

UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

LECTURE 2

INTRO TO CULTURAL
ANTHROPOLOGY

INDIVIDUALISM

AMERICAN CULTURE

- Americans may not fully appreciate their culture because of value placed on “the individual”
- Individualism itself is a distinctive *shared* value a feature of American Culture transmitted constantly in our daily lives.
- Enculturative agents—parents& grandparents insist we are all special

Culture Value

Individualism

- Certainly we all have distinctive features because we are individuals
- But we have other distinctive attributes because we belong to cultural groups
- American culture places high value on individualism
- Other cultures place priority on the group or the family

A COMPARISON

- A comparison of the United States with Brazil, Italy or virtually any Latin nations reveals striking contrasts between a national culture (American Culture) that discourages physical affection and national cultures (Brazil is one example) in which the opposite is true.

BRAZILIAN NATIONAL CULTURE

- Brazilians approach, touch, and kiss one another much more frequently than North Americans do.
- In personal encounters, the Brazilian characteristically moves closer while North Americans are apt to retreat.
- Such movements are products of years of exposure to particular cultural traditions.

DO YOU KISS YOUR FATHER?

- Middle class Brazilians teach their kids—boys and girls—to kiss every adult relative they see.
- Given size of Brazilian extended families, this can mean hundreds of people
- Women continue kissing all those people throughout their lives
- Men continue to kiss female relatives and friends, as well as their fathers, & uncles

DO YOU KISS YOUR BROTHER?

- Do you kiss your uncles, your grandfather?
- How about your mother, aunt and grandmother?
- The answers to these questions may differ between men and women, and for male and female relatives
- Whom we kiss, when, where and how often are rules shaped by our culture.

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

- Humans share *society*, organized life in groups with other animals—social animals—such as monkeys, wolves and ants
- Other animals, especially the *great Apes*, have rudimentary cultural abilities, BUT only *humans* have fully elaborate cultures—distinctive traditions and customs transmitted over the generations through learning and through language

WHAT IS CULTURE?

- The concept of culture has long been fundamental to anthropology.
- Culture focuses on those attributes people acquire not through biological inheritance but by growing-up in a particular society in which they are exposed to a specific cultural tradition

ENCULTURATION

- Is the process by which a child learns her or his culture
- Culture is transmitted in three direct ways
 - 1)direct teaching i.e., *don't pick your nose*
 - 2)observation i.e., *watch your father shave*
 - 3)unconscious absorption i.e., *waiting your turn*

CULTURE AS COMPUTER PROGRAM

- Culture as programs for governing, behavior, perceptions and interpretation.
- ***CULTURAL PROGRAMS*** are absorbed by people through enculturation in particular tradition
- People gradually internalize a previously established system of meaning and symbols, which guide their behavior and perceptions through out their lives

CULTURE IS LEARNED

- Everybody everywhere begins immediately, through a process of conscious and unconscious learning.
- Learning through interaction with others
- To internalize or incorporate a cultural tradition through the process of enculturation
- Culture is also directly taught and culture is learned through observations.

CULTURE IS SYMBOLIC

- Symbol a verbal (language) or non-verbal sign (traffic light) that arbitrarily and by convention stands for something else, with which it has no necessary or natural connection
- The term *pencil* stands for a particular writing tool. *BUT there is no necessary relationship between the term pencil and the object we call pencil*
- Convention—AGREED COMMON USAGE makes the term pencil and the object seem a natural connection

SYMBOL AND OBJECT IT SYMBOLIZES

- There need be no obvious, natural or necessary connection between the symbol and the thing it symbolizes
- The familiar pet that barks is no more naturally *a dog* than it is a “chien”, “Hund”, or “mbwa” the words for “dog” in French, German and Swahili
- Language is unique to homo sapiens

OR IS IT? DO APES HAVE LANGUAGE?

- Not biologically fit for human language
- Absence of voice box that enables speech in humans
- Have learned sign language.
- Transmit language to their young
- Can compose spontaneous sentences