

## Transcripts for Lectures

### Lecture 1 (from Chapter 1, page 21)

**Class: Anthropology**

**Topic: Cross-Cultural Perceptions of Time**

Different cultures often have entirely different perceptions of time. The cultural anthropologist Edward T. Hall popularized the idea that cultures use time and view time in very different ways. The idea of the past, present, and future—and the whole concept of scheduling or managing time—can be so different that it leads to cross-cultural miscommunications. In Hall's 1990 book *The Dance of Life*, Hall writes, "Time is one of the fundamental bases on which all cultures rest and around which all activities revolve. Understanding the difference between monochronic time and polychronic time is essential to success."

Hall's notion of monochronism and polychronism can be understood as follows. Monochronic time is linear. Events are scheduled one at a time, one event following another. To a monochronic culture, this type of schedule is valued over interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, polychronic time is characterized by many things happening simultaneously. In addition, interpersonal relationships are highly valued in polychronic cultures.

Hall's theory is that monochronic time can be found primarily in North American and Northern European cultures. These cultures emphasize schedules, punctuality, and preciseness. They also emphasize "doing" things. They are cultures that value productivity, that value getting things done "on time." They view time as something that can be lost, killed, or wasted—or, conversely, they view time as something that can, or should, be managed, planned, and used efficiently.

Polychronic time, on the other hand, can be found primarily in Latin American, African, and Native American cultures. Their perception of time is more connected to natural rhythms. It is connected to the earth, to the seasons. This makes sense when we consider that natural events can occur spontaneously, sporadically, or concurrently. Polychronic cultures view time as being somewhat flexible. Since life isn't so predictable scheduling and being precise simply isn't that important. In addition, relationships with people are valued more than making schedules. There is more value placed on "being" than on "doing."

Different cultural perceptions of time can lead to conflict, especially in the business world. The idea of being late versus on time for a meeting, for example, might differ widely between an American businessperson and a Brazilian; the American businessperson might be far less tolerant of a Brazilian's late arrival. However, the Brazilian businessperson might be offended by an American's insistence on punctuality or on getting right down to business; the Brazilian would generally prefer to finish talking with colleagues first, and would not want to cut a conversation short in order to make an appointment.

Some traditional time management programs used in the business world might not translate well in another culture. Traditional time management programs in the business world emphasize to-do lists and careful scheduling. They are monochronic. However, a business in a polychronic culture might not adjust well to that system. Companies who impose these monochronic systems on places of business in polychronic cultures might be guilty of ethnocentrism, which means making their own ethnic or cultural values central and not valuing other values.

Edward Hall's theory of monochronic and polychronic cultures has been challenged by some critics. Some people think it is overly general. They argue that within any cultural group we might find people who think of time differently. In other words, a primarily polychronic culture might have both monochronic and polychronic types of people. The same diversity among individuals might be found in a primarily monochronic culture. Critics of anthropologists like Edward Hall feel that it's more useful to think of time differences among individuals, not just between cultural groups.

## **Lecture 2 (from Chapter 2, page 51)**

### **Class: Psychology**

### **Topic: Three Systems of Memory**

Psychologists have many theories to explain how we remember information. The most influential theory is that memory works as a kind of storage system, or storehouse, for information. According to this theory, there are three types of these storage systems with different functions that hold information for different amounts of time. These storage systems are sensory memory, short-term memory, and long-term memory.

Sensory memory holds information for the shortest amount of time—less than four seconds. An instant. Sensory memory is where stimuli, or things that stimulate our senses, are very briefly stored. We forget sensory memories almost instantly, unless they pass into another storage system. Examples of stimuli that usually go into sensory memory are things that we see and hear in the world such as a flash of lightning, or the sound of a door closing.

