



Anth 101 Section WC810

INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Professor Dustin M. Wax

Tu/Th 9:30 - 10:50 am, Rm. WC B-105

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Office Hours: Tu 11 - 11:45 am (Faculty Office)

Description

This course is an introduction to human nature and culture, the universal aspects of culture and the range of cultural variation as revealed by an examination of world ethnography. At course's end, the student should be able to:

1. Define the field of anthropology
2. Discuss the four major sub-fields of anthropology
3. Define the concept of culture
4. Discuss the various institutions that comprise culture
5. Apply anthropological concepts to the analysis of individual cultures, including American culture
6. Apply anthropological concepts to the comparative examination of cultures
7. Apply anthropological concepts to the analysis of cultural problems, including those in the United States

Required Texts

Cultural Anthropology: A Global Perspective (6th ed.), Scupin (Textbook)

Faces of Anthropology (5th ed.), Rafferty and Ukaegbu (Reader)

Nuer Journeys, Nuer Lives, Holtzman (Case Study)

Assignments and Grading

Response Papers

A short (200-400 word) personal response to one or more of the Reader articles assigned for the week. Response papers are ungraded – you get 10 points for handing it in. [10 X 10 pts]

Tests

There will be 3 take-home tests, consisting of a short, 500-800 word essay. A selection of questions for you to choose from will be posted online one week prior to the due date. Tests will be submitted online through the class website. [3 X 50 pts]

Quizzes

There will be three quizzes covering vocabulary and concepts drawn from your readings. Quizzes will be fill-in-the-blank and will be taken online on the course website. [10+20+30 pts = 60 pts]

Attendance/Participation

Attendance and participation will be evaluated at the end of the semester, with up to 15 points given for attendance (based on percentage of classes attended) and up to 25 points based on your contribution to the class. Students who attend regularly and take an active part in classroom discussion should have no problem earning full points for participation. [40 pts]

Extra Credit

Students may hand in up to 2 extra credit assignments for 5 pts each. Credit is given for attending outside activities and writing a 1-pg summary of event and its relevance to our class. [to 10 pts]

The total for all assignments is 350 pts (plus extra credit). Final grades will be assigned as follows:

A	315 – 350
B	280 – 214
C	245 – 279
D	210 – 244
F	209 or lower

Offensive Material

Some of the things said, shown, or read in this class may and should offend you. I expect students to exercise their own discretion and judgment when faced with such potentially offensive material. If the material covered in this class brings into question matters relating to your own faith, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, or any other feature of your identity, please take the time to examine your reactions and their bases and reflect on the nature of your discomfort.

Tentative Class Outline



Week 1 (Jan 20-22): Class Introduction

“Body Rituals of the Nacirema” (in syllabus) - Read for Thursday

Week 2 (Jan 27-29): What is Anthropology?

Textbook: Ch. 1

☛ **Response #1 (Jan 27; Describe your heritage and what it means to you)**

Week 3 (Feb 3-5): Culture

Textbook: Ch. 3

Reader: “Filipinos Were My Teacher” (83)

Reader: “Adventures in the Field and in the Locker Room” (50)

☛ **Response #2 (Feb 3)**

Week 4 (Feb 10-12): Theories of Culture

Reader: “Epistemology” (63)

Reader: “Professional Football: An American Symbol and Ritual” (92)

☛ **Response #3 (Feb 10)**



Week 5 (Feb 17-19): The Meaning of Biology

Textbook: Ch. 7

Reader: “Learning to Love Neanderthals” (7)

Reader: “Race without Color” (13)

☛ **Test #1 handed out (Feb 17)**

☛ **Quiz #1 due 11:59 pm (Feb 17)**

Week 6 (Feb 24-26): Special Topic

☛ **Test #1 due 11:59 pm (Feb 24)**

Week 7 (Mar 3-5): Enculturation and Gender

Textbook: Ch 4 (pp. 73 - 90) and Ch 5 (pp. 112 - 128)

Reader: “Re-telling One’s Own” (317)

Reader: “Rituals of Manhood” (203)

☛ **Response #4 (Mar 3)**



Week 8 (Mar 10-12): Bands

Textbook: Ch. 9

Reader: “Hunter/Gatherers of New Guinea” (105)

Reader: “Woman the Hunter: The Agta” (191)

