

Society vs. Culture

Society: a group of animals that maintains social relationships while sharing a common territory

Ex. Bees in a hive

Human society: people who share a common culture (way of doing things), language, and geographic area

Two ways anthropologists use the word culture:

A (specific) culture: a system of lifeways and ideas shared by members of a human society as a learned set of responses to the environment, not inherited but learned

General culture: those practices that guide human behavior without specific reference to a specific group

Two Types of Culture

Ideal is what we say we do, and **real** is what we actually practice.

Ex. In America, we say "equality for all" but then we had segregation. It's a contradiction.

Mentalist vs. Totalist

Mentalist- believes that culture is only the ideational or conceptual facts of a group.

Ex. not the actual plastic water bottle we use but the fact that we know what to use it for

Totalist- believes that culture is the totality of a people's ways of life including tools, acts, thoughts, institutions that let a population live and reproduce. Relates communities to their environment. Culture as an adaptive mechanism.

Cultural Process

Enculturation: the process of learning one's language and culture, starts the day you're born (only humans)

Socialization: process of learning to be a member of a social group. Applies to animals as well as humans.

Ex. Dogs learn to live the domestic life with humans. Bison learn to be a bison.

Acculturation: the process of culture change that is the result of more or less continuous contact between two groups. Happens everywhere, particularly seen with religions. Can also be from two interacting cultures peacefully absorbing from one another

Ex. We tried to acculturate Native Americans

Diffusion: spread of cultural traits and ideas from one culture to another, human cultures can all pick up things from one another

Ex. Today, spread by commercialism. The U.S. flag means corporations rather than freedom to many foreign countries.

Assimilation: individual of a foreign or minority culture absorbs the dominant culture and enters positions of social, economic, political, and educational significance

Ethnocentrism

The tendency to take for granted the superiority of one's culture or group

Ex. social classes, occupations, countries (Americans think they're better than everyone.)

Caused by:

- lack of understanding
- the result of the enculturation process leading to in-group/out0group contrasts
- deliberate cultivation due to nationalism, religion, ethnicity, ect.
- personal experience of a negative nature with individual from other groups

Ex. fight with on Puerto Rican, judge all Puerto Ricans by that one

Good or Bad? Neither.

- blinds us, leading to bigotry, exploitation, genocide
- helps us survive by promoting loyalty, unity, morale
- unavoidable but we must understand and act only on facts rather than irrational ethnocentric evaluation

General Characteristics of Culture

-All humans have a biological capacity for culture. We exist because of our culture.

-Humans could not exist without culture.

-All cultures have equal potential; none are more advanced or less primitive.

-The culture concept was developed as an alternative to racism (Europeans called the Native Americans savages. Instead their culture should be appreciated and understood,) and an explanation for worldwide variation in behavior.

-Culture has made us the most dangerous and destructive large animal on the planet. Indigenous cultural patterns are being rapidly replaced (languages, lost ways of life destroyed, ritual changes, etc.).

-Cultures do not exist in isolation anymore (the global economy reaches far) and is changing how life works everywhere.

Ex. Little Ma-n-Pa businesses are disappearing and being taken over by store chains.

It's learned through human interaction in social groups:

-Transmitted from generation to generation by specific cultural procedures (within and between).

Schools are a function of doing this.

Ex. learning how to sew from Mom

-It's kept relatively uniform through social pressure.

Ex. hair, religion

-New adjustments are almost always compromises between the limitations of the past and heavily influence the ways societies change (culture is cumulative).

-New cultural skills or knowledge are added on to what we have learned in previous generations.

Culture Defines Reality

- It provides a set of symbols that are responded to rather than reality
 - Ex. Flags are just cloth but to humans they are symbols of countries, beliefs. Americans interpret their flag to mean freedom; other countries interpret it to mean corporations.
- It defines situations, giving clues to how one should act.
 - Ex. Fight or flight, laugh or cry, punish or reward
- It defines attitudes, values, and goals that channel human behavior.
 - Ex. Cooperation vs. Competitive, Individualism vs. Communalism
- It provides a worldview through a system of legends, myths, and ideas about the supernatural
 - Ex. Creation, spirit stories, death ideas

Culture is constantly changing due to:

- contact between groups (acculturation and/or diffusion)
- independent discovery and invention within groups
- we don't have to wait for biology to evolve as culture can adjust itself
- new technologies are invented every few years rather than once or twice a century (or less)

Culture is a learned set of responses to environmental challenges:

- It's no different than long teeth, claws, and running fast
- It's adaptive to
 - Geographic environment
 - Biophysical demands such as food, water, shelter, security, reproduction
 - Sociocultural environment such as social changes, social stress, social controls, etc.

Culture provides a sense of order:

- internal order by internalization of norms
- internal order by laws and physical force
- external order with other societies (alliances, treaties, threat)
- cultural assumptions:
 - Those taken for granted or thought to be true without testing
 - Allow us to reorganize or analyze complicated problems and issues (differentiate the significant vs. insignificant)
 - Inaccurate assumptions lead to faulty concepts

Culture is not always related to pure survival:

- Housing (shelter) can be a symbol of power, prestige, position, personality.
- Clothes can demonstrate our social position, artistic expression, badge of calling (scrubs for a nurse, suit for a lawyer, etc.), sexual attraction.
- Food (hunger and health) is related to class, stress, health, identity, pleasure.