

Anthropology 131
Spring Quarter 2006
TuTh 9:30-10:45
Fowler A139

Professor Dwight Read
Office: Haines Hall 395; Hours: TuTh 11 - 12:30
Phone: 825-3988
dread@anthro.ucla.edu

Culture: What Makes It All Work

Course Syllabus

Description:

Ask two anthropologists for a definition of culture and you will get two different answers. Culture, like conscience, is one of those elusive concepts that we know is there, but we cannot easily define. Generally, culture has to do with the shared ideas, concepts, ideologies and beliefs that we acquire as part of becoming societal members. It is what makes us "us" as opposed to "them" or "the other." Sometimes the term "constructed reality" is used to underlie the fact that culture is more than a mental representation of the social world in which we live as it also constructs for us the dimensions of the social world—and even our perception of the physical world—in which we operate.

Two main theoretical dimensions have developed that are used to account for human behavior. One is by reference to our expectations of the consequences of our behavior and the then acting in terms of our goals and assessments of those consequences. The "rational actor" of economics is of this nature. A second dimension is based on the observation that we act in accordance with the kinds of behavior that are appropriate for the identities we take on, identities we "learn" from our culture. An example is the fact that males and females do not act as they do just because of biological differences in their chromosomes, but act as they do in large part because of what your culture informs you about male and female gender identities.

While we have had over a hundred years of research and numerous theories (and even anti-theories)—functionalism, materialism, structuralism, and the excesses of post-modernism—we have not yet developed a good way to represent what we mean by culture or to deconstruct culture into its basic elements and how they combine and interact to make that whole we refer to as culture. This course will examine some of the basic questions that are addressed in our study of what we mean by culture with new theories and methods that allow us to begin to do quasi-experimental research into the nature of culture. We will make extensive use of multi-agent simulation as a way to examine how culture can be both "supra-organic" yet be embedded imperfectly in the minds of culture bearers. In this course we will attempt to arrive at a better understanding of what we mean by the "us/them" dichotomy that underlies much of the racism and other forms of discrimination that exist in the world, and better understand the way in which the individual and institutional levels we use as a framework to understand human behavior are dependent upon the cultural world within which we exist and act.

Texts

Required:

Cronk, Lee 1999 *That Complex Whole*. Westview Press: Boulder.

Morrison, R. Bruce and C. Roderick: Wilson (editors) 2002 *Ethnographic Essays in Cultural Anthropology*. F. E. Peacock Publishers, Itasca.

Readings:

Bar-Tal, Daniel 2000. *Sharing Beliefs in a Society*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks. (Chapters 1-3) (Class Web Page)

Chick, Garry 2001 Culture-Bearing Units and the Units of Culture: An Introduction. *Cross-Cultural Research*,35: 91-108

D'Andrade, Roy 2001 A Cognitivist's View of the Units Debate in Cultural Anthropology. *Cross-Cultural Research* 35:242-257 (Class Web Page)

Durham, William *Cultural Evolution* , Stanford University Press (Introduction) (Class Web Page)

Gessler, Nick 2001 Computer Models of Cultural Evolution. In *Evolution In The Computer Age- Proceedings of the Center for the Study of Evolution and the Origin of Life*, edited by David B. and Gary B. Fogel. Jones and Bartlett Publishers, Sudbury, Massachusetts (2002). (Online, Class links)

Keesing, Roger 1973 Theories of Culture. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 3:73-97.

Keesing, Roger 1975 *Kin Groups and Social Structure*, Harcourt Brace 1975 (selected pages)

Lansing, J. Stephen.; Kremer, James N. Emergent properties of Balinese water temple networks: coadaptation on a rugged fitness landscape *American Anthropologist*, v. 95, 1993. pp. 97-114 (Class Web Page)

Lévi-Strauss, Claude *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Beacon Press (1969 (1949)) (pp. 1 - 25) (Class Web Page)

Rauch, Jonathan. Seeing around corners. *Atlantic Monthly* April 2002 (available online under List of Links or at <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2002/04/rauch.htm>)

Read, D. 1987. Foraging Society Organization: A Simple Model of a Complex Transition. *European Journal of Operational Research* 30:320-326 (Class Web page)

Read, D. 1998. Kinship Based Demographic Simulation of Societal Processes. *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation* <http://www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/JASSS/1/1/1.html>

Read, D. 2001 What is Kinship? In *The Cultural Analysis of Kinship: The Legacy of David Schneider and Its Implications for Anthropological Relativism*, R. Feinberg and M. Ottenheimer eds. University of Illinois Press, Urbana. (Class Web Page)

Read, D. 2003 From Behavior to Culture: An Assessment of Cultural Evolution and a New Synthesis *Complexity* 8(6): 17-41. (Class Web Page)

Read, D. 2004 Some Observations on Resilience and Robustness in Human Systems. *Cybernetics* 36 (Class Web Page)

Read, Dwight W.; Behrens, Clifford. 1989 Modeling folk knowledge as expert systems *Anthropological Quarterly*, v. 62, no. 3, pp. 107-120

Romney, A. Kimball and C. Moore 2001 Systemic Culture Patterns as Basic Units of Cultural Transmission and Evolution *Cross-Cultural Research* 35: 154-178

Spradley, James P., Brenda J. Mann *The Cocktail Waitress* (Introduction) (Class Web Page)

Swartz, Marc J. 2001 On the Substance and Uses of Culture's Elements *Cross-Cultural Research* 35: 179-200

Weekly Topics, Readings

Week 1 (April 4 & 6): Introduction; Overview; What do we mean by culture?
Readings: Morrison and Wilson, Chapter 1; Spradley and Mann (Introduction)

Week 2 (April 11 & 13): What do we mean by culture? (continued)
Readings: Lévi-Strauss (pp. 1 - 25), Morrison and Wilson, Chapter 3, Cronk, Chapter 1-2

Week 3 (April 18 & 20): Adaptation: Culture, Behavior and the Environment
Readings: Morrison and Wilson, Chapter 2; Cronk Chapter 3-4; Read 1987

Week 4 (April 25 & 27): Adaptation: Culture, Behavior and the Environment (continued)

Readings: Read 2006 Some Observations on Resilience and Robustness in Human Systems *Cybernetics and Systems* 36

Week 5 (May 2 & 4): Culture traits and culture units

Readings: Cronk Chapter 5; Bar-Tal (Chapters 1-3); D'Andrade; Chick; Romney; Swartz

Week 6 (May 9 & 11): MIDTERM; Forms of organization; self-organization versus induced organization

Readings: Morrison and Wilson, Chapter 5; Lansing & Kremer; Rauch (Class Links, <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2002/04/rauch.htm>)

Week 7 (May 16): Kinship, family and social interaction; the central role of kinship in the construction of community;

Readings: Morrison and Wilson, Chapter 4; Cronk Chapter 6; Keesing 1975;

May 18: Guest Lecture

Week 8 (May 23 & 25): Guest Lectures

Week 9 (May 30) Guest Lecture

June 1: Kinship as a Cultural Construct; Cultural Evolution

Readings: Read 2001, Read 2003; Durham (Introduction)

Week 10 (June 6 & 8): Computer Modeling of Culture

Readings: Read 1998; Read and Behrens; Read 2005

Grading:

There will be a Midterm (100 points), a Final Exam (200 points) and Research paper (100 points).
Final Examination: June 12. 3 - 6 PM, Fowler A139