

Culture Change: A Cross-Disciplinary Approach Anthropology 385

Fall 2004

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Meeting Time: MWF 10:40-11:30
Meeting Place: Math & Science Bldg, N306
Lab Meetings: Anthropology (Old Geosciences), 107.

Content: How important is culture in our species? Does culture really affect how we think, remember, and perceive the world? Does it influence what we think is morally right and wrong, what causes an illness, which products we want to buy, and which god(s) to believe in? How do individuals actually learn culture? Who do people learn their culture from? Building on the answers to these psychological questions, we will use case studies from anthropology and applied fields such as public health, education, and business to address questions such as (1) Why do cultures change at different rates? (2) Why do some technologies, beliefs and practices spread rapidly and completely while others don't? (3) Why do some peoples refuse to adopt (seemingly) obviously beneficial technologies, beliefs and practices, while readily adopting seemingly harmful behaviors, beliefs and practices?

In addition, the course will provide a practical introduction to study designs and methods used to generate and assess theories of cultural change and transmission, including participant observation and social network analysis. Class sessions will include lectures and discussion, and students will design original research projects to address questions about cultural transmission.

Texts: *Playing on the Mother Ground*. David Lancy.
The Tipping Point Malcolm Gladwell.
Preschool in Three Cultures Joseph Tobin et al.
Himalayan Herders Naomi Bishop

Articles (on Blackboard)

Particulars: A previous course in social or behavioral science is recommended, but not required. Grades are based on class participation (5%), seven biweekly assignments (20%), two tests (15% each) and 1 final examination (20%), and the final project (25%).

Goals

- 1) To understand the fundamental importance of culture and cultural transmission in human behavior.
- 2) To appreciate how human psychology gives rise to cultural diversity and change, and how science can connect micro-level aspects of psychology to broad questions about history and cultural evolution.
- 3) To provide training in study designs and methods used to test theories of cultural transmission.
- 4) To stimulate thinking about how an understanding of cultural learning might be used to improve applied work in field such as public health, public policy and economic development.

Requirements

Seven Homework Assignments (20%): In preparing you for our bi-weekly discussions, these fun assignments will require you to review the readings and lectures. They will usually consist of a 1-page single spaced response paper.

Two Tests (15% each) & Final exam (20%): These will test the basic concepts, mastery of key facts, and major examples discussed in class. They will include a combination of multiple choice, true-false and short answer questions. Short-answer question may be take-home.

Final Project (25%): Each student will develop a research project about the role that local social ties (e.g. friends, family, acquaintances) play in spreading cultural innovations (ideas, beliefs, values, stories, practices). Students will be required to write a 10-12 page report on the project, and prepare a 5-minute presentation describing the project's key findings. There are two possible approaches:

- 1) Using interviews, students can identify and describe a cultural practice (e.g., a new diet, food, or type of exercise), and then trace through interviews and social network analysis, variations in that practice and how people learned it.
- 2) We will also provide social network datasets from Fiji, the U.S. and other countries which students can use to develop and test models of the spread of cultural innovations. Since this approach does not require interviewing, a student choosing this option should demonstrate a more sophisticated statistical approach to modeling and describing the data.

Attendance & Participation (5%): The class will consist of lectures, discussion sessions, and social network labs. Tests will include topics from the lectures and discussions not found in the readings, so attendance will indirectly contribute to your test grades. Preparation and participation in biweekly discussions will be noted and will contribute directly to your final grade.

Schedule

Aug 27 (F): Introductions, review of syllabus, lecture on Why Culture Matters.

Discussion questions:

What are your general interests?

What is your research background (interviewing, other methods classes and statistics)?

What would you like to be doing after graduation?

Is there anything specific that you would like to get out of this class?

Lecture: Culture Matters (JH)

Aug 30 (M): What is culture and what are cultures? What does it mean when we say cultures are systems? In what ways can these systems change?

Lecture: The Nature of Culture (DH)

Reading (Blackboard): Richerson and Boyd, Chapter 1,2 and 3, on Blackboard.

Sept 1 (W): Introduction to Social Networks—A tool for thinking about culture

Lecture: Introduction to Social Networks (DH)

Reading (Blackboard): RT Trotter. Ethnography and Network Analysis: The Study of Social Context in Cultures and Societies. In: Handbook of social studies in health and medicine. P. 210-229.

