Culture and Its Global Aspects

THERE ARE SOME CULTURAL UNIVERSALS:

-- INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE / SOME FORM OF FAMILY SYSTEM / BAN ON INCEST

-- LANGUAGE

Sociology, and understanding of social behavior requires a “sociological imagination.” C. Wright Mills: “The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals.”

When the cherished values of an individual, or society, are threatened, they experience a crisis. It is, through utilization of the sociological imagination that the sociologist can render assistance.
The norms, the values, the foundations for the stable social interaction sought by most is to be found within culture, and within society.

**Culture, Norms and Deviance**

Society functions, for better or for worse, by the acceptance and utilization of social behavior that is acceptable to most of its members. Commonly acceptable behavior allows the members of a society to interact in a manner that is generally more free of conflict and that enhances the abilities of the members of a society to interact successfully for their mutual benefit.

But there is an overriding question that social scientists continually seek to answer: Why do we do what we do?
Are we all behaving as we are because of intuitive skills and instincts or have we learned how to behave?

Remember the following terms:

1) Nature - we were biologically constructed to function in certain ways

2) Nurture - we were trained by society, or parents, or others to function in certain ways

John Cuber did extensive work in the nature vs. nurture area and determined that we are all subject to what is known as the **Unique Individual Experience** -- not everyone has the same things happen to them as they proceed through life and we are all molded by all the unique things that happen to us on an individual basis.
Whether social action is directed by nature or nurture, sociological study of society focuses on social behavior that is classified as micro or macro -- micro -- effect of social action on personal life macro -- effect of social action on groups, organizations, governments, entire societies

It is from social behavior that Culture emerges - consists of the values of a group, the norms they follow and the material goods they create

There are, as stated, cultural universals. And, while they are not universal all cultures have:

Norms / the behavior we might most commonly encounter

A norm is the level of conformity with expected behavior.
For example, you're expected to behave in certain ways in certain situations.

The levels of norms are:

1) **Mores** - these are the most intense expectations and include behavior that becomes a crime if deviance occurs. For example, cannibalism in America violates a More.

2) **Customs** - these are things we generally do, or avoid, but that are not necessarily criminal if deviance occurs. For example, toe nail clipping in public violates custom.

3) **Folkways** - regional or ethnic activities are an example; For example, beer halls that are part of life in Germany would not be acceptable folk culture in Westchester County, New York.
TODAY’S WORLD HAS BECOME A GLOBAL COMMUNITY IN MANY WAYS. EASY EXPOSURE TO OTHER CULTURES THROUGH

-- TRAVEL

-- MASS MEDIA

-- ELECTRONIC MEDIA

SUCH FAST AND FREQUENT ENCOUNTERS DIFFERING NORMS LEAD TO INCREASING LEVELS OF:

Culture Shock: Encountering, possibly within our own culture, but more commonly in another culture, something that seems so foreign it is difficult to understand and very difficult to accept.

India story
**Cultural Relativism:** What may be acceptable, or good, in one culture may be considered unacceptable, or bad, in another. For example, standards for pre-marital sex vary from culture to culture (may be punishable by death in some cultures but is widely tolerated and accepted in our own)

Saudi Arabia story

Culture shock and cultural relativism lead to cultural conflict which commonly arises from:

**ETHNOCENTRICISM:** using one’s own culture as a standard for the judgment of other cultures.

Sometimes we judge our own culture to be best and other things, from other cultures, are judged to be inferior or unacceptable; but not always.
Ethnocentrism is the process for comparative judgement, using your culture as the central measure for the judgement; it may or may not result in judgement in which your culture is judged best.

Cultural Differences cause problems because we are conditioned to treat those who are different with suspicion and/or contempt; there are various perspectives on how we deal with these differences:

Felson: Blame Analysis - attempts to transfer, to others, the blame for a group not performing as well as other groups in the same society; tends to link cause and blame; tends to shift the burden and reduce attempts to understand what is really going on and is, therefore, not productive in
advancing progress for the group in question. Blaming, and defending, the group(s) in question should not be the goal; understanding of cause is essential.

Miner: Ethnocentrism and cultural relativity and perspective are all portrayed in terms that are inverted; he's really talking about typical Americans here, but as might be viewed by an outsider with no knowledge of the medicine cabinet, the hospital (latipsoh), etc.

Meyer: How we are taught, how we learn, how we are controlled; studied obedience and disobedience and how they can be measured; raises questions about ethics and responsibility in research techniques.