



Language and Culture

**University of Salahaddin/ College of Education
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Fundamentals of Culture

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The lecture outline

Part One – Review of the previous lectures

- a) Culture as an Iceberg?
- b) Linking Values to Behavior
- c) Universal, Cultural or Personal
- d) The Process of Cultural Conditioning
- e) In the Mind of the Beholder

Part Two - Fundamentals of Culture

- a) The Concept of the Self (Individualism & Collectivism)
- b) Personal vs. Societal Obligations (Universalism & Particularism)

Culture as an Iceberg

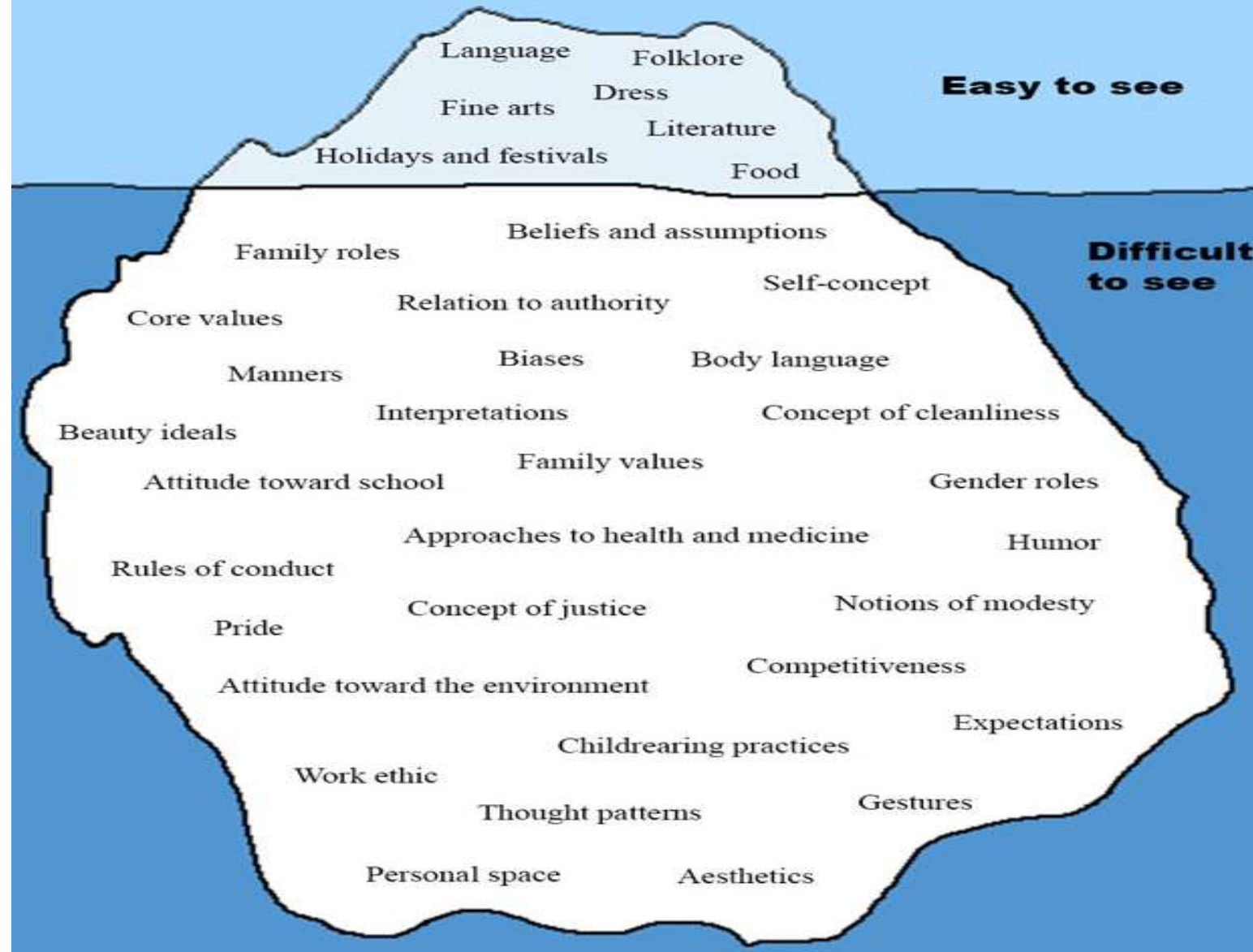


Culture as an Iceberg

Culture has been aptly compared to an iceberg. Just as an iceberg has a visible section above the waterline, and a larger, invisible section below the water line, so culture has some aspects that are observable and others that can only be suspected, imagined, or intuited.