Assignment 1 (Due Sept. 10): One-page single-spaced response. Why does culture matter? Based on the readings, develop your own definition of culture and justify why it is important (or not) for understanding how we think and act.

Sept 3 (F): Why Do We Have Culture? The Evolutionary Origins of Culture.

Lecture: The Evolution of Cultural Evolution (JH)

Reading (on Blackboard): The Evolution of Cultural Evolution (2003). J. Henrich & R McElreath. Evolutionary Anthropology. P. 123-135.

Sept 8 (W): Evolved Psychological Mechanism for Learning Culture: Who do we learn from, and why?

Lecture: Adaptive mechanisms for Learning Culture (JH)

Optional Reading (on Blackboard): Evolution of prestige: freely conferred deference as a mechanism for enhancing the benefits of cultural transmission. (2001). J. Henrich & FJ Gil-White. Evolution and Human Behavior. p.165-196.

Sept 10 (F): Discussion: What is Culture? Why Does it Matter? How can it be studied?
Bring Assignment 1 to class. Be prepared to present your definition of culture and your argument for why culture matters (or why it doesn't).

Sept 13 (M): Do Chimpanzees Have Culture?

Lecture: Social Learning in Nonhuman Primates (JH)

Reading (Blackboard): The Question of Chimpanzee culture (1996). M. Tomasello. In: Chimpanzee Cultures. P. 301-317. Orangutan Cultures and the Evolution of Material Culture (2003). C.P. van Schaik et. al. Science. P102-105.

Sept 15 (W): The Long Road to Learning Culture

Lecture 1: The Stepwise Nature of Cultural Learning (DH)
Lecture 2: Imitation and Generalization (JH): Ratcheting up Competence
Reading (on Blackboard): H Becker. Becoming a Marihuana User. P. 42-78.
Assignment 2 (Due Sept. 17): One-page single-spaced response. Do Chimpanzees have culture? Using concepts discussed in the readings and lectures argue for or against the existence of Chimpanzee cultures.

Sept 17 (F): Discussion: What is the best way to think about cultures in non-human animals? Bring Assignment 2 to class. Be prepared to present and defend your argument.

Sept 20 (M): Whose Culture do Children Learn?

Lecture: Child Socialization across cultures (JH)
Reading (Link on Blackboard): Harris, Judith Rich. What is the Child's Environment?

Sept 22 (W): The World of Cultural Learning

Lecture: The informal worlds of child socialization (JH)
Reading: Lancy, David. *Playing on the Mother Ground*. Chapters 1-8.

Sept 24 (F): Apprenticeship & Schooling

Lecture: Institutions of child socialization (JH)
Reading: Lancy. *Playing on the Mother Ground*. Chapters 9-10.

Sept 27 (M): How do Cultures Raise Boys and Girls?

Lecture: The Social lives of Boys and Girls in 6 cultures (DH)
Reading: Levine, Robert A. (1998). Child psychology and anthropology: an environmental view
Optional Reading: Whiting & Edwards (1988). *Children of Different Worlds*.
Assignment 3 (Due Sept. 29): One-page single-spaced response. From whom do children learn their culture? Based on examples from the reading, describe the most important sources of children's cultural learning.
Project Assignment 1 (Due Sept. 29): In one paragraph, describe 1) your proposed project topic, 2) the group or dataset you will work with, and 3) your research questions.

Sept 29 (W): Discussion: From whom do children learn culture? How might having read Harris' paper affect your views of parenting or public policy? AND Project proposals. Bring your assignment to class. Be prepared to present and defend your argument. *Also bring project proposal to present briefly to class.*

Oct 1 (F): Social Network Lab (DH)—visualizing student social networks in Fiji and the U.S.

Oct 4 (M): How do Cultures Shape Schooling, and vice versa ?

Lecture: How Cultures Speak through Schools (DH)
Reading: Tobin et al. *Preschool in Three Cultures*. Chapters 1-3.

Oct 6 (W): Cross-Cultural Critiques of Schooling.

Film: *Preschool in Three Cultures*
Reading: Tobin et al. *Preschool in Three Cultures*. Chapters 4-5.

Assignment 4 (Due Oct 8): One-page single-spaced response. Based on the “Preschool in Three Cultures” film, describe the major similarities and differences that you see in child-rearing in the three cultures. Points given for insights not described in the book.

Oct 8 (F): Discussion. How are cultural norms reflected in and reinforced by schooling practices? Bring Assignment 4 to class. Be prepared to present and defend your argument.

