

The concept of culture

- There are many definitions of the word “Culture”
- Derives from the Latin “Colere” – Cultivate, to settle, e.g. agriculture, horticulture
- Culture is developed within the individual as well as the outside environment
- It is continually changing and dynamic
- Culture is reflected in communication patterns
- Culture is way of acting, a way of behaving
- Culture is a collective phenomenon
- People who grow up in similar environment tend to share common attitudes and behave in similar ways
- Culture is not inherited, it is learned

CULTURE

WHAT IS CULTURE?

The concept of culture is fundamental in anthropology. Well over a century ago, in his book *Primitive Culture*, the British anthropologist Sir Edward Tylor proposed that cultures—systems of human behavior and thought—obey natural laws and therefore can be studied scientifically. Tylor’s definition of culture still offers an overview of the subject matter of anthropology, and it is widely quoted: “Culture . . . is 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” (Tylor 1871/1958, p. 1). The crucial phrase here is “acquired . . . as a member of society.” Tylor’s definition focuses on attributes that

people acquire not through biological inheritance but by growing up in a particular society where they are exposed to a specific cultural tradition. Enculturation is the process by which a child learns his or her culture.

The web of ways of living, behaviors, beliefs, values, customs, aesthetic standards, social institutions and styles of communication which a group of people have developed to maintain its survival in a particular physical and human environment. Its pervasive binding force belongs to a group of people who identify themselves as “Us”. Culture is a non-evaluative term, neither good nor bad

Forms of culture

Material Culture – formed by the physical objects that people create

- Cars, clothing, books, buildings, computers
- Archeologists refer to these items as artifacts

Non-material Culture – abstract human creations (can't touch it)

- Language, family patterns, work practices, political and economic systems

Characterizes of culture

- **Functional:** each culture has a function to perform; its purpose is to provide guidelines for behavior of a group of people
- **Social Phenomenon:** human beings create culture; culture results from human interaction and is unique to human society
- **Prescriptive:** culture prescribes (sets down or imposes) rules of social behavior
- **Learned:** culture is not inherited; it is learned from other members of the society

- **Arbitrary:** cultural practices and behaviors are subject to judgment. Certain behaviors are acceptable in one culture and not acceptable in other culture
- **Value Laden:** culture provides values and tells people what is right and wrong
- **Facilitates Communication:** culture facilitates verbal and nonverbal communication
- **Adaptive/ Dynamic:** culture is constantly changing to adjust to new situation and environment; it changes as society changes and develops
- **Long Term:** culture is developed thousands of years ago and it was accumulated by human beings in the course of time and is the sum of acquired experience and knowledge
- **Satisfy Needs:** culture helps to satisfy the needs of the members of a society by offering direction and guidance

(Source: Reisinger, 2003, p.14)

1. Culture, which is distinctive to humanity, refers to customary behavior and beliefs that are transmitted through enculturation. Culture rests on the human capacity for cultural learning. Culture encompasses rules for conduct internalized in human beings, which lead them to think and act in characteristic ways.
2. Although other animals learn, only humans have cultural learning, dependent on symbols. Humans think symbolically—arbitrarily bestowing meaning on things and events. By convention, a symbol stands for something with which it has no necessary or natural relation. Symbols have special meaning for people who share memories, values, and beliefs because of common enculturation. People absorb cultural lessons consciously and unconsciously.

3. Cultural traditions mold biologically based desires and needs in particular directions. Everyone is cultured, not just people with elite educations. Cultures may be integrated and patterned through economic and social forces, key symbols, and core values. Cultural rules don't rigidly dictate our behavior. There is room for creativity, flexibility, diversity, and disagreement within societies. Cultural means of adaptation have been crucial in human evolution. Aspects of culture also can be maladaptive.