Also like an iceberg, that part of culture that is visible (observable behavior) is only a small part of a much bigger whole.

The Cultural Iceberg



The invisible part of the iceberg

The more powerful and larger part of the iceberg and culture is beneath the surface and invisible (90-95%). These are values and norms, religious beliefs, worldviews, motivations, attitudes and expectations.

Invisible elements of culture that are below the surface, are explanations and sources for the visible features of culture (10-5%), and play a more important role when communicating with other cultures.

Practice:

Specify which of the following cultural features are visible or invisible.

1. facial expressions
2. religious beliefs
3. religious rituals
4. importance of time
5. paintings
6. values
7. literature
8. childraising beliefs
9. concept of leadership
10. gestures
11. holiday customs
12. concept of fairness
13. nature of friendship
14. notions of modesty
15. foods
16. eating habits
17. understanding of the natural world
18. concept of self
19. work ethic
20. concept of beauty
21. music
22. styles of dress
23. general world view
24. concept of personal space
25. rules of social etiquette

Linking Values to Behaviour

To understand where behavior comes from—to understand why people behave the way they do—means learning about values and beliefs. The behavior of people from another culture may seem strange to you, but it probably makes sense to them, and vice versa.

The reason any behavior makes sense is simply because it is consistent with what a given person believes in or holds. Conversely, when we say that what someone has done “makes no sense,” what we mean is that that action contradicts what we believe that person feels or wants.

Practice

Match the value or belief in the column on the left to a behavior in the column on the right.

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| 1. Directness | ___ Use of understatement. |
| 2. Centrality of family | ___ Asking people to call you by your first name. |
| 3. External control | ___ Taking off from work to attend the funeral of an aunt. |
| 4. Saving face | ___ Not helping the person next to you on an exam. |
| 5. Respect for age | ___ Disagreeing openly with someone at a meeting. |
| 6. Informality | ___ Not laying off an older worker whose performance is weak. |
| 7. Deference to authority | ___ At a meeting, agreeing with a suggestion you think is wrong. |
| 8. Indirectness | ___ Inviting the teaboy to eat lunch with you in your office. |
| 9. Self-reliance | ___ Asking the headmaster's opinion of something you're the expert on. |
| 10. Egalitarianism | ___ Accepting, without question, that something cannot be changed. |

Universal, Cultural and Personal

Culture is only one category or dimension of human behavior, and it is therefore important to see it in relation to the other two dimensions: the universal and the personal. The three can be distinguished as follows:

- **universal** refers to ways in which all people in all groups are the same
- **cultural** refers to what a particular group of people have in common with each other and how they are different from every other group
- **personal** describes the ways in which each one of us is different from everyone else, including those in our group

These are two important points for you to remember:

- Because of universal behavior, not everything about people in a new culture is going to be different; some of what you already know about human behavior is going to apply in your host country.
- Because of personal behavior, not everything you learn about your host culture is going to apply in equal measure, or at all, to every individual in that culture.

In the underlined space preceding each of them, put a “U” if you think the behavior is universal, “C” if it is cultural, or “P” if it is personal.

1. _____ Sleeping with a bedroom window open.
2. _____ Running from a dangerous animal.
3. _____ Considering snakes to be “evil.”
4. _____ Men opening doors for women.
5. _____ Respecting older people.
6. _____ Liking spicy food.
7. _____ Preferring playing soccer to reading a book.
8. _____ Eating regularly.
9. _____ Eating with knife, fork, and spoon.
10. _____ Being wary of strangers.
11. _____ Calling a waiter with a hissing sound.
12. _____ Regretting being the cause of an accident.
13. _____ Feeling sad at the death of your mother.
14. _____ Wearing white mourning robes for 30 days after the death of your mother.
15. _____ Not liking wearing mourning robes for 30 days after the death of your mother.

