

Learning session 1

Culture and cultural identity



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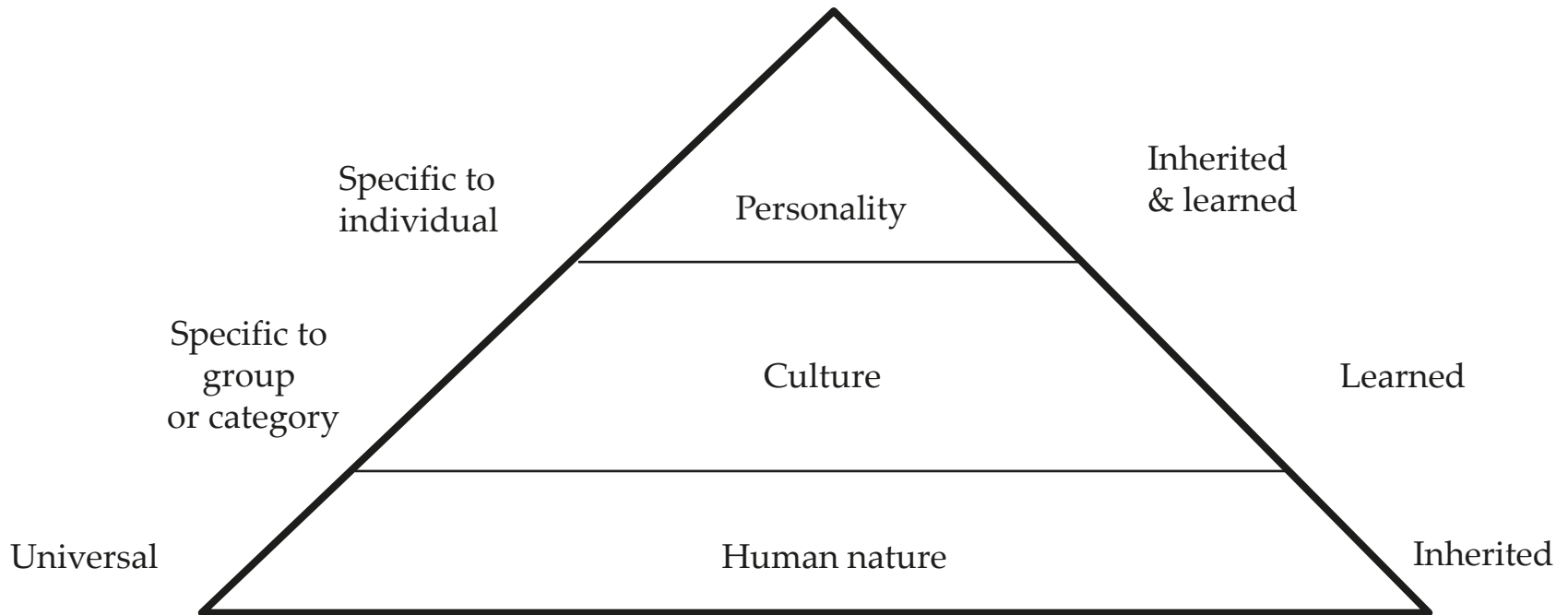
Agenda of the session

- Definitions of culture
- People are not “cultural dopes”
- Conflicting understandings of culture & culturalism
- Cultural identity
- Group work – drawing “an identity star”
- Debriefing of the group work with a plenary session

One Definition of 'Culture'

“Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour.” (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 3)

Uniqueness in human mental programming (Hofstede 1994: 6)



People are not "cultural dopes"

- People use sophisticated methods in everyday life, when producing social order
- People are not "cultural dopes"
- All people in their mundane life produce interpretations, not only researchers
- Interpretations are constantly, and jointly, produced by participants in every interactive situation

(Heritage 1984)

Cultures as "solid"

Deterministic

Individuals are determined by their culture

Objective fact

Drawing solid distinctions between groups

Acontextual

Outside of class, gender, religion et cetera

Potentially endangered

Fear of cultural change

Cultures as "liquid"

