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Part 20

Culture and Society

Rosamond Billington and her colleagues provide in Reading 4 a useful discussion of the concept of culture – one of the most important notions in sociology. The idea of culture, they point out, has been used in different ways in varying traditions of sociology and anthropology. These varying usages, however, share something in common. The core definition of ‘culture’ refers to ways of life that are shared in common by the members of a group.

‘Culture’ refers to learned patterns of behaviour, which human beings acquire through social experience or direct teaching. But some core aspects of what we are as human beings are not learned: they are determined by nature, not culture. The modern science of genetics, discussed in Reading 5, gives us a means of analysing the natural components of human behaviour. Scientists are currently in the process of mapping the whole genetic structure of human beings. In so doing, they are helping us unravel the complex relations between the cultural and the natural roots. For instance, it is often claimed that ‘racial’ differences between human groups – marked

principally by skin colour – bring with them a wide range of other biological differences. Genetic studies show that this is not the case – genetically speaking there are no distinct ‘races’.

Use of the internet is still heavily weighted towards the developed societies. However, the internet is spreading rapidly to less developed regions of the world, as is discussed in Reading 6. In countries with authoritarian governments the authorities fear the growth of the internet because it makes information freely available to those who wish to seek it. Yet the progress of the internet seems more or less unstoppable, whatever governments may say or do. Newspapers and other printed materials that are banned by the authorities can normally easily be found on the internet. The main factor limiting the spread of the internet is not really government hostility but cost. The internet is likely to reach poorer countries on a much more extensive basis now that wireless technologies are available. As carried by mobile phones, for example, the internet does not need expensive computer equipment or wiring to work.



Chapter 4 Defining 'Culture'

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Definitions

There are at least two everyday, commonsense meanings of culture. The first is the 'best' achievements and products in art, literature and music. The second is the artificial growth or development of microscopic organisms or species of plants, a meaning deriving from a much older usage of the verb 'to cultivate': meaning to husband, and originally referring to agricultural techniques. Both these meanings are relevant to what is discussed [below].

- Moroccans can find copious information posted on the Web by the Polisario Front and others who challenge the official Moroccan line on the Western Sahara [. . .] Such information is either nonexistent or one-sided in the local news media, bookshops, and libraries.
- Algerians can visit numerous web sites mounted by Islamist groups that are banned and have no legal publications inside Algeria, including the Front Islamique du Salut [. . .]
- An Arab Gay and Lesbian web site [. . .] to people who, in many Arab countries, have few places to go to obtain information pertaining to their sexual orientation.

The whole universe is harnessed to men's [sic] attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion . . . as we examine pollution beliefs we find that the kinds of contacts which are thought dangerous also carry. Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and

certain social rules symbolic load . . . some pollutions are used as analogies for expressing a general view of social order.¹

Anthropologists and culture

An important change in Western ideas in the nineteenth century was the notion of the 'evolution' of species in the natural world. Among other things, this theory established human beings as part of the animal world. The pseudo-science of physical anthropology attempted to investigate some of the differences between the 'races' of humankind at the same time that 'armchair' anthropologists were studying their cultures.

the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world.

They begin from the premise that only humankind possesses culture, in the sense of the: The pseudo-science of physical anthropology attempted to investigate some of the differences between the 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [sic] as a member of society'.¹

Like sociologists today, anthropologists (who owe a considerable intellectual debt to Durkheim) have attempted to explain societies in their own terms, that is, not simply as the sum total of the activities of individuals or deriving from the biological properties.



Many early anthropologists and ethnologists were concerned to list cultural 'traits', that is to analyse abstracted items of culture, such as religious beliefs or kinship arrangements, or items of 'material' culture, often finding similarities in these items in different societies [...].

It is perhaps HIV and AIDS which more than any other disease display analogies between pollution beliefs and social order. They constitute a threat to individuals, and the reactions of social groups suggest that, for some, they are perceived as a threat to social order.