☛ **Response #5 (Mar 10)**

Spring Break (Mar 16-20): No Class

Tentative Class Outline (Cont'd)



Week 9 (Mar 24-26): Tribes

Textbook: Ch. 10

Reader: "Life Behind the Veil" (170)

Reader: "Pastoral Nomadism and Gender" (140)

☛ **Response #6 (Mar 24)**

Week 10 (Mar 31 - Apr 2): Chiefdoms

Textbook: Ch. 11

Reader: "Working Girl" (200)

Reader: "Shamanism" (261)

☛ **Test #2 handed out (Mar 31)**

☛ **Quiz #2 due 11:59 pm (Mar 31)**

Week 11 (Apr 7-9): Agricultural States

Textbook: Ch 12

Reader: "Family and Kinship in Village India" (165)

Reader: "Trickle-Down Theory" (136)

☛ **Test #2 due 11:59 pm (Apr 7)**

Week 12 (Apr 14-16): Industrial States

Textbook: Ch 13

Reader: "Disappearance of the Incest Taboo" (155)

Nuer Journeys, Nuer Lives: Pp. 1-50

☛ **Response #7 (Apr 14)**

Week 13 (Apr 21 - 23): The Nuer in America

Nuer Journeys, Nuer Lives: Pp. 51 - 135

☛ **Response #8 (Apr 21)**

Week 14 (Apr 28-30): Globalization

Textbook: Ch. 6

Reader: "Price of Progress" (364)

Reader: "War, Factionalism, and the State in Afghanistan" (227)

☛ **Response #9 (Apr 28)**

Week 15 (May 5-7): Contemporary Problems

Textbook: Ch 17 (Pp. 455 - 473)

Reader: "Soc. Psych. of Modern Slavery" (396)

Reader: "Humanitarianism, Terrorism, and..." (255)

☛ **Test #3 handed out (Apr 30)**

☛ **Response #10 (Apr 30)**

Week 16 (May 12): Final Class

Test #3 due IN CLASS (May 12)



Classroom Policies

Attendance

Attendance is expected and will be counted as part of your grade. Because of the importance of classroom discussion and the difficulty of some of the material, you should make an effort to be in class and take part in classroom discussion. All material covered in the class, whether in the books or in lecture, is considered “fair game” for exams. However, as college students and adults you have the right to determine what and how much you want to gain from your classes. You will have to decide if the missed lecture and discussion, and the point or half-point that skipping class will cost you, are a fair trade. If you know that you will be absent, arriving late, or coming early, for whatever reason, please let me know ahead of time, for courtesy’s sake and so we can make arrangements regarding missed material and/or assignments.

Late Assignments

Late assignments cannot and will not be accepted except in direst emergency. If you know you will be unable to meet one of the due dates for a good reason (surgical recovery is a good reason, taking a vacation is not), talk to me as soon as possible to make appropriate arrangements to hand the assignment in early.

In-Class Behaviour

I take it as a given that students will behave appropriately in the classroom. Disruptive behaviour, including but not restricted to abusive argumentation (with me or your fellow students), creating a disturbance in class, repeated tardiness or early departure, practical jokes, excessive use of cell phones or pagers, or any other disturbance will be in conjunction with CCSN regulations. If you know that there is a possibility of creating a disturbance for a good reason (for instance, leaving a cell phone on to receive updates on a sick relative), please inform me before class begins.

Academic Honesty

The work you hand in for any assignment must be your own. Any ideas or language used in any assignment that are not your own – including paraphrased passages as well as direct quotes – must be attributed to the original author with a proper citation. Any work that is not properly cited and is appropriated as your own work – including work copied from another student, papers downloaded from the Internet, passages copied or paraphrased from books or articles without citation, and so on – is plagiarism and if discovered will result in a grade of “0” for the assignment, and repeated instances may result in an “F” in the class and potentially expulsion. Cheating on an exam in any way will also result in a grade of “0” for the exam. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please come see me.

Classroom Policies (Cont'd)

References

References in your assignments should be in any format you're comfortable with, as long as you're consistent. Follow a quote or paraphrase with a parenthetical citation, including the author's last name and year of publication if you cite more than one work by that author in your paper, followed by the page number on which the referenced passage appears, separated by a colon (e.g. Wax 2003: 144). After the paper, include a "Work Cited" page. Please see the "AA Format" handout for instructions on formatting references.

