CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

# 

**PSYCHOLOGY AND CULTURE**

**Psychological Development**

Anthropologists are interested in the psychological differences and similarities between societies and cultures of the world

Cultural Anthropologists reject stereotypes based on hasty ethnocentric judgments

**Anthropological Queries in Psychology**

The major questions of relevance to cultural anthropologists attempting to understand the linkage between different cultures and what they can reveal about the human personality are:

* Do all human beings develop psychologically in the same way?
* What explains the psychological differences in personality characteristics from one society to another?
* How do people in different societies conceive of personality and psychological development?
* What types of cultural variations may be explained due to cultural factors?

**Emotional Development**

Early research in anthropology was concerned mainly with supposedly universal stages of emotional development which seems to be affected by cultural differences.

*Margaret Mead* found Samoan girls were much less rebellious or emotional turmoil than those in westernsocieties. In western societies, adolescence is a time of turmoil that helps prepare emotionally for independence.

**Psychological Universals**

The ability to make binary contrasts, order phenomenon, plan for the future, and have an understanding of the world are universal psychological traits. All people have a concept of the self, they can empathize with others and feel and recognize emotions in others.

**Cognition and Culture**

Recent research on psychological universals focuses on cognitive, or intellectual, development. For example, it considers how different cultures acquire thinking habits such as formal-operation notions, which enable a person to think of the possible outcomes of a hypothetical situation

In looking for universals, many researchers have discovered some apparent differences. Yet most tests used in anthropological research favors thinking patterns taught in formal schools in Western cultures.

**Cross-Cultural Variations**

Instead of focusing on uniqueness, anthropologists look at psychological differences found within and between different cultures

Researchers focus on child rearing practices to account for observable personality differences.

Some anthropologists believe that child rearing practices are adaptive and societies produce personalities according to their requirements (obedience, self-reliance, etc.)

**Useful Terms**

**Universal:** common in all cultures

**Formal schools***:*schools organized by the public or private sector, but with a standardized curriculum andprofessional teaching staff

**Variations***:*differences

**Rearing***:*bringing up

**Intellectual***:*concerning the intellect and the process of thinking

**Suggested Readings**

Students are advised to read the following chapters to develop a better understanding of the various principals highlighted in this hand-out:

Chapter 24 in ‘*Anthropology’ by Ember and Pergrine*

**Socialization**

Socialization is the term that psychologists and anthropologists use to describe the development of, through the influence of parents and others, of patterns of behavior in children that conform to cultural expectations.

**Direct and Indirect Socialization**

Socialization takes place both directly and indirectly. Indirectly, the degree to which parents like children, the kinds of work children are asked to do and whether children go to school may at least partially influence how children develop psychologically.

**Origin of Customs**

Anthropologists not only seek to understand the link between personality traits and customs, but also how customs were themselves developed. Some anthropologists believe that societies produce the kind of customs best suited for undertaking activities necessary for the survival of society

**Personality Types**

Several anthropologists have tried to describe the influence of culture on personality. In the early 1950's, for example, David Riesman proposed that there are three common types of personalities around the world.

1. The *tradition-oriented personality* places a strong emphasis on doing things the same way that they have always been done. Individuals with this sort of personality are less likely to try new things and to seek new experiences.
2. Those who have *inner-directed personalities* are guilt oriented. That is to say, their behavior is strongly controlled by their conscience. As a result, there is little need for police to make sure that they obey the law. These individuals monitor themselves. If they break the law, they are likely to turn themselves in for punishment.
3. In contrast, people with *other-directed personalities* have ambiguous feelings about right and wrong. When they deviate from a societal norm, they usually don't feel guilty. However, if they are caught in the act or exposed publicly, they are likely to feel shame.

**Abnormal Behavior**

Just as there are cross-cultural variations in ‘normal behavior’, there are also variations in ‘abnormal behavior’. Abnormality is relative to a degree and a culture’s ideas about mental illness and how to deal with it can also vary.

**Applied Perspective**

Anthropologists are interested in understanding the possible cause of psychological differences and the possible consequences of psychological variation.

Anthropologists are particularly interested in how psychological characteristics may help explain statistical associations between various aspects of culture.

**Projective Testing**

People tend to project their feelings, ideas and concerns onto ambiguous realities.

In Thematic Appreciation Tests subjects are shown vague drawings and asked to interpret them by projecting their own personalities. An aggressive person may see a weapon in a vague drawing, whereas a more industrious person may visualize a more productive tool in the same vague drawing.

**Useful Terms**

**Ambiguous***:*unclear or vague

**Variation***:*differences

**Socialization:** the process of learning behavior

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**IDEOLOGY AND CULTURE**

**Ideology**

An ideology is a collection of ideas. An ideology can be thought of as a comprehensive vision, as a way of looking at things Ideology can also be seen as a set of ideas proposed by the dominant class of a society to all members of this society.

For example, different types of gender ideologies would describe what roles are expected of women and men in a society. The ideology of economic liberalization could be seen to particularly promote the interests of the business classes.

***Ideology in Everyday Life***

Every society has an ideology that forms the basis of the public opinion or common sense, a basis that usually remains invisible to most people within the society. This dominant ideology appears as ‘neutral’, while all others that differ from the norm are often seen as radical, no matter what the actual circumstances may be.