Short-term memory, which is also sometimes called “working memory,” holds information for about 15 to 25 seconds. This is not a very long time, but the information that passes into this system has more meaning for us than just sensory stimulation. It is not entirely clear how some sensory memories transfer into more meaningful short-term memories. Some experts believe that sensory information changes into visual images as it is stored, and others believe that information changes into words. However, it has been proven that memory going into this system is made up of “chunks,” or groups, of meaningful information (for example, single letters or numbers or more complicated sets of information), and that only around seven “chunks” of information can be stored in short-term memory. Therefore, there is not a lot of room for information in short-term memory, and it does not stay there for very long. Examples of the type of information that typically goes into short-term memory are telephone numbers, addresses, and names.

Long-term memory holds information almost indefinitely, although retrieving it can sometimes be difficult. Think of long-term memory as a very big library, or even a computer chip, with almost unlimited capacities for storage. Information gets filed, catalogued, and stored. Long-term memory has several different components, or modules, that correspond to separate memory systems in the brain. The main two categories of long-term memory are declarative memory and procedural memory. Declarative memory is where we store factual information, such as names, faces, dates, life events. Procedural memory is where we store memory of skills and habits, like how to ride a bike or how to boil an egg. Within declarative memory, there are smaller categories of memory, or subdivisions—episodic memory and semantic memory. Episodic memory is where we place memories that relate to our personal lives, things we have done or experienced, such as having a car accident, celebrating an important birthday, or graduating from school. Semantic memory is where we organize general knowledge or facts about the world, such as math formulas, spelling rules, and capital cities.

### **Lecture 3 (for Chapter 3, page 76)**

**Class: Sociology**

**Topic: Ingroups and Outgroups**

In the last class, we discussed the nature of groups: how they are formed, and what characteristics they have in common. Today we will focus on two particular types of groups: what sociologists call “ingroups” and “outgroups.”

Let’s clarify the definitions of each type of group, and then we’ll look at some examples.

First of all, what is an ingroup? Most of us are members, on some level, of at least one ingroup. These are people with whom you feel a close attachment or connection, with whom you identify strongly. An example of an ingroup could be a person’s family, or a close group of friends. Members of an ingroup may all dress in a similar style, or listen to similar music, or use a similar way of speaking—they may even have their own specialized words for certain things. However, ingroups typically define themselves not just in relation to the members of that group, but in relation to other groups that are different from the ingroup.

These other groups, in contrast to the ingroup, are called outgroups. An outgroup is a group that is viewed from the perspective of an ingroup, often in negative terms. Members of an ingroup may feel a sense of difference or separateness from the outgroup. They may feel excluded. They may even feel a strong sense of opposition or conflict with the outgroup—or even hatred. Outgroups help to define ingroups by providing the ingroup with a sense of identity against or in opposition to them. The ingroup may magnify, or emphasize, certain characteristics that make them distinctly different from the outgroup. In other words, one person’s ingroup is another person’s outgroup. To illustrate, members of a neighborhood gang may wear certain types of clothing to differentiate themselves from rival gangs, or from non-gang members—members of the dominant or mainstream culture. As another example—and an even more extreme one—countries or cultures at war may emphasize their difference from the

country they are at war with, in order to increase unity and loyalty in their ingroup. This leads to an “us versus them” mentality, that, in turn, can increase any existing conflict even as it strengthens the ingroup’s sense of identity.

Ingroups and outgroups tend to view one another in very separate terms, and they usually have little or no interaction with each other. As a result, these groups don’t have a lot of real information or firsthand experience with one another. And as a consequence of the lack of information, they rely heavily on stereotypes and misinformation about each other. The stereotypes then reinforce the ingroup’s mistrust of or hatred toward the outgroup.

Indeed, ingroups and outgroups come into conflict most frequently over symbolic representations of the groups: objects or places that hold a great deal of meaning for one group, and that symbolize, or stand for, the group in some way. An obvious example of this can be seen in how one country may seek to destroy a flag, a statue, or a building that represents a country it is at war with. During the conflict in Iraq, for example, a statue of Saddam Hussein was toppled and dragged through the streets as a symbol of an outgroup. Destroying the objects and symbols associated with one group can be a way of imagining that they are destroying the group itself. It’s important to clarify, however, that the symbol itself isn’t the cause of the conflict—it’s the meaning attached to the symbol, a point at which members of an ingroup can express their identity as distinct from the outgroup, and a point at which the ingroup can act out its emotions toward an opposing group.

