**What is culture?**

Key words, concepts and vocabulary

The core theme for this unit is socialisation and Identity. Within these themes the focus is on how individual and group behaviours and culture are learned and reinforced.

You will be expected to understand and use the following terms and concepts:

* Socialisation
* Culture and cultural diversity
* Cultural transmission
* Sub-culture
* Control
* Norms & values
* Social structures
* Status
* Sanctions
* Roles
* Identity
* Agencies of socialisation - primary (family) & secondary (media, religion, peer group, workplace and education)
* Social change
* Social inequality

## A culture consists of all of the shared products of human groups:

### Material Culture: physical objects that people create, for example, Clothing, buildings, cars, and technology.

### Nonmaterial Culture: abstract human creations such as norms, language, rules, and beliefs.

# Society

## A society is a group of mutually interdependent people who have organized in such a way as to share a common culture and feeling of unity.

## Therefore, a society is composed of both a culture and a social structure.

# Components of Culture

## Culture is both learned and shared.

## People within a society choose from among the same broad set of material and nonmaterial elements of culture in dealing with and making sense of their environment.

## All cultures have five basic components. These are symbols, language, values, norms, & physical objects.

# Symbols

## It is through symbols that we create our culture and communicate ideas among one another.

## A symbol is anything that “stands for” something else.

## Symbols may vary from culture to culture but all cultures communicate symbolically, through a variety of methods.

# Language

## Language may be the most important component of culture.

## Language is the organization of written or spoken symbols into a standardized system.

## We use language as our primary form of communication.

## People who do not speak the language of a particular society have great difficulty communicating with those people.

# Values

## Some people may argue that language is only useful because it allows us to express our values to one another.

## Values are shared beliefs about what is good or bad, right or wrong.

## The values of a group help to determine the character of its people.

# Norms

# ***All social groups create norms to enforce the cultural values.***

## Norms are the shared rules of conduct given a particular situation within a society.

## Norms are not laws but expectations of the people within a society.

## Norms that are important to a society are formalized into laws.

## A law is a written rule of conduct that is enacted and enforced by the government.

# **Examining Culture**

## Culture is dynamic, which means it is constantly changing instead of being static, which means unchanging.

Deviance

* The breaking of the normative codes of society is seen as deviance.
* Deviant behaviour is usually defined as being ‘mad’ or ‘bad’

# Cultural Universals

## Cultural Universals are general culture traits, thought to exist in all known cultures.

## The anthropologist, George Murdock, attempted to identify the common denominators of cultures and developed a list of over 70 cultural universals

### Cultural universals include: sports, cooking, courtship, division of labour, education, etiquette, funeral rites, family, language, etc.

### Ethnocentrism

### Ethnocentrism is the tendency to view one’s own culture and group as superior to all others.

### People in all societies are at times ethnocentric.

### When ethnocentrism is too extreme, cultural growth may stagnate. Limiting the number of immigrants into a society can cause this.

### Extreme ethnocentrism can also lead to conflicts such as wars.

# Cultural Relativism

## Cultural relativism is the belief that cultures should be judged by their own standards.

### Researchers attempt to understand cultural practices from the point of view of the people they are studying.

## Cultural relativism helps sociologists in understanding why people in different societies have different cultural norms.

# Subcultures

## When incompatibilities exist, culture or structure may change in order to make things more compatible. Due to this, subcultures may develop.

## Subcultures may develop by having some features in common with the larger culture.

## Subcultures are also distinct from the dominant culture. Examples would include different age groups, racial and ethnic groups, religious groups, geographic similarities, and people with common occupations, recreational interests, and economic situations.

#  Countercultures

## Some subcultures are in conflict with the larger group while others just appear different.

## Language and jargon can play an important part to this theory.

## Subcultures provide people with a feeling of belonging and allow for cultural adaptation to occur gradually within a society.

## Subcultures can however, erode society’s consensus.

## If a subculture is too different form the larger culture, conflict may occur.

Mainstream culture

* This is the culture of the majority of a society which is shared by most people e.g in the UK this would be common aspects of life such as going to work, eating with a knife and fork, getting married. People who belong to sub-cultures still behave in ways consistent with mainstream culture most of the time.

Popular Culture

* Everyone in a given society takes part in popular culture. This might include popular television programmes, soaps, reality tv, magazines, radio,This is said to be liked and enjoyed more by ordinary and working class people

High Culture

* All aspects of culture related to classics such as literature, opera, classical music, antiques, broadsheet newspapers, fine art, and modern art, ballet etc, this is mostly enjoyed more by middle class people and is said to be more worthy. Knowledge of high culture gives people cultural power.

Questions

1. Define the term culture giving examples
2. List some elements of culture
3. What is the difference between norms and values?
4. Give an examples of cultural diversity
5. Download the sheet on the Nayar tribe and complete the questions

**Transmitting Culture through Socialisation and Social Control**

The concept of socialisation assumes that although people may have biological drives they do not have animal instincts. If people had fixed patterns of biologically determined behaviour this would prevent different processes of socialisation taking place.

* Socialisation can be deliberate, or **formal**, for example, we are given instruction by parents or teachers in the skills we need, for example reading or cooking.
* Socialisation can also be unintentional, or **informal**. Events or situations have a significant effect upon us that was never planned.

