Culture

Key Concept in Cultural Anthropology
Defining Culture

• Everything humans perceive, know, think, value and feel is learned through participating in a cultural system

• Human potential can only be realized within the structure of human culture and through growing up in close contact with other humans
Scope of Culture

- Things that strike as “natural” or “normal” or “common sense” or “human nature” or “instinctive” are often cultural.
- Mother/infant bond “human nature”?
- In Northeastern Brazil where poverty is predominant, mothers give minimum care to infants.
Wildboy of Aveyon

- Found and brought into human contact
- Learned some speech
- Could not adjust adequately to human society after being isolated from it for so long
Contemporary Anthropologists

- Do not agree on a definition of culture
- Some definitions stress the materialist side of culture and others stress the idealist side of culture
- Anthropology is a social science, humanities and science
- Anthropologists do agree on characteristics of culture
Characteristics All Cultures Share

• Made up of learned behaviors
• Learning culture is continuous process
• Cultures are learned through the process of enculturation
• They all involve the use of language and symbols—things that stand for something else
Characteristics of Culture

• Elements of culture have some logical relationship to one another
• In some ways, members of a culture share values and norms
• The way people learn to interact with one another is cultural
• Types and expression of emotions is cultural
Cultures are Adaptive

• Cultures contain information about how to survive in the world
• UDEL Student Culture Has Ways to Survive and Handle Stress
• Cultures also contain information about what is maladaptive
• UDEL Drinking to excess
Culture Change

• Cultural Change may result from internal dynamics or by outside forces
• The speed in which cultures change may vary much through outside forces
• Slang words one indication of culture change
• College dorms used to be for men or women only. What brought about the culture change?
Culture Change

• Cultural Ideas about sex and gender changed
Learning One’s Culture

• Humans depend on learned and taught behavior more than any other species
• No other species has as lengthy of a period of childhood learning as humans
• Each society has both formal and informal means of enculturation or transmitting its culture
• Tacit and Explicit Cultural Knowledge
Child learning

- Interaction with parents and siblings
- Individual play and group play
- Enculturation patterns are transmitted from generation to generation—or are they?
- Society is culturally reproduced as well as biologically reproduced
Human Development is Different Cross Culturally

- Childhood is not considered as a distinct stage of life in many non-western cultures and was only recognized in the West among wealthy parents in the 17th century.
- Early 20th century in US did away with child labor. Beginning of universal public school because something had to be done for the children of working parents.
Purpose of Child Rearing Patterns

• Childrearing practices in all cultures are designed for special behaviors
• Designed to pattern children’s attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions and behavioral patterns
• To be in harmony with their society
• Child-rearing is adaptive learning
Inuit Child Adaptation

• Adapt to the conditions of uncertainty in their environment
• Test the limits of danger
• Test their own individual abilities to cope with survival and the environment
Inuit Children

- They develop skills for solving problems quickly and spontaneously
- Children are brought up to constantly test physical skills to learn their own pain and endurance capacities
- Initiative for learning skills rests largely with the child and each is expected to find solutions to problems independently
- Play to learn
Inuit Parenting

• Frequent scolding may make a child hostile and impervious to the opinions of others; thus Inuit children are less physically restrained or verbally reprimanded

• Inuit children must learn to be cooperative and emotionally restrained
Culture is a Shared System of Norms & Values—Or is it?

• Norms—an ideal cultural pattern that influences behavior in a particular society

• Example of Norm in American culture: when two adults are introduced to each other they shake hands

• Norms can be contradictory and can be manipulated for personal and group needs
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Cultural Value</th>
<th>Frequency of Usage (number of instances referred to in answers)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Fairness</td>
<td>66</td>
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<td>Personal Responsibility, Freedom and Autonomy</td>
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<td>Equitable Economic Exchange</td>
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<td>Consideration for Others</td>
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<td>Meeting Social Norms/Making a Good Impression</td>
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Cultural Values

• An example of a value shared by many Americans is that humans can and should transform nature to meet human ends
• Human behavior may not be consistent with the values of its society
• Differentiated among individuals or groups within a society may be pronounced when values and beliefs are at issue
IS Culture Shared?

• More obvious in larger complex societies

• Subcultures—a system of perception, values, beliefs and customs that are significantly different from those of a larger dominant culture within the same society

• In U.S. social class is one basis of subcultures. Working class Whites and Afro Americans have more in common than they do with the middle class of both groups
Do Americans Share a Common Set of Beliefs

• Majority consider themselves Americans but do not necessarily share a common set of beliefs

• Some people believe that individual success in the U.S. is dependent on family and ethnic background thus producing inequality

• Different groups may participate in the same culture in different ways