The process of the cultural Conditioning

How do people acquire their culture? How do they learn all the behaviors that are regarded as right and wrong in their society? This process, known as cultural conditioning, goes on in all cultures, but the specific behaviors that people acquire, the precise content of their conditioning, varies considerably from group to group. Keep in mind also that while it is behaviors that people learn through this process, they are automatically learning and internalizing the values and beliefs behind those behaviors.

When you understand how this process works, you can then understand how two people from different cultures can behave in radically different ways and both be completely convinced they are right.

The cultural Conditioning

While conditioning occurs mostly in early childhood, adults continue to be conditioned as they acquire new behaviors throughout their life. The differences between the two are these:

1. In Childhood conditioning, infants and young children learn such basic activities of life as eating, walking, talking, dressing, bathing, etc.
2. In Adult conditioning, people learn new behaviors or new ways to perform already conditioned behaviors, as, for example, learning to use a Turkish toilet or eat with your hands rather than with silverware.

Though the steps are the same in each case, one difference in adult conditioning, the kind most PCVs experience, is that it often requires unlearning or unacquiring behavior that was already acquired through childhood conditioning, and this can take longer. Here are the five steps in the process of cultural conditioning.

- Observation/Instruction
- Imitation
- Reinforcement
- Internalization
- Spontaneous Manifestation

The five steps in the process of cultural conditioning:

1. Observation/Instruction—At this stage, you are only beginning to become aware of a particular behavior but have not yet tried to do it yourself. Taking the example of eating with your hands, you may have observed how it is done, or someone may have told you how it is done.
2. Imitation—Now you actually try to carry out the activity; you sit down at a table and begin eating with your hands. At this stage, it is awkward for you, and you're conscious all the while of what you're doing, trying not to make mistakes. You may have difficulty concentrating on a conversation, for all your attention is on the act of eating.

The five steps in the process of cultural conditioning:

3. Reinforcement —As you eat, people encourage you when you do it right and correct you when you are wrong. Over the course of "several meals, you naturally try to do what they tell you.
4. Internalization —Without needing much reinforcement, over time and with practice, you now know how to eat with your hands. You may still have to pay attention to what you're doing, but not as much as during stages 2 and 3.
5. Spontaneous Manifestation—Now you're able to eat "the right way" without paying any conscious attention to what you're doing. It comes naturally; as you eat, you're aware of other things, not the act of eating."

In the mind of the beholder

We all believe that we observe reality, things as they are, but what actually happens is that the mind interprets what the eyes see and gives it meaning; it is only at this point, when meaning is assigned, that we can truly say we have seen something. In other words, what we see is as much in the mind as it is in reality.

If you consider that the mind of a person from one culture is going to be different in many ways from the mind of a person from another culture, then you have the explanation for that most fundamental of all cross-cultural problems: the fact that two people look upon the same reality, the same example of behavior, and see two entirely different things.

In the mind of the beholder

Any behavior observed across the cultural divide, therefore, has to be interpreted in two ways:

- **the meaning given to it by the person who does the action, and**
- **the meaning given to it by the person who observes the action**

Only when these two meanings are the same do we have successful communication, successful in the sense that the meaning that was intended by the doer is the one that was understood by the observer.

Write down your immediate response to or interpretation of that behavior in terms of your own cultural values, beliefs, or perception. The first one has been done for you.

1. A person comes to a meeting half an hour after the stated starting time.

Your interpretation: This person is late and should at least apologize or give an explanation

2. Someone kicks a dog.

Your interpretation:

3. At the end of a meal, people belch audibly.

Your interpretation:

4. A woman carries a heavy pile of wood on her back while her husband walks in front of her carrying nothing.

Your interpretation:

5. While taking an exam, a student copies from the paper of another student.

Your interpretation:

Part Two - Fundamentals of Culture

- a) The Concept of the Self**
(Individualism & Collectivism)

- b) Personal vs. Societal Obligations**
(Universalism & particularism)

The Concept of the Self

(Individualism & Collectivism)

The Concept of the Self

While no culture is exclusively individualist or collective—not to mention individuals within each type—most tend to be more one than the other.



