If you haven’t sent me a photo yet, remember to do so – “a340-11f-1-SimpsonBart.jpg”

This and parts of the next couple of classes is largely condensed from my Intro to Cultural Anthropology course

apologies to those who have already seen this material, but I want to get everyone onto the same page with these basic ideas

Kluckhohn, Queer Customs

the language of Kluckhohn’s article is a bit dated

written right after WWII, hence references to a Japanese Bansai charge and relocation camps.

but we can overlook that because at the time, they were standard

"man", "mankind", "he" in every case

“primitive tribes” p. 10

Basically explaining the concept of culture

What is culture?

Kluckhohn gives at least 8 definitions or descriptions (or more, depending on what you count), plus at least one attributed to someone else (Ruth Benedict)

“the total lifeway of people, the social legacy the individual acquires from his group” p. 6

“that part of the environment that is the creation of man” p. 6

that is, the material culture we surround ourselves with, plus…

the shared ideas that affect how we perceive and interact with our environment

interpretations of things

rules of behavior and social relations, etc.

“a kind of blueprint for all of life’s activities” p. 6

“a people’s design for living” p. 7

“a way of thinking, feeling, believing. It is the group’s knowledge stored up (in memories of men; in books and objects) for future use” p. 9

humans are born with less instinctive behavior than other animals, more ability to learn to do different things p. 9

learned culture replaces instinct among humans p. 9

“the distinctive ways of life of ... a group of people” p. 9

“our social legacy, as contrasted with our organic heredity” p. 10

all humans experience the same general biological facts and events

but different cultures place different meanings on them

which then call for different interpretations and responses

hunger

puberty

death

sex
“a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men” p. 11

“Culture is like a map. ... If you know a culture, you will know your way around in the life of a society” p. 11

