



# **INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY**

**Soc 1101: Summer 2023**

**Shelley Yan**

**Department of Sociology**

**Cornell University**

# Culture

## Lecture 12

# What is Culture?

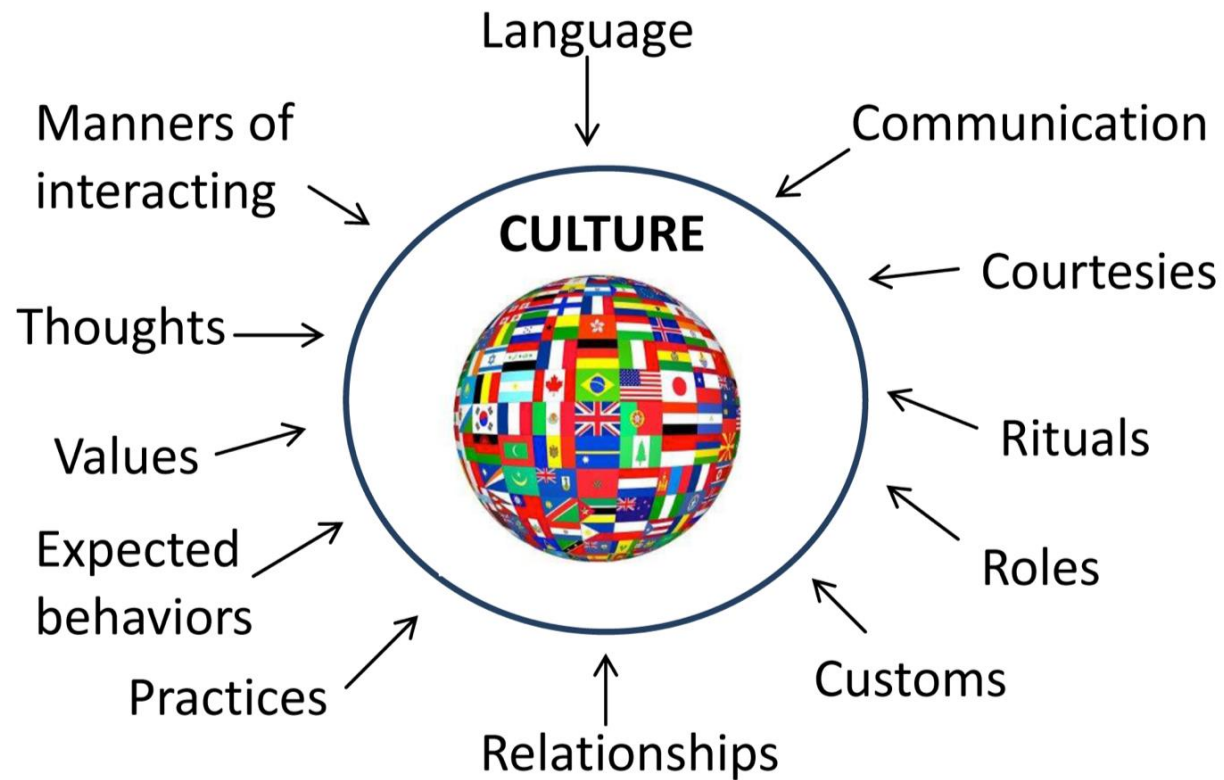
- **The values, norms, material goods, and methods of communication characteristic of a given group (Giddens, Duneier, Appelbaum, and Carr 2016)**

# EXAMPLE ELEMENTS OF CULTURE

- **Values**
  - **Abstract ideals; moral beliefs**
- **Norms**
  - **Rules that people are expected to follow; rules of conduct that specify appropriate behavior in social situations**
- **Material goods**
  - **The goods a society produces**



# EXAMPLE ELEMENTS OF CULTURE



# WAIT: IS THAT BASICALLY EVERYTHING IN SOCIETY?

- **Broader versus more specific definitions of culture**
- **STRUCTURE:** Economic, political and institutional arrangements (e.g., social classes, power hierarchies, social institutions, or social attributes like race, gender, and age)
- **CULTURE:** Shared understandings, values, rituals, norms, and expressive symbols

# Sociology and culture

- **Sociology of culture**

- Sociological studies of cultural phenomena, viewing culture as the “dependent” variable
- Older in discipline history

- **Cultural sociology**

- Studies how society is culturally constituted, viewing culture as the “independent” variable
- Newer in its history