Project Assignment 2 (Due Oct 13): Two paragraph progress report on project, including 1) progress relative to initial proposal, 2) difficulties and challenges encountered, and 3) any revisions to initial proposal.

FALL BREAK

Oct 13 (W): Review for test I & presentation of project progress reports

Oct 15 (F): Test I: Definitions of culture, modes of cultural learning, and cross-cultural differences in child-rearing and schooling.

Oct 18 (M): Invention, Innovation: Where does culture change start from?

Lecture: Innovation in a conformist world (DH)

Reading (on Blackboard): The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland 1996. In: The Invention of Tradition. Ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger.

Optional Reading (Blackboard). Relative brain size and the distribution of innovation and social learning across the nonhuman primates. S.M. Reader (2003). P. 56-93.

Oct 20 (W): How do innovations arise and spread?

Lecture: The Diffusion of Innovations (DH)

Reading: M Gladwell. The Tipping Point. Chapters 1,2,4,5

Oct 22 (F): When do cultures resist or accept change?

Lecture: The Tasmania Puzzle and Peasant Conservatism (JH)

Reading: TBA

Assignment 5 (Due Oct 27): One-page single-spaced response. Think of a cultural innovation that has spread successfully and one that has not. Present an argument, based on concepts from the readings, as to why one spread and the other did not.

Oct 25 (M): Social Network Lab (DH): Visualizing culture change

Oct 27 (W): Discussion: Why do some innovations spread, while others flounder? Bring “Why do only some innovations spread” assignment to class. Be prepared to present and defend your argument.

Oct 29 (F): The long-term: Why did we leave Eden?

Lecture: The emergence and diffusion of agriculture (JH)

Reading (Blackboard): Diamond, Chapter 4, 5, and 6.

Nov 1 (M): The long-term evolution of human societies. The Evolution of political complexity: Egalitarian Foragers, Big Men and Emergence of Chiefdom and States.

Lecture: The emergence of militant egalitarianism in out of the way places (JH)

Reading (Blackboard): Diamond, Guns, Germs and Steel, Chapter 14.

Nov 3 (W): How religious movements can succeed and fail at the same time

Lecture: Cargo cults and the ghost dance (DH)

Reading (Blackboard): Wallace, Anthony F.C., 1956. "Revitalization Movements," American Anthropologist 58:264-281.

Assignment 6 (Due Nov 5): One-page single-spaced response. Think of a cultural practice that has been successful in spreading, but has ultimately been detrimental for the people who adopted it. Describe why it was adopted despite its negative impact.

Nov 5 (F): Discussion & Social Network Lab (DH): Tracing the ghost dance. Bring Assignment 6 to class for discussion.

Nov 8 (M): How did Christianity take over the Western world?

Lecture: How did Christianity take over the Western world? (JH)

Reading (Blackboard): Stark

Nov 10 (W): How do STDs change our sex lives (and vice versa)?

Lecture: The co-evolution of cultures and disease (DH & JH)

Reading (Blackboard): S. Lindenbaum. Kuru Sorcery. P. 55-116. Diamond, Chapter 11.

Nov 12 (F): Social Network Lab (DH): Sexual networks and disease transmission

Nov 15 (M): Why do some (many) public health interventions fail?

Lecture: Deviancy training and peer leaders (DH)

Reading (BlackBoard): Dishion, Valente.

Nov 17 (W): Do ad campaigns ever work?

Lecture: Advertising and culture change (DH)

Reading: The Tipping Point. Chapters 3,6,7,8, Afterword.

Project Assignment 3 (Due Nov 19): Two paragraph progress report on project, including 1) progress relative to last report, 2) difficulties and challenges encountered, and 3) any revisions to initial proposal.

Nov 19 (F): Review for Test II & Presentation of Project Progress Report.

Nov 22 (M): Test II.

Nov 24 (W): Movie: Merchants of Cool

Assignment 7 (Due Dec 1): One-page single-spaced response. Describe a Thanksgiving (or other) tradition in your family and trace where it came from.

THANKSGIVING

Nov 29 (M): Movie: Himalayan Herders

Dec 1 (W): Globalization and Cultures in Transition

Lecture: Globalization and Cultures in Transition (DH)

Reading: Bishop, Naomi. Himalayan Herders.

Dec 3 (F): Projects Presentations

Dec 6 (M): Review for Final (JH)