

CULTURE

Week 4: Pre Module Discussion

In this module you will look at various aspects of culture. The module begins by defining culture and then goes on to examine some of the important cultural issues that affect our global society.

Part 1: Vocabulary

Match the words with their correct definitions

Word	Meaning
1. Aborigine	a) consisting of many cultures
2. anthropology	b) qualities learnt from the surrounding environment
3. ethnocentrism	c) study of the origin, development organisation and functioning of human society
4. Maori	d) original inhabitants of Australia
5. nature	e) the science of mental states and processes
6. nurture	f) fear or hatred of foreigners
7. psychology	g) native or inherent character – qualities belonging from birth
8. sociology	h) belief in one's own racial superiority and contempt for other racial groups
9. xenophobia	i) original inhabitants of New Zealand
10. multicultural	j) the science of human beings and their works
11. artefacts	k) assumes that something already exists
12. norms	l) objects made by hand, handicrafts
13. distinction	m) culture set up against the main culture (eg hippies, people who live an alternate lifestyle)
14. mundane	n) indistinct, not clear
15. embody	o) very ordinary, not special
16. presupposes	p) contains meaning
17. counter culture	q) values, the things most people in a society do, believe in; the rules of society
18. blurred	r) difference

Part 2: Discussion

- What different groups of people have you experienced?
- What are some of the specific differences between these groups?
- How do you think these differences have come about?
- What are some problems that arise as a result of cultural differences?
- Can these problems be overcome in the future? If so, how? If not, why?

Part 3: Defining Culture

Culture as Meaning . Some definitions of culture emphasise its basis in meaning. All human activity involves meaning, and this is what is said to distinguish it from the activity of non-human animal species. Culture, then, arises exclusively from *human* activity and hence excludes the work of nature or the behaviour of other species, regardless of how social such behaviour might be. Certain species of apes, for example, exhibit quite complex forms of social behaviour but this does not qualify as culture as it does not embody meaning. Meaning presupposes language, so that another way of putting this definition is by saying that language, which is a unique characteristic of humans, at the same time characterises what we mean by culture.

Culture as norms and values. A more restricted definition of culture defines it as the *values* held by a group and the *norms* governing behaviour. Values are ideal standards which are held up as 'good' for members of a society to achieve, while norms are rules governing behaviour of members of a society.

This approach to defining culture tends to have been adopted by social scientists engaged in comparing different cultures. In making such comparisons they have tended to focus on such norms and values rather than on other aspects of human activity. To most analysts of culture, this approach is far too narrow to give a full account of culture.

Culture as leisure activity. Sometimes culture is defined as what we do outside of our work, that is, as our leisure activity. While this includes many more activities than the preceding definition, it is still unsatisfactory as it produces an artificial distinction between leisure activity and work. Sometimes this distinction is blurred as many people combine work and leisure. Do, for example, professional sports people see their sporting activities as work? It also serves to perpetuate the myth that leisure is enjoyable and work is not.

Culture as human activity. In the most general sense of the term, culture refers to all human activity. No activity is excluded, not even the most mundane activities involved in satisfying one's basic needs. Work, leisure, eating and drinking, travelling and even thinking are all cultural activities. This definition is so broad that special terms have been devised to describe particular aspects or categories of culture, for example, 'popular' culture, 'counter' culture, 'dominant' culture.

Culture as works of art. A common view of culture is that it refers to shades of art embodied in music, opera, ballet, painting, sculpture, literature, drama and other art forms. Culture includes all of these, but it is a much broader concept. Such works of art can only be understood in the context of the wider culture in which the artists live and work. They are not created in a vacuum. A definition of culture which did not include the wider culture in which works of art are created would limit our understanding of those works.

Read one of the definitions of culture and make notes in the table below. Form a group with other students who have read the other definitions. Using your notes, explain your definition. Take brief notes as the other members of your group give their explanation.

Culture as meaning
Culture as norms and values
Culture as leisure activity
Culture as human activity
Culture as works of art