

Culture

Ryan Cragun – Summer, 2005

What is 'culture'?

- The meanings given to the objects, symbols, norms, values, and beliefs that pervade social life.
- Is it something you can 'have'?
 - evolving definition
- High culture vs. 'low' culture?
- Material culture?
- Micro and macro understandings
- How does it extend relationships?
 - e.g., father vs. other

Components of Culture

- Symbols – anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share culture
- Language – a system of symbols that allows people to communicate with one another
- Values and beliefs
 - Values – culturally defined standards by which people assess desirability, goodness, and beauty and that serve as broad guidelines for social living
 - Beliefs – specific statements that people hold to be true
- Norms – rules and expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members (more on this when we look at deviance)

Cultural Universals

- The Family
- Funeral Rites
- Smiling and Humor
- Deviance

Extensions of Culture

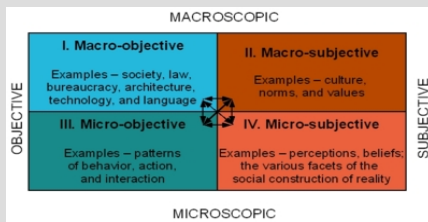
- Subculture – cultural patterns that set apart some segment of a society's population
- Multiculturalism – promotion of equality among cultural traditions
 - If we emphasize difference...
 - If we ignore difference...
- Counterculture – cultural patterns that strongly oppose those widely accepted within a society

Theories of Culture

- Structural-Functionalism - stability
 - Culture is a complex strategy for meeting human needs.
 - Ignores cultural diversity
- Social-Conflict Analysis - change
 - Culture and inequality; any cultural trait benefits some members of society at the expense of others
 - Understates the ways in which cultural patterns integrate members of society
- Sociobiology and Symbolic Interactionism
 - Explores how human biology affects how culture is created; cultural universals reflect the necessities of continued life
 - Non-eugenicist; lack of evidence?

Ritzer on Culture

- How does he understand it?



Cultural Change

- Diffusion
- Acculturation
- Assimilation
- Origin of culture?
- What about a global culture?

Culture of Fear

- What is he saying about fear?
- To what does he attribute the pervasiveness of fear in society?
- Media
- Politicians
- Capitalists
- How dangerous are roads from road rage?
- Are campuses turning people into automatons?
- Why is crime so pervasive in the news?

Class Questions