### **Culture and Stigma**

Professor Virginia Bond, LSHTM & Zambart

9 June 2021, Fogarty Stigma Research Training Institute





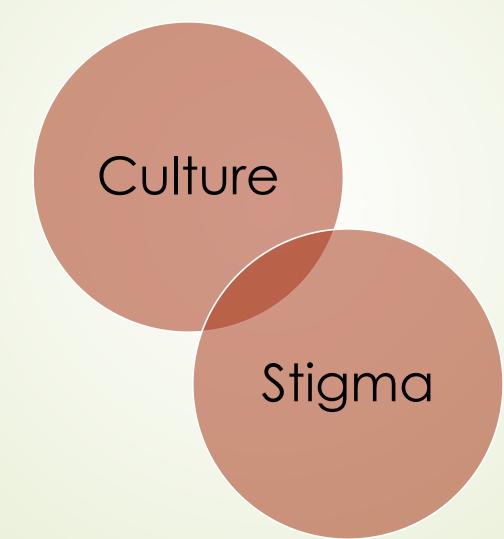
#### What is Culture?

- Variation in use of the term
  - e.g. arts = culture, product of civilisation ('cultured')
- Focus on anthropological approach to the concept as an ideational system
- "systems of shared ideas, systems of concepts and rules and meanings that underlie and are expressed in the ways that humans live" (Keesing 1974)
  - i.e. processes that give something in common to people who interact and communicate with each other
  - cultural meanings are public a code of shared rules & common meanings
  - learned & used

#### **Reification of Culture**

- Culture can be reified, used to explain more than it should
- Culture is NOT a "thing" that exists "out there"
- Not fixed, bounded, but dynamic
- Not an excuse for something not working
  - e.g. cultural barriers blamed for a health intervention not working
- Culture is individual knowledge of rules and/or codes + interaction between individuals
  - social interactions as lie at heart of culture
- Culture is a neutral term the sum of knowledge and skills in a community that passes from generation to generation and is socially constructed, not set in stone
- Comparison is key to "seeing" culture culture distinguishes communities from each other

## What do culture and stigma have in common?



#### **Similarities**

- Part of context, "other-things-happening"
  - Both occur alongside other things and these other things influence both
  - Rub up against each other
  - Wider context is bigger than both
- Part of social interactions
- Variable across groups and countries
  - Common structure and process at the core but differ in manifestation
- Both can be an "excuse", reified & used too loosely
  - E.g. low uptake of condoms because of culture/stigma
- Linked to:
  - Difference
  - Identity
  - Language
  - Judgement

#### Differences

#### Culture

- Socially constructed to bolster commonalities
- Cohesive
- Affirmative
- Bonding

#### Stigma

- Socially constructed to mark differences & push people out, down
- Negative process
- Linked to prejudice
- Can result in discrimination

# Relationship between stigma and culture in stigma research

- Focus has been on the influence of culture on stigma of certain health conditions
  - E.g. Susan Sontag (1991), History of TB and HIV, differences in metaphors and myths about conditions
  - E.g. Katele Kalumba (1987), diverse management of epilepsy across Zambian ethnic groups
- Less focus on empirically examining the role of culture in health-related stigma research
  - Over focus on psychological & individual processes of stigma have led to not enough understanding of relationship between stigma and socio-structural processes, including culture
  - "considerations of how social life and relationships are changed by stigma" (Parker and Aggleton, 2003)