Withdrawal

If you wish to drop the class for any reason, you must officially withdraw from the class or you will receive an "F" on your transcript. I will not give administrative withdrawals at the end of the semester unless there are compelling and extraordinary circumstances (e.g. you were unexpectedly dead for 3 weeks) to do so. The responsibility for withdrawing correctly is the student's, not the professor's.

Students with Disabilities

I will make any reasonable effort to make sure my classroom is accessible and comfortable for students with disabilities – please see me with any problems or suggestions. If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, make sure you contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) for coordination of any necessary academic accommodations. The DRC is located in the Student Services area of each campus.

Students who would like to perform community service or possibly earn some extra cash can stop by the DRC and fill out an interest card. The DRC hires students as note-takers, proctors, scribes, and research assistants as needed.

Grading Standards

Assignments will be graded on a combination of two factors: your understanding of the material covered in class and your ability to express that understanding clearly. Unless it becomes an impediment to understanding what you are trying to say, a spelling or grammar error here and there will not negatively affect your grade (but, please do spellcheck and proof-read your work before handing it in). Excessive and distracting errors, however, cannot help but get in the way of your ideas, and most likely will negatively affect your grade. I strongly urge all students to at least pay a visit to the writing center in Building "C" to see what resources are available to make you a better writer.

Assignment Format

All assignments except work done in class should be typed and clearly printed on normal 8 1/2" X 11" paper. Essays should be double-spaced in 12-point type in some standard font (Times, Arial, Garamond, Helvetica, etc.--nothing ornate or oversized, in other words), and should have 1" margins all around. All assignments must be typed.

Body Rituals among the Nacirema¹

by Horace Miner

Most cultures exhibit a particular configuration or style. A single value or pattern of perceiving the world often leaves its stamp on several institutions in the society. Examples are "machismo" in Spanish-influenced cultures, "face" in Japanese culture, and "pollution by females" in some highland New Guinea cultures. Here Horace Miner demonstrates that "attitudes about the body" have a pervasive influence on many institutions in Nacirema society.

The anthropologist has become so familiar with the diversity of ways in which different people behave in similar situations that he is not apt to be surprised by even the most exotic customs. In fact, if all of the logically possible combinations of behavior have not been found somewhere in the world, he is apt to suspect that they must be present in some yet undescribed tribe. The point has, in fact, been expressed with respect to clan organization by Murdock.² In this light, the magical beliefs and practices of the Nacirema present such unusual aspects that it seems desirable to describe them as an example of the extremes to which human behavior can go.

Professor Linton³ first brought the ritual of the Nacirema to the attention of anthropologists twenty years ago, but the culture of this people is still very poorly understood. They are a North American group living in the territory between the Canadian Cree, the Yaqui and Tarahumare of Mexico, and the Carib and Arawak of the Antilles. Little is known of their origin, although tradition states that they came from the east....

Nacirema culture is characterized by a highly developed market economy which has evolved in a rich natural habitat. While much of the people's time is devoted to economic pursuits, a large part of the fruits of these labors and a considerable portion of the day are spent in ritual activity. The focus of this activity is the human body, the appearance and health of which loom as a dominant concern in the ethos of the people. While such a concern is certainly not unusual, its ceremonial aspects and associated philosophy are unique.

The fundamental belief underlying the whole system appears to be that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease. Incarcerated in such a body, man's only hope is to avert these characteristics through the use of ritual and ceremony. Every household has one or more shrines devoted to this purpose. The more powerful individuals in the society have several shrines in their houses and, in fact, the opulence of a house is often referred to in terms of the number of such ritual centers it possesses. Most houses are of wattle and daub construction, but the shrine rooms of the more wealthy are walled with stone. Poorer families imitate the rich by applying pottery plaques to their shrine walls.

While each family has at least one such shrine, the rituals associated with it are not family ceremonies but are private and secret. The rites are normally only discussed with children, and then only during the period when they are being initiated into these mysteries. I was able, however, to establish sufficient rapport with the natives to examine these shrines and to have the rituals described to me.

The focal point of the shrine is a box or chest which is built into the wall. In this chest are kept the many charms and magical potions without which no native believes he could live. These preparations are secured from a variety of specialized practitioners. The most powerful of these are the medicine men, whose assistance must be rewarded with substantial gifts. However, the medicine men do not provide the curative potions for their clients, but decide what the ingredients should be and then write them down in an ancient and secret language. This writing is understood only by the medicine men and by the herbalists who, for another gift, provide the required charm.