#### **Lecture 4 (for Chapter 4, page 108)**

**Class: Philosophy / Ethics**

**Topic: Social Inventions**

How important is it for people to contribute to society in some way? After the tragedy of 9/11, some people have become preoccupied with this question. Tragedies have a way of making people rethink their values and find a new focus. They make people think, on some level, about what a society needs in order to survive. Not just basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter, but deeper needs, relating to the health and values of society. Many people find themselves asking: how can I find more meaning in our society? What can I do to make a difference? For some, these questions may lead to practical decisions; others ask these questions and find themselves setting foot on a more spiritual path.

The notion of doing something to take control of society or of our fate as humans is not something that developed just after 9/11. We might date this impulse back to ancient times, when the Greeks believed that humans were subservient to the gods, and that both gods and humans were powerless under fate. What was fated to happen was going to happen, and there was nothing that they could do about it. However, this way of thinking changed, arguably, with the rise of the great city of Athens. The social critic John Ralston Saul reminds us of how the Greeks constructed both new styles of buildings and new structures of civilization. The Greeks began to believe in the power of ingenuity, or the notion that creative, imaginative

thinking could lead to humans' ability to shape their own futures. They could use their own ingenuity, and the tools at hand, to make life better. They did not have to be subject to fate. Their thinking changed, in other words, from a passive approach to an active one.

Perhaps somewhere in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century we began to lose sight of this active way of thinking. According to John Ralston Saul, the notion of "fate" returned with new faces—globalization, the market, or even technology. People in Western society began to feel powerless in the face of these large, looming forces that were shaping our society for us. Now, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, we may be seeing another change similar to the ones that the Greeks experienced, according to another cultural critic, Jon Spayde. In the wake of 9/11, perceiving a need for significant social change and new values, people who call themselves "social inventors" are trying to take back some control over society's direction once again.

A social inventor is not necessarily a social activist. An activist fights for social change. Nor is a social inventor a social contributor; a social contributor might be someone who supports social causes financially, or emotionally. And finally, a social inventor is not necessarily someone who works in a high-tech industry or invents new technologies and consumer products. A social inventor is different because he or she is using the power of ingenuity, or creative thinking, to come up with ideas for change in certain communities or sections of society. Social inventors have a vision of a better world and create new systems or practices. Their ideas may seem offbeat or impossible. Most social inventors are not famous or wealthy because of their inventions. They are usually quite ordinary people; they may even be people you know. Or we may never know who they are. But some of these creative thinkers have powerfully, and quietly, changed the way we live.

Some examples of social inventions may sound familiar to you. The organization of "Alcoholics Anonymous," a support group for people with addiction to alcohol, was founded in 1935 and has been going strong ever since. This was a social invention because an individual named Bill Smith, himself a recovering alcoholic, came up with a 12-step process for creating personal change. The idea caught on, communities and support groups formed around it, and millions of alcoholics have changed their lives ever since.

Another example of a social invention is the organization Amnesty International, which was founded in 1961. A British lawyer named Peter Benenson wrote an editorial after two Portuguese students were imprisoned for toasting freedom in a café, and the international organization to support human rights began. Now millions of people around the world write letters to protest human rights violations.

Social inventions do not have to be organizations, however. Sometimes they are new designs for neighborhoods or communities, allowing for more interaction among people. Sometimes they are systems, like new ways to help prisoners in jails receive an education or re-enter society. Sometimes they are very simple ideas, examples of new ways of thinking or "thinking outside the box" to solve problems. For example, some movie theatres in Boston and New York have recently started implementing a social invention to solve the problem of babies crying in movie theatres. To accommodate parents with babies, who would like to keep up with current movies, some theatres now offer special "mother's hours," a daytime showing of a film

in which they are free to bring babies or young children. The lights are not turned down as low so that they can keep an eye on their children while they watch the movie.