Flexible

Cultures are negotiated in the everyday life

Socially constructed

Differences are relational

Contextual

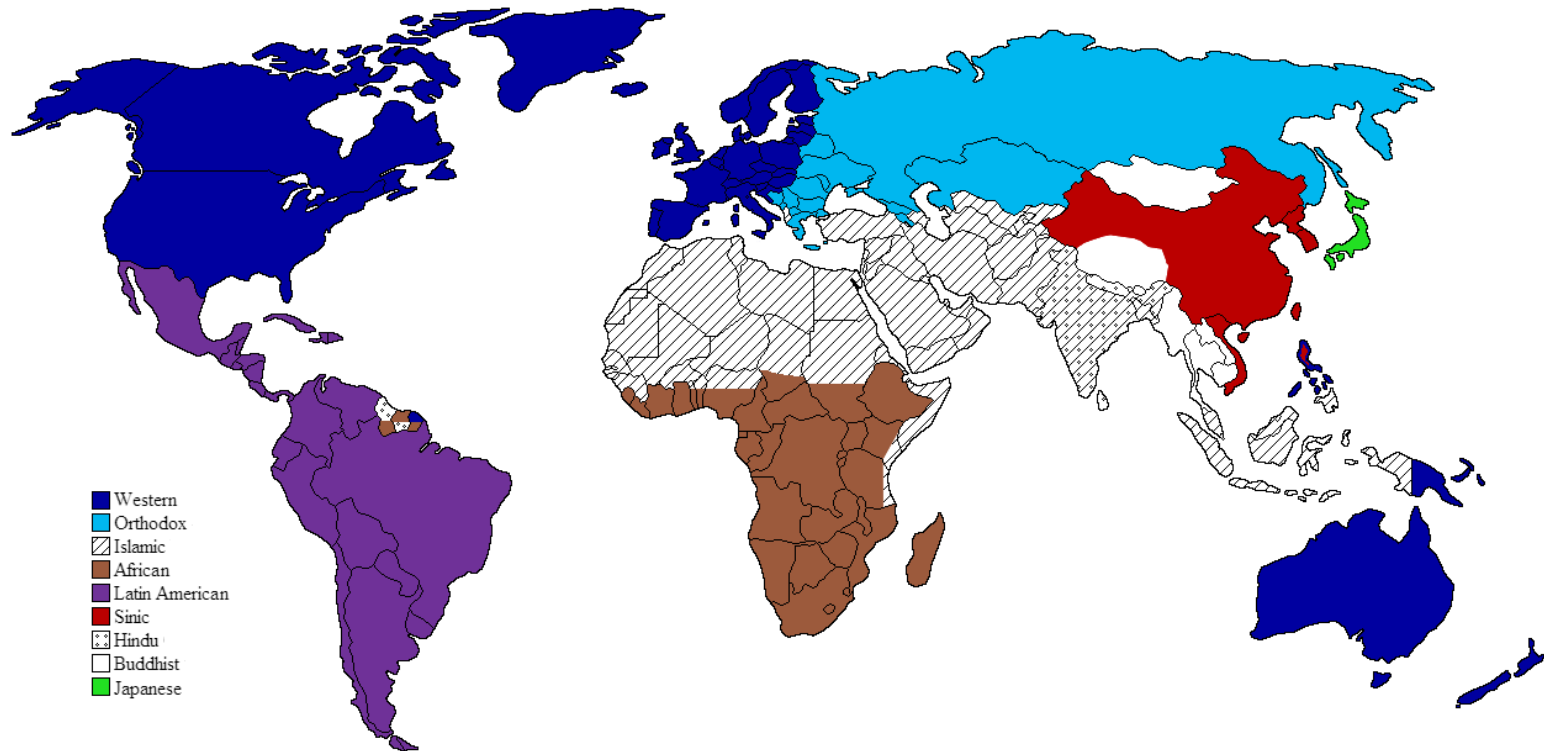
Produced by issues of social power

Source of creativity

Constantly evolving into new practices

(Developed according to ideas from Dervin & Layne 2013)