In our society, a number of **agents of socialisation** can be identified. Some are identified below; there are others:

* Family
* Peer Group
* School
* Mass Media
* Work
* Religious groups and clubs

In terms of **HOW** this happens, we are taught correct norms and values for our culture by **imitating others**, people such as parents, family members, teachers, celebrities

**role model** behaviour and we copy it. Another important way we are socialised is through **positive and negative sanctions** (see next page) which are essentially rewards and punishments for correct/incorrect behaviour. This is a very powerful method of informal social control. Of course if we really break important rules of behaviour like committing a crime then formal methods such as police arrest would be used.

Sociologists identify three forms of socialisation into culture:

* **Primary Socialisation** is the socialisation of young children in the family in addition to learning essential skills such as language; children learn rules in relation to how to dress, customs and traditions that are appropriate to their role. Socialisation is informal at this stage, and based around personal relationships.
* **Secondary Socialisation** starts when a child starts school. During this phase children are judged according to universal criteria, such as exam success. Children also have formal socialisation in the teaching of skills that they will need to fulfil their adult roles, for example, in the labour market.
* **Adult Socialisation** is concerned with life long processes of learning and development. In addition, people who enter total institutions, such as prisons, boarding schools or some other closed institution, have to go through a process of re-socialisation into the norms and values of the institution.

Although socialisation is thought to produce a degree of conformity, it should be noted that the child is active in the socialisation process, in other words the child has **agency** - the ability to think of itself as a separate person and to act on that assumption.

Contemporary societies are culturally diverse and may contain a number of sub-cultures. A sub-culture is a group in society that has values, norms and mores that are different from those of mainstream culture. There is some considerable debate in sociology as to whether sub-cultures with values different from mainstream culture actually exist. This takes place within the **Functionalist** tradition. Even if they do not exist, the concept is a useful one. It can be used to describe the way that some social groups are expected to have norms, values and mores that are different from those of other social groups in the same society.

Note that although the processes of socialisation are the same for men and women, the intended outcomes of socialisation are quite different so that men and women have grown experiencing quite different norms, morals and values. Gender roles vary considerably in different societies and **Anne Oakley** in a range of books over many years has demonstrated that gender roles in our society are acquired via the process of socialisation rather than biologically determined.

“Indian emperor, Akbar (who ruled from 1542 to 1602), ordered a group of children be brought up without any instruction in language, to test the belief that they would eventually speak Hebrew, the language of God. The children were raised by deaf mutes. They developed no spoken language and communicated solely by gestures.”

McLeish 1993: 694

1. What do you understand by the term ‘Socialisation ‘?
2. Why did the children fail to develop spoken language?
3. How is culture transmitted from one generation to the next?

Websites

<http://anthro.palomar.edu/social/soc_1.htm>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feral_child>

**What happens if we break the rules?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Positive Informal Sanctions (Rewards - spontaneous display of approval) | Negative Informal Sanctions (Punishments - spontaneous display of disapproval) |
| Formal Positive Sanctions (Rewards - formalised public rewards and approval) | Negative Formal Sanctions (Punishments - institutionalised punishment or disapproval) |

**Identity formation and Social Class identity**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Forms of identity** | Definition | Your personal examples |
| **Social identity** | These are the characteristics that people tend to associate with various social roles such as gender, age, occupation and class or ethnicity |  |
| **Personal identity** | These are the elements of a person that make them individual. They can be markers such as name, adornments, habits, addresses and signatures |  |
| **Self** | This is an individual’s subjective sense of who and what s/he is. This sense of self is created in the tension between the individual and others’ perceptions of the individual |  |

What is the name for the process by which we learn the expectations of others of our personal behaviour?

**Functionalists** believe that the individual is less important than the society. Can you think of one example to explain this idea in simple terms?

**Marxists** believe that society trains the individual into an acceptance of the current economic structure. Society expects us to conform and to behave and it is intolerant of those who reject social structures. Give an example of one way in which difference is not tolerated in our society.

**Interpretivists** consider that it is the interaction between individuals and society that creates culture and a sense of self in the individual. People take on roles and play the part that they feel others expect of them in that role. Give some examples of roles we play in daily life.

Many identities are typified by the notion of ‘other’ (**Skeggs** and others); this is a rejected identity. For example, ‘I am man, because I reject everything that is feminine or gay’ or ‘I am Goth, because I am not chav’. Part of the chosen identity is rejection and hostility towards another similar identity. Few people would define themselves as English through fear and hatred of Patagonians – we choose people with whom we could be confused to reject and hate.

**Roles**

Interactionist sociologists such as **Mead** and **Goffman** suggested that we do not necessarily have one identity. Instead, we are actors in the drama of our own lives – the dramatalurgical model of social life. We take on different behaviours and different roles in differing situations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Role** | **Norms and values that you display in that situation** |
| **Child** |  |
| **Friend** |  |
| **Student** |  |
| **Worker** |  |

Some young people manage a variety of roles and behaviours, so a dangerous Gangsta may be really nice to his Mother and an excellent father to his children.

Sometimes roles conflict, a good worker may not make a good parent. There will be a conflict of interest between being a good employee and making a career, whilst at the same time, you have to care for children.

**Social Class Identity**

1. **List examples of characteristics of these classes**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Upper Class | Middle Class | Working Class | Underclass |
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1. **Write a paragraph on how at least two agents of socialisation affect class identity.**

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