Their findings were used as evidence for constructing evolutionary typologies and theories of societies or institutions such as kinship and religion. Partly in reaction against such theories and their wrenching of cultural items out of context (and their assumption that social evolution occurred in a similar way to biological evolution) later anthropologists stressed the importance of studying 'primitive' cultures as systematic wholes, to understand the significance, function and meaning for the cultures themselves of particular beliefs, customs and How does any particular feature we are examining affect, practices. Such a holistic approach to the study of other cultures usually adopted the structural-functional assumptions of Durkheim which have important implications for the study of culture, a point to which we shall return.

- 1 What is the structure of this particular society as a whole? What are its essential components and how are they related to one another?
- 2 Where does this society stand in human history? What are the mechanics by which it is changing? What is its place within and its meaning for the development of humanity as a whole?
- 3 What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period?

Kluckhohn writes in the Durkheimian tradition, stressing the shared and normative nature of culture and its functions for integrating the individual into the group. He emphasises that although some aspects of culture are relevant only

Box 19.1 'Alternative' medicines

- (1) Herbalism
- (2) Osteopathy
- (3) Homeopathy
- (4) Acupuncture
- (5) Chiropractic
- (6) Spiritual healing
- (7) Hypnotherapy
- (8) Reflexology
- (9) Naturopathy
- (10) Aromatherapy

Source: U. Sharma, *Complementary Medicine Today* (Routledge, 1992)

to particular groups – generational, sex, work, class – all aspects are interrelated and form a whole, although culture is not necessarily perfectly integrated. In particular, he points out that individuals in Western societies, because of the cultural stress on individualism and freewill, are not always willing to conform to cultural patterns. Two points are implied in this argument.

[...]

One is that in general culture serves an overall integrative function in society and the second is that there is a functional if complex relationship between culture and social structure, an analysis similar to that of the sociologist, Talcott Parsons.

the concept of culture . . . is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it . . . not an experimental science in search of law but in interpretative one in search of meaning law but an interpretative one in search of meaning [...]

Functions of culture

It is useful to note some important similarities between the theories we have examined. Most of





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Box 19.2 Clarifying concepts

Alternative medicine denotes medical practices that are *different* from accepted forms. People use alternative health practices *instead* of orthodox medicine. Alternative does not guarantee that methods will be holistic. For example, someone may consult an acupuncturist or chiropractor as an alternative to receiving drug therapy or surgery. Alternative medicine may be used to address particular conditions or to transform health and lifestyle practices.

Holistic medicine embodies a particular *attitude* to health: the patient's health is regarded as integral to the human organism – an entity that is dynamic and constantly changing. The practice is concerned with an understanding of the different functional aspects of the client: physical, emotional, psychological, social and spiritual. Holistic health is not only a medical criterion but also a cultural concept and the way in which it is defined varies over time and place.

Complementary medicine implies an approach to health that recognises the potential relationship between various health-care choices and can include many orthodox and non-orthodox healing arts. It marks a shift from seeing alternatives as *separate* from modern orthodox medicine to recognising that they can enhance and support orthodox treatment.

Orthodox medicine covers the understanding and treatment of the human body and health which is widely accepted in Western societies. The medical profession claims its system of medical practices to be superior, legitimated by scientific methods in diagnosis and cure.

Source: Adapted from K. Olsen The Encyclopedia of Alternative Health Care (Piatkus, 1989)

élite. Finally, we must note that a fairly clear distinction is emerging in these theories, between the notion of 'society' and 'culture', and that culture is something which overarches, reflects and ultimately has its own effect on the social.

Dr: Slip your gear off an let's have a look.
[intervening phone conversation]

Dr: [completes call and turns to patient]

P: *hhh hhhhh kh (0.2) *hhhh keh kh hm
(0.8)

P: khh
(2.3)

Dr: Now then, let's have a listen

Sociologists and anthropologists are not alone in developing theories and ideas about culture.