The charm is not disposed of after it has served its purpose, but is placed in the charmbox of the household shrine. As these magical materials are specific for certain ills, and the real or imagined maladies of the people are many, the charm-box is usually full to overflowing. The magical packets are so numerous that people forget what their purposes were and fear to use them again. While the natives are very vague on this point, we can only assume that the idea in retaining all the old magical materials is that their presence in the charm-box, before which the body rituals are conducted, will in some way protect the worshiper.

Beneath the charm-box is a small font. Each day every member of the family, in succession, enters the shrine room, bows his head before the charm-box, mingles different sorts of holy water in the font, and proceeds with a brief rite of ablution.⁴ The holy waters are secured from the Water Temple of the community, where the priests conduct elaborate ceremonies to make the liquid ritually pure.

In the hierarchy of magical practitioners, and below the medicine men in prestige, are specialists whose designation is best translated as "holy-mouth-men." The Nacirema have an almost pathological horror of and fascination with the mouth, the condition of which is believed to have a supernatural influence on all social relationships. Were it not for the rituals of the mouth, they believe that their teeth would fall out, their gums bleed, their jaws shrink, their friends desert them, and their lovers reject them. They also believe that a strong relationship exists between oral and moral characteristics. For example, there is a ritual ablution of the mouth for children which is supposed to improve their moral fiber.

The daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouth-rite. Despite the fact that these people are so punctilious⁵ about care of the mouth, this rite involves a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures.⁶

In addition to the private mouth-rite, the people seek out a holy-mouth-man once or twice a year. These practitioners have an impressive set of paraphernalia, consisting of a variety of augers, awls, probes, and prods. The use of these items in the exorcism of the evils of the mouth involves almost unbelievable ritual torture of the client. The holy-mouth-man opens the client's mouth and, using the above mentioned tools, enlarges any holes which decay may have created in the teeth. Magical materials are put into these holes. If there are no naturally occurring holes in the teeth, large sections of one or more teeth are gouged out so that the supernatural substance can be applied. In the client's view, the purpose of these ministrations⁷ is to arrest decay and to draw friends. The extremely sacred and traditional character of the rite is evident in the fact that the natives return to the holy-mouth-men year after year, despite the fact that their teeth continue to decay.

It is to be hoped that, when a thorough study of the Nacirema is made, there will be careful inquiry into the personality structure of these people. One has but to watch the gleam in the eye of a holy-mouth-man, as he jabs an awl into an exposed nerve, to suspect that a certain amount of sadism is involved. If this can be established, a very interesting pattern emerges, for most of the population shows definite masochistic tendencies. It was to these that Professor Linton referred in discussing a distinctive part of the daily body ritual which is performed only by men. This part of the rite includes scraping and lacerating the surface of the face with a sharp instrument. Special women's rites are performed only four times during each lunar month, but what they lack in frequency is made up in barbarity. As part of this ceremony, women bake their heads in small ovens for about an hour. The theoretically interesting point is that what seems to be a preponderantly masochistic people have developed sadistic specialists.

The medicine men have an imposing temple, or latipso, in every community of any size. The more elaborate ceremonies required to treat very sick patients can only be performed at this temple. These ceremonies involve not only the thaumaturge⁸ but a permanent group of vestal maidens who move sedately about the temple chambers in distinctive costume and headdress.

The latipso ceremonies are so harsh that it is phenomenal that a fair proportion of the really sick natives who enter the temple ever recover. Small children whose indoctrination is still incomplete have been known to resist attempts to take them to the temple because "that is where you go to die." Despite this fact, sick adults are not only willing but eager to undergo the protracted ritual purification, if they can afford to do so. No matter how ill the supplicant or how grave the emergency, the guardians of many temples will not admit a client if he cannot give a rich gift to the custodian. Even after one has gained and survived the ceremonies, the guardians will not permit the neophyte to leave until he makes still another gift.

The supplicant entering the temple is first stripped of all his or her clothes. In everyday life the Nacirema avoids exposure of his body and its natural functions. Bathing and excretory acts are performed only in the secrecy of the household shrine, where they are ritualized as part of the body-rites. Psychological shock results from the fact that body secrecy is suddenly lost upon entry into the latipso. A man, whose own wife has never seen him in an excretory act, suddenly finds himself naked and assisted by a vestal maiden while he performs his natural functions into a sacred vessel. This sort of ceremonial treatment is necessitated by the fact that the excreta are used by a diviner to ascertain the course and nature of the client's sickness. Female clients, on the other hand, find their naked bodies are subjected to the scrutiny, manipulation and prodding of the medicine men.

