating, selling children into prostitution or armies, female circumcision as morally corrupt? Should we ‘ignore’ the exploitation in certain cultures?
 - Debated among sociologists

Symbolic Culture

- Refers to nonmaterial culture b/c of the use of symbols
- Symbols- something to which people attach meanings & them use to communicate with others. Include: gestures, language, values, norms, sanctions, folkways, & mores

Gestures

- def- the ways in which people use their bodies to communicate with one another
- Ex. Middle finger (in North America), putting your hand in your armpit & moving the arm up & down (Mexico)- the worst insult in Mexico
- When traveling abroad it is important to understand gestures so you don't offend anyone
- Are any gestures universal to all cultures?
Debatable

Language

- Def- a system of symbols that can be combined in a infinite number of ways & can represent not only objects, but abstract thought
- Goes hand in hand w/ gestures. Gestures can emphasize language.
- Emoticons were developed to substitute for gestures
- Language is universal- all cultures have one, but the same sounds mean different things in different cultures

- With language we pass ideas, knowledge, & attitudes from generation to generation- allows future generations to learn from the experiences & modify their behavior
- *Language allows culture to develop by freeing people to move beyond their immediate experiences-* ideas about past & future events
- Memories would be limited & the communication of them no existent
- Provides a shared or Social Past, Social or shared future & shared perspectives and allows complex, shared, goal-oriented behavior

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

- Language creates ways of thinking & perceiving
- *Language has embedded within it ways of looking at the world*
- *Ex. If you didn't know the words jock, Goth, emo, preps, etc. you perceive students in entirely different ways*
- Language both reflects & shapes cultural experiences

Values, Norms, & Sanctions

- Values- the standards by which people define what is desirable or undesirable, good or bad, beautiful or ugly.
- Norms- expectations, or rules of behavior, that reflect & enforce values
- Sanctions- expressions of approval or disapproval given to people for upholding or violating norms

- Positive Sanctions- a reward or positive reaction for following norms, ranging from a smile to a prize
- Negative sanction- an expression of disapproval for breaking a norm, ranging from a mild, informal reaction such as a frown to a formal reaction such as a prison sentence or execution

- Moral Holiday- specific times when people are ‘allowed’ to break norms (not completely drop them more of a bending of norms) ex. Mardi Gras
- Moral Holiday Places- locations where norms are expected to be broken. Ex. Red light districts, ‘Party Cove’ in Lake of the Ozarks in MO.

Folkways & Mores

- Folkways- norms that are not strictly enforced. Ex. Passing on the right side of the hallway
- Mores- norms that are strictly enforced b/c they are thought essential to core values or the well-being of the group
- Taboo- a norm so strong that often brings revulsion if violated. Ex. Cannibalism, incest. Sanctions can be severe including prison, banishment, or death

Examples of Local Culture

- Language-
- Symbols-
- Material culture-
- Nonmaterial culture-
- Norms-
- Sanctions-
- Folkways-
- Moeres-
- Values-

Subcultures

- Def- the values & related behaviors of a group that distinguish its members from the larger culture; a world w/in a world
- Ex. Age groups, professions, ethnic groups, religious groups
- Subcultures are still part of the larger culture
- Specific examples- _____

Counterculture

- Def- a group whose values, beliefs, & related behaviors place its members in opposition to the broader culture
- Ex. Satanists, other religious cults, gangs
- Members of countercultures are often ridiculed, isolated, or even attacked
- Specific examples? _____

Values in US Society

- Pluralistic society- a society made up of many different groups
- The US is a pluralistic society w/ numerous religious & racial-ethnic groups. There are also many different interest groups (clubs, collector groups, etc.)

US Core Values

- Defined by Robin Williams- sociologist
- 1. Achievement & Success
- 2. Individualism
- 3. Activity & Work
- 4. Efficiency & practicality
- 5. Science & technology
- 6. Progress
- 7. Material Comfort
- 8. Humanitarianism

- 9. Freedom
- 10. Democracy
- 11. Equality
- 12. Racism & group superiority
- 3 values added by the text author
 - 13. Education
 - 14. Religiosity
 - 15. Romantic Love

Value Clusters

- Def- values that together form a larger whole
- Certain US values are connected
- Ex. Hard work, education, efficiency, material comfort & individualism
- Success is connected to hard work, education, etc.
- Lack of success is blamed on the individual

Value Contradictions

- Def- values that contradict one another; to follow the one means to come in conflict w/ the other
- Ex. Group superiority contradicts freedom, democracy & equality
- What happens when value contradiction explodes? Civil War, Women's Lib, Civil Rights Mov't
- *It is precisely at the point of value contradictions, that one sees a major force for social change in a society*

Emerging Values

- 1. Leisure- recreation
- 2. Self-Fulfillment- personal development
- 3. Physical Fitness- increased emphasis
- 4. Youthfulness- attributed to aging ‘baby boomers’, some claim, ‘aging is not a normal life event, but a disease’ can be seen in ‘makeover’ shows & more plastic surgeries
- 5. Concern for the environment
 - People are only able to be concerned for the environment when basic needs are met

Culture Wars: when values clash

- Changes in values are often met w/ strong resistance
 - Ex. Homosexual marriage
- Blinders- some values can be held in such high esteem that people are ‘blinded’ to the circumstances that keep people from success
 - Ex. Everyone can succeed if they try hard enough- regardless of the circumstances

“Ideal” versus “Real” Culture

- Ideal culture- the ideal values & norms of a people; the goals held out for them
- Real Culture- the norms & values that people actually follow
- People aspire for the ideal culture but often fall short

Cultural Universals

- Def- a value, norm, or other cultural trait that is found in every group
- Ex. Courtship, marriage, funerals, family, games, laws, music, myths, incest taboos, toilet training- *the specific customs differ from group to group*

Technology

- Def- in its narrow sense, tools; its broader sense includes the skills or procedures necessary to make & use those tools
- New technology- the emerging technologies of an era that have a significant impact on social life
- *Technology sets the framework for a group's nonmaterial culture*
- If a group's technology changes, so do the people's ways of thinking & how they relate to one another. Ex. Communication- now we have the need for instantaneous communication

Cultural Lag

- Cultural Lag- human behavior lagging behind technological advances
- *A group's material culture normally changes first, with the nonmaterial culture lagging behind*
- Ex. A 9 month school year was based on the farming society when children were needed at home
- Ex. Laws regulating the internet are virtually nonexistent- who has jurisdiction over the internet? Makes it difficult to prosecute internet 'crimes'
- Other examples?

Cultural Diffusion

- Def- the spread of cultural characteristics from one group to another
- Through human contact
- Used to occur slowly, now occurs rapidly thanks to communication & travel
- Cultural Leveling- the process by which cultures become similar to one another; refers especially to the process by which US culture is being exported & diffused into other nations

- Evidence of cultural leveling
 - McDonald's around the world
 - Other 'icons' of US culture in other cultures ex. Mickey Mouse, Nike Swoosh