

The Word “Culture” and its Dimensions

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Abstract

“Culture is a literary term mostly used for almost all spheres of life. We can say that culture is everywhere in ideas, values and emotions. As it is common and wide, as it is difficult to describe what is culture? Just as culture seems to be everywhere, it is also seems to slip through your fingers when you try to get hold of it. It is one of the words that describe so many aspects of human life, and yet it is one of the most slippery words we have. The article represents a critical research study of multidimensional word “culture.”

In the early 1950s, the American anthropologists Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluchhohn {1952} reviewed all the various meanings of ‘culture’ (and what they took as being its close verbal cousin, ‘civilization’) that they could find. The result was 164 definitions of what ‘culture’ could mean. The literary scholar Raymond Williams (1976) famously noted that ‘culture’ was one of the most complex words in the English language, having a whole series of meanings that had changed a great deal over time.¹

A few definitions and categories are given below:

1. The total pattern of human behaviour and its products embodied in through, speech, action and artifacts and dependents upon man’s capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations through the use of tools, language, and system of abstract thought.²
2. That complex whole which includes knowledges, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.³
3. The sum total of knowledge, attitudes and habitual behaviour patters shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society.⁴

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4. [All the] historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational irrational and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behaviour of man.⁵
5. The mass of learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas and values and the behaviour they induce.⁶
6. The man-made part of the environment.⁷
7. Patterns, explicit and implicit of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, includes their embodiments in artifacts.^{8 & 9}

David Inglis and Jhon Hughson presented the idea that culture has following six parts:

1. Culture comprises the patterns of ideas, values and beliefs common to a particular group of people. It does not matter whether the group is small or large, or whether it comprises a set of people within a particular 'society', or everyone within that society, or people from different societies related to each other in some way across national boundaries. Culture is defined as always being part of the collective life of given groups of human beings. Culture comprises recurring patterns of ideas, values and belief. A 'culture' persists to some extent over time. It has some capacities to endure over time, as well as to change and be changed.
2. The culture of one group differentiates it from other groups, each of which has its own culture. Different types of groups can be said to have 'their own' cultures: the culture of a 'nation' (e.g. French culture), of a social class (e.g. working-class culture), of an ethnic group within a nation (e.g. Italian-American culture), of a group outside the 'mainstream' culture (e.g. a youth subculture of punks or Goths). Each of these types of group can be said to have its own culture, its own distinctive set of ideas, values and beliefs. This is not, however, to suggest that there are no overlaps between different cultures, and no shared aspects between them (e.g. working-class culture in the United States is part of, and shares many of the features of, more general 'American' culture).
3. Culture contains meanings. Culture is meaningful. These meanings are the ways through which people in the group comprehend, make sense of, and respond intellectually and emotionally to, the world around them.
4. The ideas, values and beliefs of a group are embodied in symbols and artifacts. These symbols can be pictorial or can be part of a written language. These artifacts are physical objects which are imprinted in some way with the idea, values and beliefs of the group.

5. Culture is learned. Culture is transmitted by one generation of people to the next generation. This learning process means that individuals internalize the ideas, values and beliefs of the group. These become habitual and taken for granted, and are generally experienced as 'natural' rather than learned.
6. Culture is arbitrary. Culture is the result of human activities, rather than the product of 'nature'. It is neither 'natural' nor inevitably the way it is. It could be different from the way it is if the life conditions of the group change.¹⁰

From definitions of cultures Raymond Williams concluded that:

There are three general categories regarding the definition of culture. There is, first, the 'idea', in which culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values. The analysis of culture, if such a definition is accepted, is essentially the discovery and description, in lives and works, of those values which can be seen to compose a timeless order, or to have permanent reference to the universal human condition. Then, second, there is the 'documentary', in which culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way; human thought and experience are variously recorded. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the activity of criticism, by which the nature of the thought and experience, the details of the language, from the convention in which these are active, are described and valued. Such criticism can range from a process very similar to the 'idea' analysis, the discovery of 'the best that has been thought and written in the world', through a process which, while interested in tradition, takes as its primary emphasis the particular work being studied (its clarification and valuation being the principal end in view) to a kind of historical criticism which, after analysis of particular works, seek to relate them to the particular traditions and societies in which they appeared. Finally, third, there is the 'social' definition of culture, in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour.¹¹

The term of culture has become so common that it is being used now for every kind of group of any thing. Look into some titles of the books explaining the point:

1. Culture of contentment.¹²
2. Culture of Corruption.....¹³

Theory and popular culture, Editor: John Storey, Harvester Wheatsheaf New York, 1994, P.P56

3. Culture of Cold Water Marine Fish¹⁴
4. The Culture of Criticism and Criticism of Culture.¹⁵
5. Culture of Democracy: a Challenge for schools¹⁶
6. Culture of Design¹⁷
7. Culture of Education.¹⁸
8. The Culture of Fashion¹⁹
9. Culture of Flowers²⁰
10. The Culture of Food²¹
11. A culture of Life: Women's Theology and Social Liberation.²²
12. Culture of Pain²³
13. The Culture of Print²⁴
14. Culture of Security²⁵
15. Culture of Bureaucracy²⁶

These different titles show that use of this term has a variety of its usage. So it is very difficult to make it finite and limited.

In short we can say that there is an ambiguity in this term. Above mentioned facts are explained by Roger Ivar Lohmann in these sentences.

“Despite the various critiques, culture continues to be useful term in the social sciences and humanities not only in spite of, but also because of, its multiple meanings and ambiguity.”²⁷

R.G.F. decided that according to Kroeber and Kluckhohn, and many other anthropologists culture is “An abstraction from behaviour” but at the same time he writes about this decision “these conceptions have defects or shortcomings”²⁸

In addition to this Brightmann wrote an article which is a critique of the term culture, its changing meanings and its replacement with new terms. He advises to forget culture.²⁹

Similarly Lila in one of his essays argued that the term culture should be replaced with practice and discourse.³⁰

When the basic term is so controversial, confused and disputed, then in such conditions how we can discuss the matters such as cross culture, international culture, clash of culture etc. First of all we have to specify the boundaries of culture or replace it with other terms, then we will be able to discuss such topics.

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