The idea of social inventions or social ingenuity has become so popular in recent years that “Idea Banks” of social inventions have shown up on the World Wide Web, books have been published on the subject, and Institutes have been founded. The Institute for Social Inventions, based in London, connects think tanks and idea banks throughout Europe. It has a website that invites ideas from anyone and that I’ll write here on the board: [www.globalideasbank.org](http://www.globalideasbank.org). You can search this website by category to see the types of ideas that ordinary people come up with. Looking at a wide range of them gives you some sense of the extent to which people desire to make a difference in our society and not remain powerless.

## **Lecture 5 (for Chapter 5, page 139)**

### **Class: Psychology**

### **Topic: Causes and Effects of Stress**

Everyone experiences stress on some level every day. Stress, broadly defined, is our response to events that we perceive as threatening or challenging. We may experience different levels of stress depending on the *stressors*, meaning the events or circumstances that cause us to feel stress.

Of course, not everyone perceives the same events or circumstances as stressful; we don’t always react the same way to the same stressors. In fact, something that is extremely stressful for one person may be exciting and non-stressful for another. In general, though, stressful events can be classified into three main categories: cataclysmic events, personal stressors, and background stressors. Cataclysmic events are major events that cause stress suddenly, immediately, for a great many people at once. Examples of these are earthquakes, fires, or other disasters. Personal stressors are major life events that create stress. They can include the death of a loved one, a job loss, a divorce, a financial setback, or a geographical move. They are not always events that we would perceive as negative; many “joyful” life events can also cause a great deal of stress. For example, getting engaged or married, acquiring a new family member (through birth or adoption), starting a new job, and even taking a vacation can all be as stressful as “negative” life events. Finally, background stressors—which we can also think of as day-to-day hassles, or minor irritations—can cause stress, particularly when they add up, when we are repeatedly exposed to them. Examples of background stressors are waiting in a long line, getting stuck in a traffic jam, being exposed to noise, experiencing a delay of some sort, or dealing with broken equipment. Examples of chronic background stressors—and the kind that can lead to long-term health problems—include being unhappy with one’s job, living environment, marriage, or relationship.

Stress is not something that only exists in our mind. Repeated exposure to stressors has both psychological and biological consequences. When we are exposed to stressors, our adrenal glands secrete certain hormones, and our heart rate and blood pressure rise. We experience

a “fight or flight” response, a sense of emergency, where the body prepares to defend itself. This is useful in some situations, especially where we might actually need to defend ourselves. In the long run, though, this activation of what is known as the sympathetic nervous system has negative effects and reduces our capacity to manage stress. When stress hormones are constantly secreted, and the body is continually preparing for emergencies, body tissues such as the heart and blood vessels can begin to deteriorate. The immune system functions less effectively, and reduces our ability to fight off illnesses. Some people who complain of repeated exposure to highly stressful circumstances tend to report the following types of symptoms: aches and pains (headaches and backaches are common), skin rashes, digestive problems, and fatigue.

The General Adaptation Syndrome, or G.A.S., explains the sequence of physiological reactions to stress. There are three phases to G.A.S. The first is the “alarm and mobilization” phase. This is when we first become aware of a stressor. When we respond with alarm, we may feel upset or confused. We may even feel a sense of panic or fear. After that, however, we may begin to mobilize our efforts—in other words, to take action to remove the stressor. For example, if you received a mid-semester report stating that your grades were all very low, you might worry at first, but then you would probably make plans to reverse the situation, to improve your grades. It is during this first phase that the sympathetic nervous system is activated and the body responds with a sense of emergency.

The second phase of G.A.S. is the resistance stage, which occurs if the stressor is not removed. This is the stage when we fight against the stressor or try to cope with the stressor. The attempt to mobilize and remove the source of stress from phase one can result in further stress. For example, if you were studying long hours to try to improve low grades, you might succeed in improving the grades but create more stress in the process.