Raymond Williams has attempted to show how modern notions of culture in Britain arose out of the nineteenth-century changes and processes indicated by the 'keywords', industry, democracy, class, and art.³ Williams is pointing essentially to what sociologists have called social differentiation, the increasing specialisation of functions in society. In the nineteenth century he argues, the concept of culture 'as an abstraction and an absolute' emerged 'as a recognition of the practical separation of certain moral and intellectual activities' from the rest of society, and as an attempt to create ultimate values at which to aim and by which to judge other social and economic activities'.⁴ Williams stresses that this new concept of culture was not simply a response to industrialThe

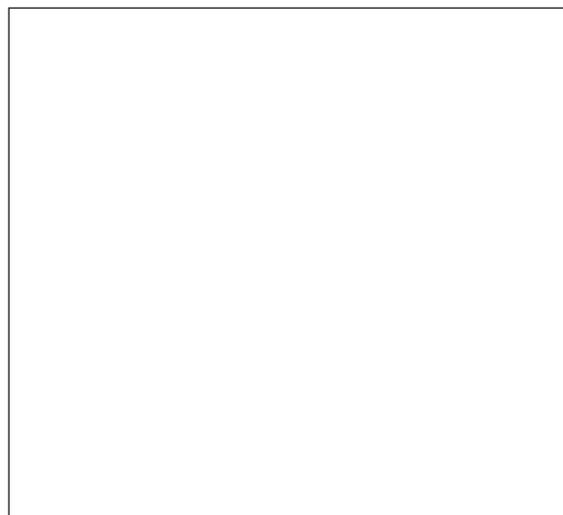
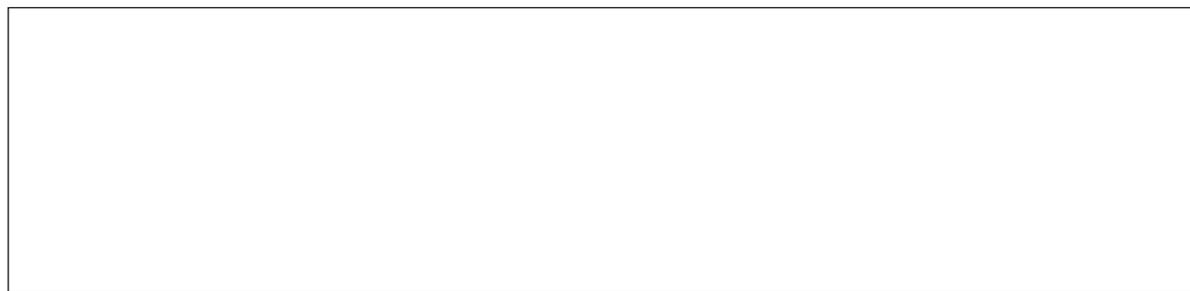


**Table 52.1** Biweekly numbers of posts to rec.arts.tv.soaps, 1984-1993

2-Week Period Ending . . .	Number of posts in rec.arts.tv.soaps
October 23, 1984	11
October 22, 1985	8
October 22, 1986	32
October 22, 1987	68
October 27, 1988	231
October 22, 1989	427
October 8, 1990	696
October 23, 1991	1,037
October 23, 1992	1,685
September 8, 1993	2,412

After 1994, these types of statistics no longer were collected.

Source: R. Adams, news.lists (newsgroup).

**Figure 1.1** Biweekly numbers of posts**Figure 1.1** Biweekly numbers of posts

terminology is not confusing so long as we see sation but a search for 'new kinds of personal and social relationship'. In the United States this attempt was couched in terms – just the concern of social theorists like Saint-Simon, Comte, Durkheim, Spencer and Marx. Similar 'cultural consequences of modernization' were felt in America too [. . .] If we accept that an essential part of the 'spirit of the age' was the idea of human progress, then the various theories of culture are part of the attempt to regulate and channel progress. In the United States this attempt was couched in terms of the need to develop a national culture commensurate with democracy

and freedom of the individual and one which was the equal of European culture [. . .]

