# Lesson Element

# Different types of culture and cultural hybridity

## Aims and Objectives

* To understand that there are different types of culture, understood both sociologically and non-sociologically
* To understand different types of culture and learn about examples of each
* To understand how these different forms of culture are related to norms and values
* To understand what is meant by cultural hybridity and consider different examples of cultural hybridity.

## Task 1 – Different types of culture

The concept of culture is very broad, and is often used in a number of different ways, both generally and within sociology. The following terms are just a few of the ways in which the word culture is used.

* Subculture
* High Culture
* Popular culture
* Global culture
* Consumer culture.

Read about each type of culture below and answer the questions that follow.

### Subculture

**Definition:** A smaller group within a larger group that has its own values, which are different to the wider group. There are many different types of subculture and sociologists are interested in understanding how and why these groups form. In recent years there has been a growing interest in **youth subcultures**.

There has been a particular interest in deviant youth subcultures, whose norms and values run counter to those of wider society. For example, in the 1970’s and 1980’s the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University started to study youth subcultures which emerged from the 1950’s onwards. Many of the results of these pieces of research show that youth subcultures often represent an attempt for groups of young people to remain separate from the dominant culture. By creating their own style, dress and music, they can maintain some control over their distinctive values.

1. Can you identify any youth subcultures from your own experience?
2. What kinds of values might be important to youth subcultures?
3. How are youth cultures perceived by wider society? Why?
4. What might young people see as attractive about youth subcultures?

### High Culture

High culture is a term that relates to the kinds of culture enjoyed by those with higher status (position) in a society. High culture would include activities such as opera, classical music and particular forms of art and certain types of aesthetic objects (objects which are seen as desirable and pleasing).

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu claims that this particular form of culture is significant because it provides people with **cultural capital**. This means that having the appropriate norms and values, enjoying a particular form of high culture leads to financial rewards and social mobility (a chance to improve your social position).

The very fact that higher status individuals enjoy certain activities together means that individuals are likely to make contact and networks which can lead to all kinds of rewards. The kinds of knowledge gained through enjoying high culture are also highly valued within the education system, meaning that children who are raised in an environment where they are exposed to high culture places them at a great advantage when they reach school.

1. Identify three examples of high culture.
2. What is cultural capital?
3. What is meant by social mobility?
4. Identify three possible benefits of knowing high status individuals or groups.
5. Why might exposure to high culture at home lead to advantages in the education system?

### Popular Culture

Popular culture is every aspect of culture, which is not high culture. It is sometimes referred to as ‘mass culture’. Some claim that this form of culture is a simple or less sophisticated version of culture. The origins of popular culture lie in the growth of the mass media, which made particular forms of music, media and consumer items widespread.

In sociology, views are divided on the role of popular culture. Some argue that the powerful high culture groups and individuals use popular culture to exploit and control the lower status groups in society. Others however claim that popular culture provides lower status groups an opportunity to express their own cultural values or even rebel.

### Global Culture

With the spread of western ideas through the mass media, there is now arguably a global culture, a collection of specific norms and values, which cross national boundaries. Globalisation is the wider process leading to the global culture, which can be defined as the compression of time and space, in other words the world is becoming a much smaller place now as many people can communicate and travel much more easily. As such, ideas about culture can be shared much more easily. Some regard the emergence of a global culture as damaging smaller scale, local or traditional cultures, though this issue is highly complex and contested. The spread of western types of food is a very good example of this. For example, nearly every single city in the world today has a McDonalds fast food outlet.

This process of spreading influence of western ideas has been called McDonaldisation (George Ritzer 1993). Ritzer argues that societies are becoming similar to each other in the way that fast food chains are similar to each other. In sum, Ritzer argues that societies are becoming more western which means that culture becomes more rational, scientific and predictable. This suggests that globalization has led to the loss of traditional, alternative culture, however others disagree and argue that increasing communication through globalisation has led to the protection and strengthening of traditional cultures.

1. What is globalisation?
2. How might globalisation have led to the loss of traditional cultures?
3. What is McDonaldisation?
4. What effects might McDonaldisation be having on different types of culture?
5. What are the arguments for and against the spread of western culture?

### Consumer Culture

Consumer culture is a set of ideas that encourages people to buy a range of never ending products. A consumer culture is closely connected to the global culture since the mass media is used to promote and advertise products for people to buy. Consumerism has become part of many people’s culture, buying goods has become a way of people’s lives. Often people buy products to express their culture.

A consumer culture has become possible through the mass production of goods as well as the increased affluence (wealth) of different groups of people who have the money and time to be able to buy objects and services.

