

INTRODUCTION TO ANTHROPOLOGY

CULTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

ANTH 101 - PROF. KURT REYMERS (DR. K)

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H.1. What is Culture?

1. What is culture?



a. Culture is learned, shared ideas and artifacts of a human population. It develops as a result of our natural human abilities to imagine and to imitate.

Q: Where does our ability to imitate and learn come from?

A: It evolved.

“Mirror Neurons”

VIDEO: NOVA Science NOW (PBS)

A system discovered in the brain may help explain why we humans are so naturally social, and why we develop culture.

See also [the work of neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandran here](#).

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H.1. What is Culture?

How can we better understand the idea of **culture**? **Culture is BOTH:**



i. Material culture – physical cultural artifacts.

Example: *paper money*

ii. Non-material culture – intangible, mental cultural meanings.

Example: *value* of a “dollar”



It is through **CULTURE** that thought and action come together.

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H.1. What is Culture?

b. Cultural Artifacts are:



the wide range of material human creations. These artifacts always *reflect underlying cultural values*.

This tension between material and non-material culture is realized in the balance between *form (design) and function (usefulness)* of an artifact.

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H.1. What is Culture?

c. Is culture unique to humans? No!



- [Chimps use tools!](#)
- [Great Ape Culture Finding Narrows Divide Between Humans](#)

Jan 3 2003, NPR Morning Edition

“Culture = innovation, followed by social transmission”

- [Ancient chimps 'used stone tools'](#)

Feb 13 2007, BBC News

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H.1. What is Culture?

1. What is culture?

“Culture is to people like water is to fish.”

It seems natural to us – but it is not. Culture ≠ Nature

d. Cultural Change: *Invention, Diffusion and Acculturation*

i. **Invention** can be **accidental** (unconscious, as with small improvements to the hand ax over thousands of years) or **deliberate** (as with the light bulb). **Discovery** and **innovation** are part of the inventive process.

ii. **Diffusion** happens when cultural elements **move from one culture to another**

iii. **Acculturation** is like **diffusion**, but **differences in cultural power** lead to a **forced adoption of cultural traits** (as with the Native American experience).



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H.2. Studying Culture

2. Studying Culture



a. Holistic Perspective

Characterized by **comprehension of the parts of something as intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole.**

Holism provides for the most complete understanding of the social relationships between and within cultures.

To be holistic is to be both **inclusive and diverse** in one's viewpoint on culture and biology.

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H.2. Studying Culture

b. Awareness of Ethnocentric Bias



Ethnocentric (adj.): to characterize by or base one's viewpoint on the attitude that one's own group is superior.

Why do human groups tend to be ethnocentric?

The cultural trait comes from two sources:

- 1) **Cultural**: diversity occurred after the rise of civilization
- 2) **Socio-psychological**: the perceived need for protection of cultural practices.

Relativism: the idea that cultures are unique from one another.

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H.2. Studying Culture: Ethnography

c. Ethnography



Ethnography is the firsthand personal study of a local cultural setting.

"Ethnographers try to understand the **whole** of a particular culture, not just fragments (e.g., only the economy, family or politics)." (Spradley 2008)

i. In pursuit of this holistic goal, ethnographers usually spend **an extended period of time living with the group** they are studying and employ many different techniques to gather information.

(Watch: [first contact with the Penan of Borneo](#))
(Watch:)

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H.2. Studying Culture: Ethnography

2. Studying Culture: Ethnography



ii. Early ethnographers conducted **research almost exclusively among small-scale, relatively isolated indigenous societies**, with simple technologies, politics and economies.

The cultures of **indigenous peoples** are increasingly **threatened by modernization**.
(Global Response)

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H.2. Studying Culture

d. **Ethnographic Fieldwork** involves the researcher taking part in the activities being observed.

Ethnographers are trained to be aware of and **record details from daily events**, the significance of which may not be apparent until much later.

Field notes are the traditional means of recording experiences.

Ethnographic goals:

i. **Achieving Realism:** The writer's goal was to produce an accurate, objective, scientific account of the study community.

ii. **Comparing Differences:** The writer's goal was to compare differences between culture in a non-biased way.



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H.2. Studying Culture

iii. Pros, Cons and Dangers



Positives (Pros)

- Access the culture
- Determine actual behavior
- Develop rapport
- Biculturalism

Problems (Cons)

- Language
- Lies
- Ethics
- Culture shock (*Maasai*) (*Mursi*)
- Witness effect
(cultural/individual bias)
- Heisenberg effect
(you affect what you are observing)
- "Going native"

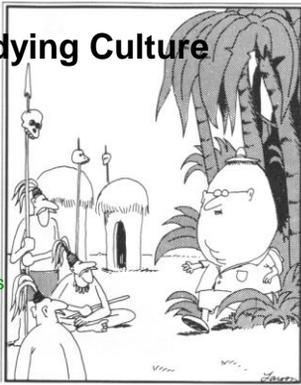


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iii. Dangers and Difficulties

- Faux Pas
- Group Hostility / Defense Reactions
- Poor Sanitation
- Environmental Stresses
- Health and Illness
- Civil Wars



Unwittingly, Palmer stepped out of the jungle and into headhunter folklore forever.

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H.2. Studying Culture

c. Three Generations of “Fieldworkers”



- Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942)** is generally considered the father of ethnography. He did “salvage ethnography,” recording cultural diversity that was threatened by westernization. *Trobriand Magic* was one of his more well read ethnographies.
- Margaret Mead (1901-1978)** Popularized the insights of fieldwork with a book titled *Coming of Age in Samoa* about culture and sexuality the peoples of the South Pacific islands.
- Napoleon Chagnon (living)** Famous for his exposing the *Yanomamö* natives of the Amazon rainforest in Venezuela to the modern world. Controversy has recently emerged.

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H.2. Studying Culture



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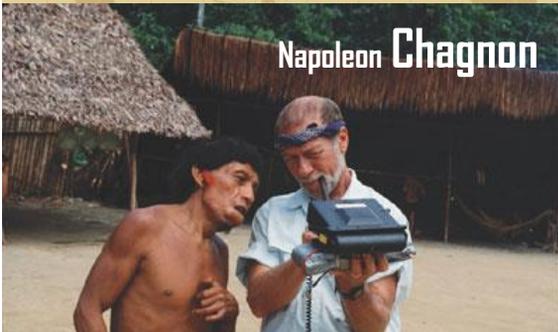
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Margaret Mead

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H.2. Studying Culture



Napoleon Chagnon

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