

CHAPTER 2

CULTURE

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Introduction

- A. There is Tylor's definition of "culture," which can be defined as, "that complex whole which includes, knowledge, belief, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."
- B. Enculturation is the process by which a child learns his or her culture.

II. What is Culture?

A. Culture is Learned

- 1. Cultural learning is unique to humans.
- 2. Cultural learning is the accumulation of knowledge about experiences and information not perceived directly by the organism, but transmitted through symbols.
 - a. Symbols are signs that have no necessary or natural connection with the things for which they stand.
- 3. Culture is learned through both direct instruction and through observation (both conscious and unconscious).
- 4. Anthropologists in the 19th century argued for the "psychic unity of man."
 - a. This doctrine acknowledges that individuals vary in their emotional and intellectual tendencies and capacities.
 - b. However, this doctrine asserted that all human populations share the same capacity for culture.

B. Culture is Shared

- 1. Culture is located and transmitted in groups.
- 2. The social transmission of culture tends to unify people by providing us with a common experience.
- 3. The commonality of experience in turn tends to generate a common understanding of future events.

C. Culture is Symbolic

- 1. The human ability to use symbols is the basis of culture (a symbol is something verbal or nonverbal within a particular language or culture that comes to stand for something else).
- 2. While human symbol use is overwhelmingly linguistic, a symbol is anything that is used to represent any other thing, when the relationship between the two is arbitrary (e.g. a flag).
- 3. Other primates have demonstrated rudimentary ability to use symbols, but only humans have elaborated cultural abilities – to learn, to communicate, to store, to process, and to use symbols.

E. Culture and Nature

- 1. Humans interact with cultural constructions of nature, rather than directly with nature itself.
- 2. Culture converts natural urges and acts into cultural customs.

F. Culture is All-Encompassing

- 1. The anthropological concept of culture is a model that includes all aspects of human group behavior.

2. Everyone is cultured, not just wealthy people with an elite education.

G. Culture is Integrated

1. A culture is a system: changes in one aspect will likely generate changes in other aspects.
2. Core values are sets of ideas, attitudes, and beliefs, which are basic in that they provide an organizational logic for the rest of the culture.

H. People Use Culture Creatively

1. Humans have the ability to avoid, manipulate, subvert and change the “rules” and patterns of their own cultures.
2. “Ideal culture” refers to normative descriptions of a culture given by its natives.
3. “Real culture” refers to “actual behavior as observed by an anthropologist.”
4. Culture is both public and individual because individuals internalize the meanings of public (cultural) messages.

I. Ethnocentrism, Cultural Relativism

1. Ethnocentrism is the use of values, ideals, and mores from one’s own culture to judge the behavior of someone from another culture.
 - a. Ethnocentrism is a cultural universal.
 - b. Ethnocentrism contributes to social solidarity.
2. Cultural Relativism asserts that cultural values are arbitrary, and therefore the values of one culture should not be used as standards to evaluate the behavior of persons from outside that culture.

III. Universality, Particularity, and Generality

A. Introduction

1. Cultural universals are features that are found in every culture.
2. Cultural generalities include features that are common to several, but not all human groups.
3. Cultural particularities are features that are unique to certain cultural traditions.

B. Universality

1. Cultural universals are those traits that distinguish *Homo sapiens* from other species.
2. Some biological universals include a long period of infant dependency, and a complex brain that enables us to use symbols, languages, and tools.
3. Some psychological universals include the common ways in which humans think, feel, and process information.
4. Some social universals include: incest taboos, life in groups, and food sharing.

C. Generality

1. Certain practices, beliefs, and the like may be held commonly by more than one culture, but not be universal; these are called “generalities.”
2. Diffusion and independent invention are two main sources of cultural generalities.
3. The nuclear family is a cultural generality since it is present in most, but not all societies.

D. Particularity

1. Cultural practices that are unique to any one culture are “cultural particulars.”
2. That these particulars may be of fundamental importance to the population is indicative of the need to study the sources of cultural diversity.

IV. Mechanisms of Cultural Change

A. Diffusion

1. Diffusion is defined as the spread of culture traits through borrowing from one culture to another; it has been a source of culture change throughout human history.

2. Diffusion can be direct (between two adjacent cultures) or indirect (across one or more intervening cultures or through some long distance medium).
 3. Diffusion can be forced (through warfare, colonization, or some other kind of domination) or unforced (*e.g.*, intermarriage, trade, and the like).
- B. Acculturation**
1. Acculturation is the exchange of features that results when groups come into continuous firsthand contact.
 2. Acculturation may occur in any or all groups engaged in such contact.
- C. Independent Invention**
1. Independent invention is defined as the creative innovation of new solutions to old and new problems.
 2. Cultural generalities are partly explained by the independent invention of similar responses to similar cultural and environmental circumstances.
 3. The independent invention of agriculture in both the Middle East and Mexico is cited as an example.