**Influencing Ideology**

Organizations that strive for power influence the ideology of a society to provide a favorable environment for them. Political organizations (governments included) and other groups (e.g. lobbyists) try to influence people by broadcasting their opinions, which is the reason why so often many people in a society seem to think alike.

A certain ethic usually forms the basis of an ideology. Ideology studied as ideology (rather than examples of specific ideologies) has been carried out under the name systematic ideology. There are many different kinds of ideology: political, social, epistemological, ethical.

The popularity of an ideology is in part due to the influence of moral entrepreneurs, who sometimes act in their own interests. A political ideology is the body of ideals, principles, doctrine, myth or symbols of a social movement, institution, class, or large group that references some political and cultural plan. It can be a construct of political thought, often defining political parties and their policy.

**Hegemony**

When most people in a society think alike about certain matters, or even forget that there are alternatives to the current state of affairs, we arrive at the concept of Hegemony, about which the philosopher Antonio Gramsci wrote. The much smaller-scale concept of groupthink also owes something to his work.

The ideologies of the dominant class of a society are proposed to all members of that society in order to make the ruling class' interests appear to be the interests of all, and thereby achieve hegemony. To reach this goal, ideology makes use of a special type of discourse: the lacunar discourse.

A number of propositions, which are never untrue, suggest a number of other propositions, which are. In this way, the essence of the lacunar discourse is what is *not* told (but is suggested).

**Epistemological ideologies**

Even when the challenging of existing beliefs is encouraged, as in science, the dominant paradigm or mindset can prevent certain challenges, theories or experiments from being advanced.

The philosophy of science mostly concerns itself with reducing the impact of these prior ideologies so that science can proceed with its primary task, which is (according to science) to create knowledge.

There are critics who view science as an ideology itself, called scientism. Some scientists respond that, while the scientific method is itself an ideology, as it is a collection of ideas, there is nothing particularly wrong or bad about it.

Other critics point out that while science itself is not a misleading ideology, there are some fields of study within science that are misleading. Two examples discussed here are in the fields of ecology and economics.

**Useful Terms**

**Discourse:** discussion or dialogue

**Proposition:** proposal or plan

**Paradigm:** standard, pattern or example

**Doctrine:** set of guidelines

**Comprehensive**: complete, all-inclusive

**Ecology***:*concerning the species found in the natural environment

**Moral entrepreneurs:** those who make up new morals according to their cultural needs

**Political ideologies**

In social studies, a political ideology is a set of ideas and principles that explain how the society should work, and offer the blueprint for a certain social order. A political ideology largely concerns itself with how to allocate power and to what ends it should be used.

For example, one of the most influential and well-defined political ideologies of the 20th century was communism, based on the original formulations of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Communism is a term that can refer to one of several things: a certain social system, an ideology which supports that system, or a political movement that wishes to implement that system.

As a social system, communism is a type of egalitarian society with no state, no private property and no social classes. In communism, all property is owned by the community as a whole, and all people enjoy equal social and economic status. Perhaps the best known principle of a communist society is "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need".

As an ideology, communism is synonymous for Marxism and its various derivatives (most notably Marxism-Leninism). Among other things, Marxism claims that human society has gone through various stages of development throughout its history, and that capitalism is the current stage we are going through. The next stage will be socialism, and the one after that will be communism. Therefore, it should be noted that communists do not seek to establish communism right away; they seek to establish *socialism* first, which is to be followed by communism at some point in the future.

Other examples of ideologies include: anarchism, capitalism, corporate liberalism, fascism, monarchism, nationalism, fascism, conservativism and social-democracy.

**Economic Ideology**

Karl Marx proposed a *base/superstructure* model of society. The *base* refers to the means of production of society. The *superstructure* is formed on top of the base, and comprises that society's ideology, as well as its legal system, political system, and religions.

Marx proposed that the base determines the superstructure. It is the ruling class that controls the society's means of production - and thus the superstructure of society, including its ideology, will be determined according to what is in the ruling class' best interests. On the other hand, critics of the Marxist approach feel that it attributes too much importance to economic factors in influencing society.

This is far from the only theory of economics to be raised to ideology status - some notable economically-based ideologies include mercantilism, Social Darwinism, communism, laissez-faire economics, and "free trade".

There are also current theories of safe trade and fair trade calling for a revision in terms of trade which can be seen as ideologies. These ideologies call for a revision of rules based on which trade between developed and developing countries takes place.

**Interaction between Legal and Economic Ideologies**

Ideologies often interact with, and influence, each other in the real world. Consider for example, the statement 'All are equal before the law', which is a theory behind current legal systems, suggests that all

people may be of equal worth or have equal 'opportunities'. This is not true, because the concept of private property over the means of production results in some people being able to own more (*much* more) than others, and their property brings power and influence (the rich can afford better lawyers, among other things, and this puts in question the principle of equality before the law).

**Useful Terms**

**Fair trade** – the notion that all countries should be given a fair price for the products they export throughinternational trade

**Terms of trade** – the price which products of different countries fetch in international trade

**Means of production** – these include land, labor, capital investments required to produce something.

**Inevitable** - unavoidable

**Synonymous** – another term carrying the same meaning