Individualism

The individual identifies primarily with self, with the needs of the individual being satisfied before those of the group.



Collectivism

One's identity is in large part a function of one's membership and role in a group, e.g., the family or work team.

The Concept of the Self

Individualism: Looking after and taking care of oneself, being self-sufficient, guarantees the well being of the group. Independence and self-reliance are greatly stressed and valued. In general, people tend to distance themselves psychologically and emotionally from each other. One may choose to join groups, but group membership is not essential to one's identity or success. Individualist characteristics are often associated with men and people in urban settings.

Collectivism: The survival and success of the group ensures the well-being of the individual, so that by considering the needs and feelings of others, one protects oneself. Harmony and the interdependence of group members are stressed and valued. Group members are relatively close psychologically and emotionally, but distant toward non-group members. Collectivist characteristics are often associated with women and people in rural settings.

Now look at the list of behaviors or characteristics given below. If you decide the statement is more likely to apply to people living in an individualist culture, write “I” in the underlined blank space; if you think it is characteristic of a collectivist culture, write “C.”

1. ___ People answer the phone by giving the name of the organization.
2. ___ People give cocktail parties.
3. ___ *Intergroup rivalry is strong.*
4. ___ Employee-of-the-year awards are offered.
5. ___ People adhere to tradition.
6. ___ People are promoted based on production and results.
7. ___ Contracts in business are used frequently.
8. ___ There is a need for autonomy.
9. ___ People change jobs frequently.
10. ___ People believe that conflict clears the air.
11. ___ There is a need for affiliation.
12. ___ Short-term relationships are common.
13. ___ It's okay to stand out.
14. ___ Face saving is important.
15. ___ It's common for mothers to ask their preschoolers what they want to wear today.
16. ___ Self-help books are popular.
17. ___ Decisions are made by consensus.
18. ___ The language has one word for mother's brother, another for father's brother.
19. ___ Marriages are arranged.
20. ___ People have potluck dinners.

The Concept of the Self

(Universalism & Particularism)

The Concept of the Self

No culture is exclusively universalist or particularist, but cultures do tend to be more one than the other, and while the attitudes of individuals in a given culture will vary, the focus here is on the culture as a whole. Brief descriptions of the two poles follow:

Universalism: Certain absolutes apply across the board, regardless of circumstances or the particular situation. Wherever possible, you should try to apply the same rules to everyone in like situations.

Particularism: How you behave in a given situation depends on the circumstances. You treat family, friends, and your in-group the best you can, and you let the rest of the world take care of itself. Their in groups will protect them.

The Concept of the Self

Universalism:

To be fair is to treat everyone alike and not make exceptions for family, friends, or members of your in-group. Where possible, you should lay your personal feelings aside and look at the situation objectively. While life isn't necessarily fair, we can make it more fair by treating people the same way.

Particularism:

There can't be absolutes because everything depends on whom you're dealing with. No one expects life to be fair. Exceptions will always be made for certain people.

circle the statement that does not belong in the group of four, either because it reflects a universalist attitude and all the others are particularist, or vice versa:

1. Objectivity, not letting personal feelings affect decision making, is possible and desirable.
 2. A deal is a deal, whatever happens.
 3. Principles have to get bent once in a while.
 4. The law is the law.
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1. You don't compromise on principles.
 2. Friends expect preferential treatment.
 3. Subjectivity is the rule.
 4. The logic of the heart is what counts.
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1. People tend to hire friends and associates.
 2. Consistency is desirable and possible.
 3. Logic of the head is important.
 4. Exceptions to the rule should be minimized.
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1. Friends protect friends.
 2. Life is neat, not messy.
 3. Written contracts are not necessary.
 4. This attitude is more consistent with collectivism.
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1. Situational ethics are the norm.
 2. A deal is a deal, until circumstances change.
 3. Deals are made on the basis of personal relationships.
 4. Justice is blind.

Thank You