A different approach to defining culture (not from the Kluckhohn article)
- Anthropologists generally agree that culture has the following characteristics: It is…
  - **learned**
    - any normal child learns the culture in which he or she is raised
    - Kluckhohn's example of the child of American missionaries raised in China
      - the child looked Euro-American, but thought and acted like a Chinese person
    - adults can learn other cultures too, but adults take longer to adopt a culture, and may never become fully acculturated
  - **shared**
    - that is, numerous people hold roughly the same set of beliefs, values, etc.
    - if beliefs, etc. are not shared, then they are just individual quirks, not culture
  - **symbolic**
    - symbols are things that refer to other things
      - A red octagon outlined in white refers to the concept “stop”
      - the symbol “means” something else
    - saying that culture is symbolic means that culture is essentially about *meanings* that people place onto, or read into, the world
      - a black and silver sweatshirt with certain designs on it *means* “the wearer is an Oakland Raiders fan, passionate about football, etc.”
      - being male *means* that the male person should act in certain ways, and not in others
    - these meanings, interpretations, or ideas are the essence of culture
  - **integrated**
    - that is, its many parts fit together in a generally (but not necessarily completely) coherent, logical way
    - two senses of integration (at least!)
      - **organizational** integration
        - culture is a system of interconnected parts
        - each affecting, and affected by, many others
          - systems of production, exchange, and consumption
          - systems of social relations, family, marriage, class, etc.
          - systems of religious belief and practices
          - and many others
        - changing one aspect generally creates ripples of change through other aspects
      - **cognitive** integration
        - the different ideas, values, beliefs, etc. of the culture fit together logically
        - they make sense with each other
        - they often share common some broad, common themes, underlying logic, and values and beliefs
examples:
− in some cultures, a strong value placed on respect or honor may influence many aspects of the culture
− or an emphasis on individualism
− or an emphasis on conformity and the good of the group… etc.
− practical (often put as "adaptive" in the ecological or evolutionary sense)
− that is, many aspects of culture are ways of dealing with practical problems
  − of the physical environment
  − like getting food and keeping warm and dry
  − of the social environment
  − like resolving conflicts, forming a family, etc.
− a culture’s the ways of dealing with these problems may not always be effective, but they are meant to be
  − naturalized and unconsidered
    − the meanings that culture places on the world seem natural, normal, inherently human
    − most people do not consciously question or check their cultures values and beliefs
    − people just assume that they are true facts of nature
− In addition, culture is arbitrary
  − not established by fixed features of the real world
  − arbitrary ideas that differ from culture to culture
  − as in Kluckhohn's example of Native Americans of the same clan and white US brother and sister both being repelled at physical contact
  − “equally nonrational responses, culturally standardized unreason” p. 8
  − “arbitrary” does not mean “random”
    − arbitrary beliefs or ideas are probably often present for a reason
  − so the question for anthropologists is: why does a given culture have its arbitrary beliefs, and not others, which are equally possible?
  − where did those ideas come from?
  − what function do they serve?
  − who benefits from these ideas, and what do they do to preserve them?
  − why do people continue to believe them, or why do they change?
− Culture’s influence is profound: even individualists know and mostly follow their culture’s prescriptions
  − of dress, eating, behavior, etc.
  − even what an individualist resists, he or she must share enough to understand and manipulate
− Culture as a system of meanings
  − we react not to things, but the meanings we put on them
  − your response to someone who gets out of a BMW, vs. someone who gets out of a Toyota Corolla
  − We also react to systems of meanings, or relations between things
    − school desks are appropriate in classrooms, but not in living rooms
    − you would be surprised to come into a classroom and find sofas and lazy-boy recliners
− and your behavior would probably be different as a result
− These meanings, and thus the behaviors that result from them, are **socially constructed**, or **culturally constructed**
  − Not “out there” in the world
  − Rather, created in people’s heads (“constructed”)
  − Through social interactions (“socially”)
  − And to fit with other aspects of the culture (“culturally”)
  − **Social constructs** or **cultural constructs** are shared by members of the culture
  − A sort of unplanned consensus
  − Therefore **arbitrary**, and variable from culture to culture
− One goal of anthropology: to show how given cultures are consistent, ordered, understandable, make sense in their context
− Anthropologists ask “why do some groups of people assign certain meanings to things, and other groups of people assign different ones?”
  − that is, “why do some people see things this way, and not some other way?”
  − And then “why do WE see things this way, and not some other way?”
  − that is, anthropology encourages us to look at our own culture from outside
− often looking for **unconscious assumptions**
  − discovering assumptions and figuring out how they fit into the rest of the way people think
  − gives a clearer, more complete understanding of the culture - of the meanings that lead people to behave in certain ways
  − by finding OTHERs’ assumptions, we highlight our own, different assumptions about the same things
− one goal in this class: to see how cultures affect how individuals and groups interact, and how cultures are in turn affected by that interaction
  − what are the differing meanings assigned by the different cultures to the same things?
  − why?
  − what effect do these different meanings have on how people act and interact?
− **Useful concepts**
  − **ethnocentrism**
  − the assumption that one’s own culture is normal, natural, good
  − so practices that differ from those of one’s own culture are misguided, ignorant, backwards, wrong
  − without attempting to understand them in their own context
  − example: American tourists’ responses to vertical furrows in the Andean highlands
  − **cultural relativism**
  − the view that cultures and practices must be understood in their own context
  − assumes that people’s beliefs and actions generally make sense to them in their cultural context and situation
  − that we get the best understanding of people, practices, and beliefs by understanding them relative to their culture and situation
  − not relative to our own culture, as if that were some absolute standard
  − seeks to understand why and how others’ practices make sense to them
- **ethical relativism**
  - the idea that morality (right and wrong) are defined relative to each culture
  - that we cannot judge things to be right or wrong outside of their cultural context
  - this is an extreme position
    - one can be a cultural relativist without being an ethical relativist
    - you can strive to understand the practices of another culture without necessarily approving of them

