What Is Culture?

- Culture consists of abstract ideas, values, and perceptions of the world that inform and are reflected in people's behavior.
- Culture is shared by members of a society and produces behavior that is intelligible to other members of that society.
- Cultures are learned rather than inherited and the different parts of a culture function as an integrated whole.

Why Do Cultures Exist?

- Cultures provide a design for thought and action that help people survive the challenges of existence.
- A culture must satisfy the basic needs of those who live by its rules, and provide an orderly existence for the members of a society.
Ethnocentrism: Are Some Cultures Better Than Others?

- The human perspective is typically “ethnocentric”—believing that the ways of one’s own culture are the only proper ones.
- Crossing cultural boundaries, we discover that people in our own society are not unique in being ethnocentric.
- Anthropologists strive to understand each culture in its own right.

Culture Defined

- The values, beliefs, and perceptions of the world shared by members of a society, that they use to interpret experience and generate behavior, and that are reflected in their behavior.

Characteristics Of Culture

- Culture is shared.
- Culture is learned.
- Culture is based on symbols.
- Culture is integrated.
- Culture is dynamic.
Culture Is Learned

- All culture is learned rather than biologically inherited.
- The process of transmitting culture from one generation to the next is called enculturation.
- Through enculturation individuals learn the socially appropriate way to satisfy biologically determined needs.

Culture Is Shared

- Culture cannot exist without society.
- There are no known human societies that do not exhibit culture.
- All is not uniform within a culture; There is some difference between men's and women's roles in any human society.

Culture and Gender

- Significant numbers of infants are born each year whose genitalia do not conform to cultural expectations.
- Because only two genders are recognized, the usual reaction is gender assignment surgery to construct male or female genitalia.
Definitions
- World view: The way people interpret the world around them.
- Society: A group of interdependent people who share a common culture.
- Subculture: A distinctive set of standards and behavior patterns by which a group within a larger society operates.

Subculture: Amish
- By maintaining schools to instill Amish values in their children, prohibiting mechanized vehicles and equipment, and dressing in plain clothing, the Amish proclaim their own special identity.

Ethnic Group
- People who collectively and publicly identify themselves as a distinct group based on various cultural features such as shared ancestry and common origin, language, customs, and traditional beliefs.
Ethnic Groups of the Russian Federation

Culture Is Based on Symbols
- Symbols are signs, emblems, and other things that represent something else in a meaningful way.
- Culture is transmitted through ideas, emotions, and desires expressed in language.
- Through language, humans transmit culture from one generation to another.

Culture Is Integrated
- All aspects of a culture function as an integrated whole.
- A change in one part of a culture usually will affect other parts.
- A degree of harmony is necessary in any properly functioning culture, but complete harmony is not required.
The Barrel Model of Culture

- Every culture is an integrated system.
- There are functional relationships among the economic base (infrastructure), the social organization (social structure), and the ideology (superstructure).

Barrel Model

- Infrastructure: The economic foundation of a society, including its subsistence practices, and the tools and other material equipment used to make a living.
- Social Structure: The rule-governed relationships of individuals and groups within a society that hold it together.
- Superstructure: A society's shared sense of identity and worldview. The collective body of ideas, beliefs, and values by which a group of people makes sense of the world—its shape, challenges, and opportunities—and their place in it. This includes religion and national ideology.

Culture is Dynamic

- Cultures are dynamic systems that respond to motions and actions within and around them.
- When one element within the system shifts or changes, the entire system strives to adjust, just as it does when an outside force applies pressure.
- A culture must be flexible enough to allow such adjustments in the face of unstable or changing circumstances.
Culture and Adaptation

* In the United States, the principal source of fruits, vegetables, and fiber is the Central Valley of California, where irrigation works have made the desert bloom.
* As in Mesopotamia, evaporation concentrates salts in the water, but here pollution is made worse by fertilizers that accumulate in the soil and threaten to make the valley a wasteland.

Describing a Culture Without Bias

Anthropologists must:
1. Examine people's notion of the way their society ought to function.
2. Determine how people think they behave.
3. Compare these with how people actually do behave.

Three Components of Culture

* Cultural knowledge – world view
* Cultural behavior – the actual behavior
* Cultural artifact – what people make
Enculturation
- Passing cultural knowledge from one generation to the next

Functions of Culture
- Food and necessities
- Biological reproduction
- Getting new members
- Maintain order

Cultural universals
- Marriage
- Language
- Political/social systems
- Belief systems
- Art, music, dance
- Kinship
- Incest taboo
- Economic systems
- Technology
Why Cultures Change
- Environment they must cope with has changed.
- Intrusion of outsiders.
- Values have changed.

Three Mechanisms for Change
- Invention
- Innovation
- Diffusion

Culture and Change
- Pastoralists herd grazing animals, moving across vast territories in search of food often crossing unmarked international borders.
- No longer able to range through their traditional territories due to government restrictions on land use, these African herders and their cattle are hit hard when droughts occur.
Culture Loss
- Cultures are being lost due to globalization and forced change.
- Acculturation: a process in which members of one cultural group adopt the beliefs and behaviors of another group.
- Acculturation can be forced or voluntary.

Syncretism
- One response to acculturation is syncretism.
- Blending of cultures
  - Trobriand cricket

Scapegoating
- Some people whose needs are not readily met by society direct their frustrations against scapegoats, usually minorities.
- In Australia, Europe, and North America, such resentment fueled the rise of "skinheads" who express their hatred with Nazi symbols such as swastikas.
### Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativity

- **Ethnocentrism**: The belief that the ways of one's own culture are the only proper ones.
- **Cultural relativity**: The thesis that one must suspend judgment on other peoples’ practices in order to understand them in their own cultural terms.

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### Evaluating a Culture

Cultures can be evaluated according to:

- Nutritional status
- Physical and mental health of population
- Incidence of violence, crime and delinquency
- Demographic structure
- Stability and tranquility of domestic life