Few supplicants in the temple are well enough to do anything but lie on their hard beds. The daily ceremonies, like the rites of the holy-mouth-men, involve discomfort and torture. With ritual precision, the vestals awaken their miserable charges each dawn and roll them about on their beds of pain while performing ablutions, in the formal movements of which the maidens are highly trained. At other times they insert magic wands in the supplicant's mouth or force him to eat substances which are supposed to be healing. From time to time the medicine men come to their clients and jab magically treated needles into their flesh. The fact that these temple ceremonies may not cure, and may even kill the neophyte, in no way decreases the people's faith in the medicine men.

There remains one other kind of practitioner, known as a "listener." This witchdoctor has the power to exorcise the devils that lodge in the heads of people who have been bewitched. The Nacirema believe that parents bewitch their own children. Mothers are particularly suspected of putting a curse on children while teaching them the secret body rituals. The counter-magic of the witchdoctor is unusual in its lack of ritual. The patient simply tells the "listener" all his troubles and fears, beginning with the earliest difficulties he can remember. The memory displayed by the Nacirema in these exorcism sessions is truly remarkable. It is not uncommon for the patient to bemoan the rejection he felt upon being weaned as a babe, and a few individuals even see their troubles going back to the traumatic effects of their own birth.

In conclusion, mention must be made of certain practices which have their base in native esthetics but which depend upon the pervasive aversion to the natural body and its functions. There are ritual fasts to make fat people thin and ceremonial feasts to make thin people fat. Still other rites are used to make women's breasts larger if they are small, and smaller if they are large. General dissatisfaction with breast shape is symbolized in the fact that the ideal form is virtually outside the range of human variation. A few women afflicted with almost inhuman hyper-mammary development are so idolized that they make a handsome living by simply going from village to village and permitting the natives to stare at them for a fee.

Reference has already been made to the fact that excretory functions are ritualized, routinized, and relegated to secrecy. Natural reproductive functions are similarly distorted. Intercourse is taboo as a topic and scheduled as an act. Efforts are made to avoid pregnancy by the use of magical materials or by limiting intercourse to certain phases of the moon. Conception is actually very infrequent. When pregnant, women dress so as to hide their condition. Parturition takes place in secret, without friends or relatives to assist, and the majority of women do not nurse their infants.

Our review of the ritual life of the Nacirema has certainly shown them to be a magic-ridden people. It is hard to understand how they have managed to exist so long under the burdens which they have imposed upon themselves. But even such exotic customs as these take on real meaning when they are viewed with the insight provided by Malinowski⁹ when he wrote:

*Looking from far and above, from our high places of safety in the developed civilization, it is easy to see all the crudity and irrelevance of magic. But without its power and guidance early man could not have mastered his practical difficulties as he has done, nor could man have advanced to the higher stages of civilization.*¹⁰

Footnotes

1 From "Body Ritual among the Nacirema," *American Anthropologist* 58 (1956): 503-507. All footnotes were added by Dowell.

2 George Peter Murdock (1897-1985), famous ethnographer.

3 Ralph Linton (1893-1953), best known for studies of enculturation (maintaining that all culture is learned rather than inherited; the process by which a society's culture is transmitted from one generation to the next), claiming culture is humanity's "social heredity."

4 A washing or cleansing of the body or a part of the body. From the Latin *abluere*, to wash away.

5 Marked by precise observance of the finer points of etiquette and formal conduct.

6 It is worthy of note that since Prof. Miner's original research was conducted, the Nacirema have almost universally abandoned the natural bristles of their private mouth-rite in favor of oil-based polymerized synthetics. Additionally, the powders associated with this ritual have generally been semi-liquefied. Other updates to the Nacirema culture shall be eschewed in this document for the sake of parsimony.

7 Tending to religious or other important functions.

8 A miracle-worker.

9 Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), famous cultural anthropologist best known for his argument that people everywhere share common biological and psychological needs and that the function of all cultural institutions is to fulfill such needs; the nature of the institution is determined by its function.

10 Did you get it?