The problematic idea of solid cultures



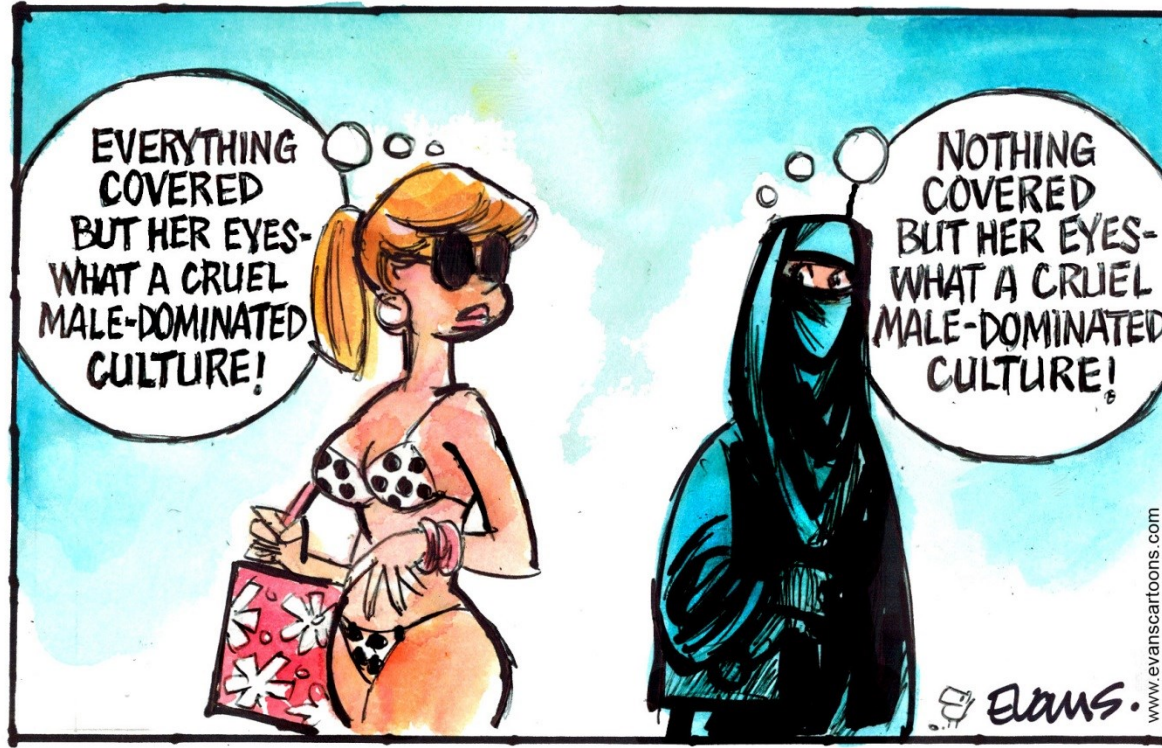
(Source: Huntington 1997)

Culturalism

- Racism finds its articulation through the notion of culture
- Extract from “OH BEHAVE! towards understanding communication in Finnish Universities”, quoted in Dervin & Layne 2013):

