

# Cultural Construction: A Fundamental Principle of Anthropology

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A cultural construction can be defined as a set of ideas that shape the perception and understanding of a situation in a particular way, within a specific space-time context. The concept of cultural construction aims to describe a situation as a process and to make clear that this situation can be seen differently by each culture. Almost everything that has not been created by nature but by societies is a cultural construct (for example law, marriage, fashion, guilt, sex, etc.). This term was firstly presented in the European literature by Prof. Alexandros Argyriadis in 2014, in order to enrich the term "social construct". The significance of this term focuses mainly on the fact that it explains that every population group that perceives specific characteristics which might differ from the majority is not superior or inferior to another, but simply different.

It is important to note that the difference between social and cultural construction lies mainly in the fact that the cultural approach examines phenomena and processes always in their historical depth. Furthermore, it studies the deeper structures that lead to the emergence of a phenomenon considering that culture is the unconscious determinant of behaviors. At the same time, it focuses on art, experiences and everyday life, examining them as processes.

Keywords: Cultural Construction ; Anthropology ; Diversity ; Argyriadis ; Cultural Studies

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## 1. A Brief Description

The significance of this term focuses mainly on the fact that it explains that every population group that perceives specific characteristics which might differ from the majority is not superior or inferior to another, but simply different. At the same time, it is interesting that each culture has its own "construction" of what Marriage is, Guilt, Duty, Honour, etc., and the definition help us understand meanings and values in the context of diversity. There are also several examples of cultural constructions such as laws, norms, language, race, ethnicity, gender, and many more. Additionally, cultural constructions can also be defined as shared ideas, frameworks, practices, or perspectives on the world, which have real effects on how they organize human behavior.<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> People's beliefs about reality are largely determined by their culture and ideas, tastes, personal expressions, attractions, values, beliefs, and expectations which are all culturally constructed. For example, it is not biologically necessary for men and women to marry although marriage has taken several forms in the number and gender of partners who may compose a family. At the same time, each society sets separate rules regarding the procedures for conducting and operating a wedding. The customs, traditions followed and material artifacts used along with institutional bureaucratic elements, compose a different context for the meaning of marriage in different cultures. Examples like this exist in Gender differences which have also become a cultural construction. There are concepts of masculine and feminine that suggest to society how men and women should behave. Even certain diseases and death are now being considered as cultural constructions and they are connected to the donation of organs. Kinship is also a cultural construction but all previous examples have a common basis; diversity. Everything has to do with the perception of reality which can be different from one culture to another. The method that Anthropologist follow and helps among other to identify the cultural constructions is the Ethnographic Method. The ethnographic methodology that Boas brought forward, the intensive locally participatory observation leaded the after-Boas anthropologists into the creation of total portraits of the societies that they were studying. One of the first critical opinions in this perception came from James Clifford and George Marcus. According to Clifford,<sup>[4]</sup> the anthropologists, during their trial to equalize themselves with the physical scientists (physics-chemistry), basically deleted the consequences-results of the researcher's intervention during the research process. In this sense he pointed that Boas's descendants haven't properly and sufficiently exploded the significant impacts of the same anthropological model about diffusion. In other words, it isn't "totally internal", but it consists a description of the relationship between societies and social groups.

## 2. The Research

Cultural construction is one of the key values in the study of Anthropology for several reasons.<sup>[5]</sup> According to Peoples and Bailey<sup>[6]</sup> Anthropology not only enhances the understanding of the biological, technological, and cultural development of humanity but it's also intended to teach the importance of understanding and appreciating cultural diversity. Anthropologists claim that it would be impossible to gain an understanding of Anthropology without the definition of cultural construction since its purpose is to illustrate the birth, change, and differences of ideas and values within individual cultures. Although the concept was originally studied by Anthropologists, today it has been incorporated into all social sciences and humanities.

Recent research focuses on different aspects of the way that the definition of cultural construction can be found. Special characteristics about specific social groups have been studied<sup>[7]</sup> as well as historical aspects of everyday life. Furthermore, there is extensive research on the way language has been formed<sup>[8]</sup> and linguistic constructions from simple ways to describe life to the use of language in the case of political crimes.<sup>[9]</sup> The definition has also been used to describe child marriage and constructions of gender and sexuality as well as implications for married girls.<sup>[10]</sup> Recent research has taken dimensions in religious questions of cultural constructions as for example the Construction of Hinduism concerning Colonialism,<sup>[11]</sup> the construction of disability<sup>[12]</sup> and even the construction of ideas about diversity from the social media.<sup>[13]</sup>

Race, nation, religion, and language determine the cultural identity of a person, as well as the combination of the above contribute to the determination of cultural diversity. Also, the social reality is directly connected to the culturally different individuals within it, such as immigrants, who have ethnocultural differences from the dominant population and perhaps less satisfaction with the social claims attributed to them.<sup>[2]</sup>

The United Nations General Assembly in 1967, specifies the right of every child with a migrant background to have equal education with the children of the host country, without discrimination as to race, religion, or country of origin. UNESCO in 2005 calls for inclusive practices and seeks to develop understanding and respect for cultural differences among all children.

After a literature review, it becomes clear that there is a significant research trend regarding diversity, however a functional definition of the concept of cultural construction is completely absent.

## 3. Conclusions

Considering the need to reduce social inequalities stemming from an incomplete understanding of cultural diversity it becomes clear that the concept of cultural construction can play a catalytic role. Essentially, it comes to highlight the fact that everything is a human creation and not a natural one, such as the rules, duties, customs, and procedures in a society. This means that they are open to criticism, flexible, and can change for the good of humanity, reducing inequalities and strengthening human rights and the values of freedom and democracy.

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