- **Great overlap still!**

# Ann Swidler, Culture in Action (1986)



- **Most highly cited paper in cultural sociology (>13k times by today)**
- **Key question: Does culture “matter”—i.e., causally impact social action?**
  - **Cultural sociology or the sociology of culture?**
- **Critique:**
  - **Culture as values (only) that define the ends and goals of actions;**
  - **“Culture of poverty”**



# Ann Swidler, Culture in Action (1986)

- **Establish:**
  - **Culture = tool kit for constructing strategies of action**

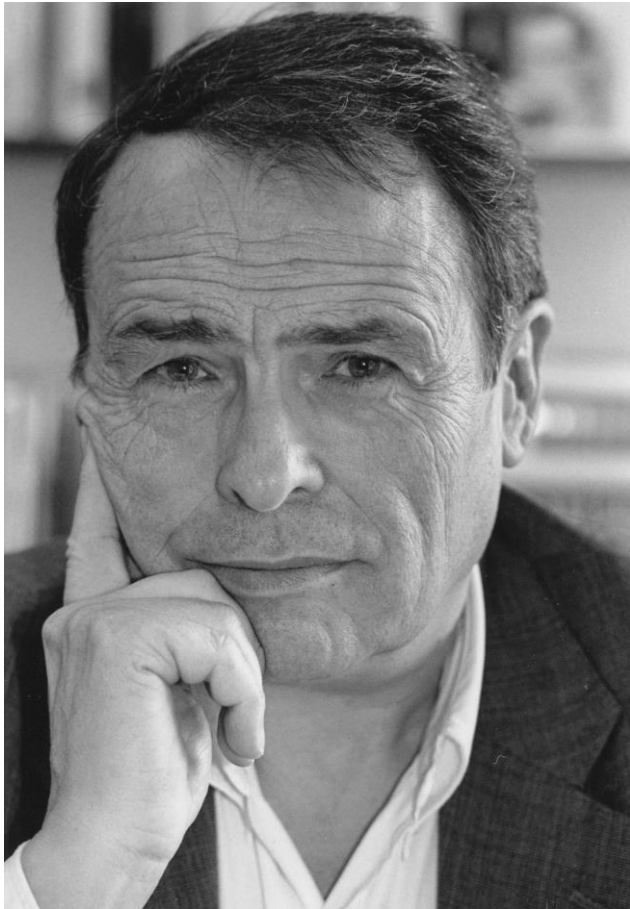
**Culture can be thought of as a "tool kit" or "repertoires" of practices, knowledge, and symbols acquired through learning, rather than by instinct, that enable people to live in society**

## p281

- 'Such cultural influence can be observed in "cultural lag." People do not readily take advantage of new structural opportunities which would require them to abandon established ways of life. This is not because they cling to cultural values, but because they are reluctant to abandon familiar strategies of action for which they have the cultural equipment.'

# RECALL LAREAU...

- **Concerted cultivation vs accomplishment of natural growth**
- **Application of the theory of “Cultural capital”**



Bourdieu 1930-2002

# Cultural Capital and Pierre Bourdieu

- Bourdieu, Pierre and Jean-Claude Passeron. 1977[1970]. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
  - Reproduction of educational attainment by family background (dominant vs subordinate class)
  - Legitimation
- Lamont and Lareau (1988): "institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion"



LE SENS COMMUN

pierre bourdieu

## la distinction

critique sociale du jugement



LES EDITIONS DE MINUIT

## *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste (Bourdieu [1979] 1984)*

- Study of class distinction through the lens of culture in French society (eg., music, food)
- Judgments of taste as related to social position and acts of social positioning
- Empirical component: data from quantitative surveys, photographs and interviews
- Habitus: socially ingrained habits, skills and dispositions that shape the body and the mind; as a result, it shapes present social actions of an individual
- “Forms of capital” (economic, social, cultural)

# Tavory and Swidler A. 2009, Condom Semiotics

**Example of culture (beliefs, meaning-making, interpretations, norms) shaping medical knowledge and health behavior**

- **Puzzle: Resistance to condom use in Malawi despite high prevalence of HIV**
- **Cultural explanation through diary data collection and analyses**
  - **“sweetness” of sex (sexual pleasure requires the contact of semen with vaginal fluids)**
  - **trust between partners**
  - **risk and danger assessment (condom use causing cancer, vaginal sores, or infertility)**