## Task 2 – Presentation

In small groups, prepare a presentation into each into each type of culture, making sure that you include:

* The definition of the type of culture
* Two examples of each type
* A summary of a sociological piece of research that has been carried out on this type of culture
* Relate the type of culture to your own experience
* Examine the cause and effects of each type of culture.

## Task 3 – Cultural hybridity

As we have seen, increasingly there are a number of different cultures co-existing at the same time. Where two cultures are combined, new, different forms of culture emerge. These are known as cultural hybrids. Cultural hybridity is very much linked to the globalisation process, which as we saw earlier refers to the spread of western ideas and culture. Western culture and local cultures can combine in order to produce new forms of culture. It can be hard to disentangle cultures and it is often the case that it is more than two cultures that combine to produce the new form of culture.

### An example of cultural hybridity: Creolisation

The term Creolisation is used to refer to forms of culture that do not have historical roots, but are the result of global interconnections (Hannerz 1992). Creolisation is a useful way of thinking about hybridity, how different types of culture which exist simultaneously and overlap, leading to new forms of culture.

**What is Creolisation?**

Creolisation is a process where Creole cultures emerged in colonial societies, mainly in Louisiana and the Caribbean, but also the Indian Ocean. In the Caribbean it was a mixture of people of indigenous, European, and African descent. Creolisation was caused by the uprooting and displacement of large numbers of people in colonial plantation economies. From the sixteenth century to the twentieth century European powers, such as Great Britain, France and Spain, established colonies in the Americas, Asia and Africa.

Creole people today find it difficult to point out where their ancestors are from. Therefore, being Creole meant to be uprooted and to belong to a new world in contrast to a world that is old, deep and rooted. So, for instance, within creole cultures, aspects of traditional African religious beliefs continue to exist alongside Christianity and the blending of the two has created new religious systems, such as Santeria in Brazil and Voodoo in Haiti. The term Creolisation has subsequently been applied to food, architecture, music and language.

### ****An example of Hybrid identity: food****

Food can provide good examples of hybridity. Mulligatawny soup, for example, is served today in many Indian restaurants in Britain as part of a ‘traditional’ or ‘authentic’ menu of Indian cuisine. But this mix of meats, spices and rice is in fact the product of English-Indian cultures mixed together, which took place during the period of British rule in India. It was invented to serve the tastes of the ruling British but has, over the years, also been accepted as part of daily cuisine by some peoples of the Indian sub-continent.

1. Consider a genre of music or art or food that has emerged as the result of combining two or more forms or styles.
2. Research into the origins of this new hybrid form of culture and explain its origins and how it came into existence.
3. Feedback to the rest of the class, using images/videos/music.

## Task 4 – Key concept grid

Match the correct concept to the correct definition.

| **Definition** | **Concept** | **Example/linked to** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Something which people see as important. |  | Something people believe in |
| Behaviour that is considered normal. |  | Manners |
| Culture which is expressed through the choices people make about what they buy. |  | Buying particular brands to express status |
| The ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society. |  | Dress, language, behaviour |
| The way that people act. |  | Act out norms |
| A smaller group within society with values which are different to the wider group. |  | Youth subculture |
| The idea that cultural values, norms and behaviour may vary according to different societies. As a result people must be aware that they see other cultures from the perspective of their own. |  | Challenges for sociologists wishing to understand other cultures |
| The artistic and entertainment forms that are most generally associated with the most educated people in a society. |  | Opera, classical music, theatre |
| Exploring examples of culture from various societies. |  | PNG, The San, The Na |
| A new form of culture created from combining two or more forms of culture. |  | Creolisation |

| **Definition** | **Concept** | **Example/linked to** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| The main form of culture that is popular with the masses, often associated with those who are not highly educated. |  | Pop music/pop art |
| Due to increased communications and connections between people all over the world, a new form of culture is emerging which reflects large scale shared ways of life. |  | McDonaldisation |
| Due to larger scale production, larger and larger numbers of people share cultural ideas. |  | Through the media, western ideas are spread eg films |
| The idea that some people possess the appropriate norms values and behaviour which leads to economic rewards. |  | Pierre Bourdieu, leads to greater success in education |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Subculture** | **Culture** | **Cultural hybridity** | **High culture** |
| **Norms** | **Mass culture** | **Global culture** | **Consumer culture** |
| **Behaviour** | **Cultural capital** | **Values** | **Cultural diversity** |
| **Popular culture** | **Cultural relativism** | **Cross cultural** |  |