NOTES

- 1 E. B. Tylor, 'Culture Defines' (1891), in L. A. Coser and B. Rosenberg (eds), *Sociological Theory* (, 1964), p. 18.
- 2 A. L. Kroeber, 'The Supererogic' (1952), *ibid.*
- 3 R. Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1958; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963).
- 4 *Ibid.* (1963), p. 17.





chapter 7 The McDonaldization of Society

The Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life

George Ritzer

Ray Kroc, the genius behind the franchising of McDonald's restaurants, was a man with big ideas and grand ambitions. But even Kroc could not have anticipated the astounding impact of his creation. McDonald's is one of the most influential developments in twentieth-century America. Its reverberations extend far beyond the confines of the United States and the fast-food business. It has influenced a wide range of undertakings, indeed the way of life, of a significant portion of the world. And that impact is likely to expand at an accelerating rate.¹

However, this is *not* a discussion of McDonald's, or even the fast-food business. [. . .] Rather, McDonald's serves here as the major example, the 'paradigm,' of a wide-ranging process I call *McDonaldization*, that is,

the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world.

As you will see, McDonaldization affects not only the restaurant business, but also education, work, health care, travel, leisure, dieting, politics, the family, and virtually every other aspect of society. McDonaldization has shown every sign of being an inexorable process by sweeping through seemingly impervious institutions and parts of the world.

McDonald's success is apparent: in 1993 its total sales reached \$23.6 billion with profits of almost \$1.1 billion. The average U.S. outlet has total sales of approximately \$1.6 million in a year. Many entrepreneurs envy such sales and profits and seek to emulate McDonald's success. McDonald's, which first began franchising in 1955, opened its 12,000th outlet on March 22, 1991. By the end of 1993, McDonald's had almost 14,000 restaurants worldwide.

The impact of McDonaldization, which McDonald's has played a central role in spawning, has been manifested in many ways:

- The McDonald's model has been adopted not only by other budget-minded hamburger franchises such as Burger King and Wendy's, but also by a wide array of other low-priced fast-food businesses. Subway, begun in 1965 and now with nearly 10,000 outlets, is considered the fastest-growing of these businesses, which include Pizza Hut, Sbarro's, Taco Bell, Popeye's, and Charley Chan's. Sales in so-called 'quick service' restaurants in the United States rose to \$81 billion by the end of 1993, almost a third of total sales for the entire food-service industry. In 1994, for the first time, sales in fast-food restaurants exceeded those in traditional full-service restaurants, and the gap between them is projected to grow.



Chapter 24 The Normal Chaos of Love

Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim

Translated by

Mark Ritter and Jane Wiebel

[...]

Never before has marriage been built on such ephemeral and immaterial foundations. Men and women with good jobs are economically independent of family support. Their union no longer serves any political ends or the maintenance of dynasties or owning property as it did in the feudal hierarchy. Inherited ties, which used to be taken for granted, have slackened, and the couple working as a team becomes the exception; in short everything which used to be firm and preordained is vanishing. Instead one is supposed to seek and find in the macro-microcosm of life with the beloved everything that society previously assigned to various professions and often different parts of town: romantic love, keeping a mistress, comfortable affection, liberation from the shackles of adulthood and a humdrum life, being forgiven one's sins, refuge in family history and future plans, parental pride and pleasure and whatever other incompatibilities – with their enigmatic dragon's features – there may be.

Seen historically, in an era when men and women have lost their old political and economic certainties and moral guidelines one wonders why they are seeking their own private bliss in such a uniform way, marrying for love, of all things, while society in general suggests that differentiating is the answer. Marrying for love has existed only since the beginning of the industrial revolu-

tion and was its invention. It is regarded as the most desirable goal although the social realities suggest exactly the opposite. Marriage has lost its stability but none of its attractiveness as a result of its metamorphosis from a means of passing on wealth and power into the airy version we know, nourished only on emotional involvement and the desire to find oneself. Despite and contrary to the 'bad' reality, the family and loving relationships continue to be idealized on every level of society (with slight behavioural differences), irrespective of income, education and age.

Interviewer: 'What does having a family and children mean to you?'

Mr Schiller: 'That there is some sense in life.'

Mrs Schiller: 'You know why you're there, you know what you're working for.'

Mr Xeller: 'To me, family means everything. I'd give up everything but that.'

Mrs Taler: 'Family and children are the main thing and the most important thing.'

There is scarcely anything else in the parents' lives which they describe so emphatically as the core of their lives. Only having a family and children gives existence a subjective 'purpose'.

Seen historically, and economic certainties and moral guidelines one wonders why they are seeking their own private bliss in such a uniform way, marrying for love.