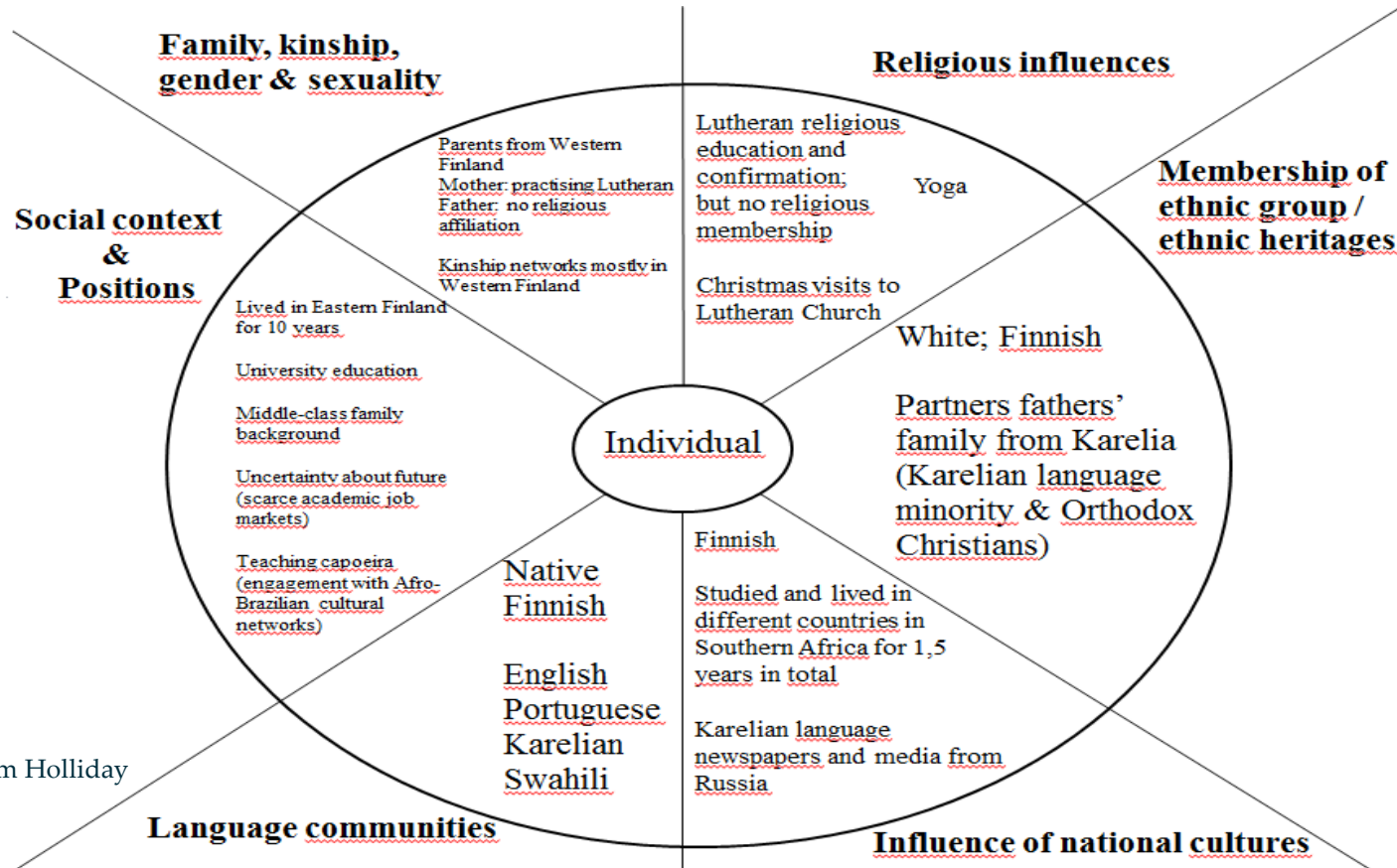
“Whereas in many cultures people are supposed to follow instructions of teachers and supervisors, Finns are encouraged to solve problems independently and take initiative when needed. Thus while young people in many cultures live in a very protected and supervised life, students in Finland are very independent and take responsibility for their studies.”

Culture as a source of identity



Cartoon: Malcolm Evans

Web of identity



Moldel adapted from Holliday et. al. 2005, 163-164

TASK:

First, take a moment (**15 minutes**) on your own and **draft your own web of identity on a piece of paper**. Think of your personal history through the concepts of family, gender, sexuality, kinship, ethnicity, religion, language, nationhood and social position. How these factors have been significant for your development?

After you have finished drafting your web of identity **start a discussion (15 minutes) in groups of four**. First, present yourself and your star of identity in the group. Tell also **what stereotypes people have assumed about you that aren't true**.

In which factors do you have most in common within your small group?

OUTPUT:

Oral presentation of the groups in a plenary session.

TIME FOR THE TASK:

30 minutes

TIME FOR THE PLENARY SESSION:

30 minutes

References

Dervin, Fred, and Heidi Layne 2013. "A guide to interculturality for international and exchange students: an example of Hostipitality?" *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, Vol. 8 No. 1 : 1-19.

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Thank you!



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