

Culture, conceived as a system of competence shared in its broad design and deeper principles, and varying between individuals in its specificities, is then not all of what an individual knows and thinks and feels about his [or her] world. It is his [or her] theory of what his [or her] fellows know, believe, and mean, his [or her] theory of the code being followed, the game being played, in the society into which he [or she] was born. . . . It is this theory to which a native actor [or actress] refers in interpreting the unfamiliar or the ambiguous, in interacting with strangers (or supernaturals), and in other settings peripheral to the familiarity of mundane everyday life space; and with which he [or she] creates the stage on which the games of life are played. . . . But note that the actor's [or actress's] "theory" of his [or her] culture, like his [or her] theory of his [or her] language may be in large measure unconscious. Actors [or actresses] follow rules of which they are not consciously aware, and assume a world to be "out there" that they have in fact created with culturally shaped and shaded patterns of mind. We can recognize that not every individual shares precisely the same theory of the cultural code, that not every individual knows all the sectors of the culture . . . even though no one native actor [or actress] knows all the culture, and each has a variant version of the code. Culture in this view is ordered not simply as a collection of symbols fitted together by the analyst but as a system of knowledge, shaped and constrained by the way the human brain acquires, organizes, and processes information and creates "internal models of reality." (Keesing, 1974, p. 89)

Culture, therefore, is our implicit theories of the "game being played" in our societies.

We generally are not highly aware of the rules of the game being played, but we behave as though there was general agreement on the rules (Keesing, 1974). To illustrate, if we met a stranger from Mars and the Martian asked us to explain the rules of our cultures, we probably would not be able to describe many of the rules because we are not highly aware of them. We, nevertheless, use our theories of the game being played to interpret unfamiliar things we come across. We also use our theories in interacting with the other people we encounter in our societies. Members of cultures do not all share exactly the same view of their cultures. No one individual knows all aspects of a culture, and each person has a unique view of a culture. The theories that members of cultures share, however, overlap sufficiently so that they can coordinate their behavior in everyday life.

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