This can lead to the third G.A.S. phase: exhaustion. In this phase, if resistance was not successful and stressors still exist, our ability to fight or cope with the stressor diminishes. At this point, symptoms of stress manifest themselves psychologically and biologically. Psychologically, we may become irritable, short-tempered, or unable to focus. There may be a sense of being completely overwhelmed and unable to function. Biologically, our bodies may react with such symptoms as aches and pains, fatigue, or illnesses. Interestingly, the exhaustion phase may actually be an extreme way of trying to avoid the stressors. The body may be telling us that we need to take a break, that we need to do whatever is necessary to remove ourselves from the stressor.

## **Lecture 6 (for Chapter 6, page 180)**

**Class: American History / American Studies**

**Topic: The American Dream: Myth or Reality?**

The term “American dream” is widely used today. But what exactly does this concept mean? Where does the term come from? When we talk about the American dream, *whose* American dream are we describing? Is the American dream the same for all Americans? Has the meaning of the term changed over time? Is the American dream a uniquely American concept?

Questions like these can complicate a seemingly simple term and lead us to an even more important question: is the American dream a myth or a reality today?

The term “American dream” began to be widely used in 1867. The term was used in a famous novel written by Horatio Alger. The novel, *Ragged Dick*, was a “rags to riches” story about a little boy who was orphaned and lived in New York. The boy saved all his pennies, worked very hard, and eventually became rich. The novel sent the message to the American public that anyone could succeed in America if they were honest, worked hard, and showed determination to succeed. No matter what your background, no matter where you were from, no matter if you had no money or no family, hard work and perseverance would always lead to success.

Today, the message from Alger’s novel is still a prevalent one in this country. It is still used to define the American dream. A very basic definition of the American dream is that it is the hope of the American people to have a better quality of life and a higher standard of living than their parents. This can mean that each generation hopes for better jobs, or more financial security, or ownership of land or a home.

However, new versions and variations of the American dream have surfaced since Alger’s novel was published. For one thing, the basic definition I stated a moment ago—the idea that Americans are always seeking to improve their lifestyle—also suggests that each generation wants more than the previous generation had. Some people would argue that this ever-increasing desire to improve the quality of one’s life may have started out on a smaller scale, in the past, but today has led to an out-of-control consumerism and materialism. According to this view, we not only want more than our parents and our grandparents had, but we also want more than our friends, our co-workers, and our neighbors have.

Another, more benign view of the American dream is that it is about the desire to create opportunities for ourselves, usually through hard work. A hallmark of the American dream, some would argue, is the classic “self-starter,” the person who starts out with very little in life—little money, few friends, few opportunities—and works hard to make his or her way in the world. A classic example of this type of American dreamer would be former president Abraham Lincoln, who was born in a log cabin, was largely self-educated, and yet worked his way up in the world to eventually become a United States president.

This view of the American dream has also been associated with immigrants and their stories, their quests for a better life in a new country. Americans have long been fascinated by immigrant stories, and many feel great pride about their own families who may have come from other countries, worked very hard, and created a better life for future generations. The immigrant story is most often a narrative of upward mobility. Immigrants, seeing this country as a place of new opportunities and possibilities, play a large role in narratives—both fiction and nonfiction—about pursuing the American dream, and indeed, we could point to many success stories.

The American dream has also, historically, been associated with westward expansion in this country. Throughout most of the 1800s, the notion of the frontier—a vast expanse of largely unclaimed land in the West—symbolized new opportunities and a fresh start to people.



Many a dreamer set off for the West in search of land, jobs, gold, or other opportunities, often with next to nothing in his pocket. Unfortunately, this idea of new opportunities in the West had a negative side. The American West was not unpopulated; Native American Indians already lived there, along with other immigrant groups, and these people were often displaced—or met with violence—if they interfered with the visions or ideas of westward-migrating Americans.

A more recent interpretation of the American dream has to do with equality. Civil rights activists such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., used some of the rhetoric associated with the American dream to urge people to work for equal opportunities for all Americans, not just some Americans. A harsh reality was becoming clear to some people, especially in the 1960s and 1970s: not everyone had the same opportunities. If people were denied jobs, education, or other opportunities because of their race, ethnic background, or gender, was the American dream only a myth?