- **naïve realism**: the assumption that some *arbitrary cultural construct* is actually a universal, real fact of life
  - the assumption that the concept or way of behaving applies to all people, is a feature of the real world
  - rather than being arbitrary and socially constructed

- Examples of cultures as systems of arbitrary meanings: different meanings about food
  - every culture defines different things as edible or not
  - we respond to the meanings our culture teaches us to place on potential foods, not simply to the actual food itself
    - as in people who vomit when they are told they have eaten something they consider inedible, like rattlesnake meat (in Kluckhohn article, p. 7)
  - other examples of responding to culturally constructed meanings
    - cuy (Guinea pig) in Peru
    - pumpkin pie in Peru
    - point: what we consider to be edible is determined by the meanings placed on the items, not their taste, nutrition, etc.
      - there is nothing inherent in rattlesnake, cuy, or pumpkin pie that makes people sick
      - is it only the strength of the culturally constructed meanings that does that

- Another kind of evidence of how strongly we are affected by our culture: the existence of culture shock
  - Culture shock is a psychological syndrome
    - **syndrome**: a characteristic set of specific symptoms
  - caused by the stress of being immersed in a foreign culture
    - it usually takes numerous days, weeks, or longer to develop
    - the stress is strongest when the person has little or no contact with others of his or her own culture
  - Many specific aspects of the foreign culture contribute to this stress
    - strange food
    - new sights and smells
      - the pork section of the Orcotuna market
    - incomprehensible language
    - inexplicable strange behavior
      - the Tongan official wiggling his eyebrows
    - and strange responses to your behavior
      - the social cues you expect are missing or don’t work
      - the people have different values or interpretations of things
The characteristic symptoms include:
- anger, frustration, irritability, anger, hostility, depression
- for unease to inexplicable rages
- constant complaining about the people, food customs…
- and an idealized recollection of how great it is at home
- paranoia
- fear of being cheated, robbed, taken advantage of
- withdrawal
- seeking the familiar
- seeking compatriots
- seeking familiar foods
- focussing on returning home

Some examples of the many stresses that contribute to culture shock
- unfamiliar responses to sensory impressions such as smells, tastes
  - people of other cultures associate different meanings with many smells, tastes, etc
    - the person suffering culture shock is stressed because he or she cannot understand the locals’ responses
    - and the local people make it clear that the visitor is responding inappropriately
  - ex: flies
    - North Americans associate with filth, unhealthy conditions
    - Tswana associate flies with wealth
  - ex: body odor
    - North Americans’ react to body odor in part because we associate it with bad hygiene and thus moral weakness
    - Tswana don’t; bathing would waste water
  - ex: the “Sonoma aroma”
    - when you first get here and smell it, you might be disgusted – we are surrounded by acres of decomposing s**t
    - but people who are used to it perceive agriculture, productive activity, thriving society…
- what we learn:
  - that our seemingly natural interpretations of basic sensations are not universal and necessary, but instead are culturally determined
  - we learn some specifics about the other culture’s values, beliefs, ways of thinking
  - and by contrast, this leads us to think about our own responses to those things
- many, many others: confusing language, unfamiliar gender roles, different morals, and on and on

In general, what we learn from culture shock
- the mere existence of culture shock as a psychological disorder shows how deeply we are shaped by our own culture
- otherwise we wouldn’t have such an extreme response when immersed in a different culture
we learn that our perceptions, way of speaking, ideas about food, gender roles, morality, and many other things are not simply real, objective, and natural
- but rather are very much culturally determined: they are arbitrary cultural constructs
- because other cultures can have such different constructs

Point: culture is both
- arbitrary
- socially constructed, rather than part of the real, natural world
- and profoundly influential in how people
  - perceive the world
  - think about the world
  - and behave

- so naturally people of different cultures tend to misunderstand each other
  - naturally they assume that the other is wrong, abnormal, primitive, decadent…
  - getting around this requires learning the other’s point of view
  - harder than it sounds, but usually possible