

Culture is a set of ideas passed on by each generation setting the standards of how society is expected to behave and conform; it is what society aspires to be and to achieve in life. Role models, symbols and values are all part of culture; especially in western parts of the world many people's lives are inspired by celebrities. Verbal and non verbal symbolism can define a culture, however they can be interpreted differently within different cultures. For example showing the sole of your foot and pointing is offensive in some cultures but part of everyday life in others. Values illustrate a culture's beliefs and what they believe to be morally right and wrong, values can also vary within different cultures; the Muslim culture insists that all Muslims must go on pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their life time as long as they are fit and financially stable to do so, otherwise it is seen as culturally unacceptable. The Catholic culture however encourages people to go on pilgrimage to Lourdes but does not expect them to do so. The definition of culture can easily be mistaken with race and ethnicity; 'South Africa contains a variety of ethnic groups with skins of many colours, who all feel that they are African and feel nothing in common with the cultures of, say, Britain or India, which places define their ethnic origins.' Burton and Dimbleby (2006)

One's culture is part of one's identity. Branaman defines one's identity as 'A set of reactions and performances by others, the expressive implications which tend to confirm one's detailed and imaginative view of himself...Role-support is centrally the implied confirmation of the specific content of one's idealised and idiosyncratic imaginations of self.' Branaman (2001)

Cultures can some times be distinguished by the way people behave. All cultures have a different perspective as to what is acceptable behaviour and what is not; it is culturally unacceptable for Muslim men and women to consume alcohol and for Muslim women to reveal their neck, ears, hair and body shape in public and therefore they must wear a Hijab. It is rather offensive some might say that women of other more relaxed cultures holiday in Muslim countries such as Turkey wearing as little as a bikini, and groups of hedonistic British tourists especially, consuming drastic amounts of alcohol whilst on holiday and behaving socially and culturally unacceptably in a Muslim dominated country. The contrast between the way the two cultures dress and behave reflects their identities; it is an insight into a whole different cultural upbringing. British hedonistic tourists on the whole have created an identity for themselves in a way by behaving unacceptably on holiday. On lookers from other cultural backgrounds are given the impression that all British people behave in that way all the time. Also Muslim Women are not always allowed to wear a Hijab to work for health and safety purposes; one believes that this can diminish part of their identity and cultural beliefs.

Within society people have different social roles; they are treated differently and thus behave differently depending on their professions and social class. For example people of lower class status travelling with a budget airline are not expected to receive the same treatment as a highly paid business man waiting in a private airport lounge and travelling in first class. Some may say this is morally wrong as people should all be treated equally despite their social class or financial status; however in a money driven consumerist world one's social and financial status defines one's identity. This can be illustrated on a global scale; people from third and second world countries perceive that all people from Western countries are wealthy, and Western people perceive people from third world countries such as Africa to be poverty stricken, however this is not the case for all Africans many are educated, employed and have food and shelter although we create an identity that they are all in the same situation.

Various social groups and cultures will have different norms. 'The concept of norms presupposes that some individuals will deviate from the norms of the group to which they belong. Obviously, each of us is a member or a number of groups and these may have different norms. If we feel particularly attracted to one group to which we belong then we are likely to be prepared to conform to the norms of that group.' Burton and Dimbleby (2006). One's self esteem can relate to being part of a group for example a graduate who has just landed a new highly paid job will adapt the way they dress and the social activities they participate in to fit in with the business men and women they will now be working alongside. This illustrates how one's identity can change as one's circumstances change. At one time this was a student living on a budget and possibly unemployed, at this time society would have perceived the student to be not of lower class but in a low income bracket. Now that the student has graduated and has a highly paid job society will perceive him or her to be a middle class member of society.

Socialisation is the way society takes on particular norms and values, knowing what kind of behaviour is expected of them. You could say that socialisation holds some aspects of conformity. Social cohesion brings groups of people together in a work place, for example it allows people to share ideas and talents to benefit each other and the organisation. 'Group cohesiveness is not something that can be seen as the main aim of a group. A group may be seen to be working in a cohesive way, but then tensions can arise that may damage that group identity.' McShane and Von Glinow (2007) as McShane and Von Glinow state if a person decides to leave a group or a new person enters the group new ideas will either be lost or gained changing the identity of the group itself.

Gramsci created the idea of hegemony, 'Hegemony might be defined as an 'organising principle' that is diffused by the process of socialisation into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things.' Boggs (1976) in society people accept their social positions and are in a way dominated by the elite middle and upper class people. The idea of hegemony in a way defines one's social identity, people are not thought of as individuals they are ordered in a kind of hierarchy.

'The mass media cultivate attitudes and values which are already present in a culture: the media maintain and propagate these values amongst members of a culture, thus binding it together.' Boyd-Barrett and Braham (1977) as Boyd-Barrett and Braham state, the media is the main influence on culture thus affecting our social identities as it can be very persuasive and change the way we think and behave.

Cultural ethnocentrism existed more in the 1800s when Afro-American women were used by white families as slaves. 'These women have seen white elites, both actual and aspiring, from perspectives largely obscured from their black spouses and from these groups themselves.' Jackson and Scott (2002) although slavery is non-existent in first world countries nowadays, in some areas there is still an air of superiority between cultures. This can affect the identity of those who feel less superior as they are unable to express their values and beliefs, and may feel they cannot dress in their cultural attire for fear of rejection. Cultural relativism however, is something that exists in most areas of the world especially multicultural countries. Cultural relativism means that all values and beliefs are relative and there are no absolute standards of right or wrong, it is based on morality rather than culture. Unlike cultural ethnocentrism it allows people to express who they are and what they believe in, which brings out different identities and allows them to share their values with one another.

One concludes that one's culture and surrounding cultures can affect one's identity both positively and negatively. Positive aspects include sharing values and beliefs and negative aspects include delusions formed by the mass media. No two cultures are the same and even people within the same culture can have varying beliefs, it is all part of their identity. People must learn to live in cultural harmony despite varying cultures and identities.

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