

CULTURE




QUESTION: WHAT IS CULTURE?

- ▶ Is it something that is innate in us (natural, born with the ability)?
- ▶ Instinctive? (Instinct: a biologically determined behaviour pattern common to all members of a species that predictably occurs whenever certain environmental conditions exist. Spider builds web triggered by need for protection / food.
- ▶ Or is it something learned (nurtured)?

THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE IN A CHANGING WORLD

- ▶ **Culture** refers to the knowledge, language, values, customs, and material objects that are passed from person to person and from one generation to the next in a human group or society.
- ▶ Since people cannot rely on instincts to survive, culture has been referred to as our “tool kit” for survival. Not only is culture essential for our individual survival and communications with others, but also it is fundamental for the survival of societies since it makes the actions of individuals intelligible to the group.
- ▶ As society becomes more diverse and international communication more frequent, the need for cross cultural understanding and mutual tolerance also increases.

BUT WHAT IS A 'SOCIETY'?

- ▶ A society is a large social grouping that occupies the same geographic territory and is subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations.
 - ▶ A society is made up of people. A culture is made up of ideas, behaviour, and material possessions. They are interdependent.
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MATERIAL AND NONMATERIAL CULTURE

- ▶ **Material culture** consists of the physical, or tangible creations that members of a society make, use, and share. Raw materials are transformed into material culture through **technology** — the knowledge, techniques, and tools that make it possible for people to transform resources into usable forms, and the knowledge and skills required to use these forms after they are developed.
- ▶ **Nonmaterial culture** consists of the abstract or intangible human creations of society that influence people's behaviour (e.g., language, beliefs, values, rules of behaviour, family patterns, and political systems).

CULTURAL UNIVERSALS:

- ▶ According to anthropologist George Murdock, **cultural universals** (he lists seventy) are customs and practices that occur across all societies. Murdock's categories included: appearance, activities, social institutions, and customary practices.
- ▶ While these customs and practices may be present in all cultures (since all humans must fulfill the same basic needs), their expression may vary from one group to another, and from one time to another within the same group.

9 CULTURAL UNIVERSALS / ELEMENTS COMMON TO MOST CULTURES MAY INCLUDE:

▶ 1. MATERIAL CULTURE:

- ▶ food, clothing, housing, transportation, tools

▶ 2. ARTS, PLAY, AND RECREATION:

- ▶ fine arts, drama, beauty

▶ 3. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION:

- ▶ societies, families, kinship systems

▶ 4. LANGUAGE AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

▶ 5. SOCIAL CONTROL:

- ▶ government systems, rewards and punishments

▶ 6. CONFLICT AND WARFARE:

- ▶ defence systems, practices of warfare, conflict, and conflict resolution

▶ 7. EDUCATION:

- ▶ formal and informal

▶ 8. WORLDVIEW:

- ▶ belief systems, religion, values

▶ 9. ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION:

- ▶ trade, production, labour, property, standard of living

NATURE OR NURTURE?

- ▶ From the sociological perspective, human behaviour is shaped from birth by the culture into which we are born (nurtured / learned). We learn about culture through interaction, observation, and imitation in order to participate as members of the group.
- ▶ We rely on culture because we are not born with the information we need to survive. People cannot rely on instincts to survive. Culture has been referred to as a “toolkit” for survival. Not only is culture essential for our individual survival and communications with others, but also it is fundamental for the survival of societies since it makes the actions of individuals intelligible to the group.

CULTURE QUESTION SET

