



# Culture and Stigma

Professor Virginia Bond, LSHTM & Zambart

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# 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?




Culture

Stigma



# 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)