

Culture & Subculture

Introduction to Sociology

Definition

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Learning outline

1. What is culture?

- What is the role of symbols in culture?
- What is subculture?

2. James Scott: subcultures of resistance

- Concept overview: subcultures of resistance
- public transcripts and hidden transcripts
- Scott's concept of everyday resistance = hidden transcripts becoming public
 - infrapolitics is direct opposition to the public transcript
 - subcultural resistance is indirect opposition to the public transcript
 - Both are different ways that hidden transcripts become public

1. What is culture?

Culture:

shared knowledge, beliefs and ideas, sentiments and values and experiences, customs, behaviors, language (including dialects, accents, body language and expressions), religion, fashion, art (painting, music, literature, sculpture, theater, film, dance), music, food, humor, folklore, story telling, myths, celebrations, gatherings, and parties

Culture is how people making meaning in life or find meaning in life

1. What is culture?

The role of symbols

How do symbols establish
and promote culture?



1. What is culture?

Are there symbols on campus? What do they mean? Do they have cultural significance?



subcultures

Subculture = a cultural group within a larger culture, often having beliefs or interests at variance with those of the larger culture.

Examples

Ethnic subcultures

http://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/01/23/nyregion/20110123-nyc-ethnic-neighborhoods-map.html?_r=0

https://www.nj.com/news/2016/06/segregated_nj_a_look_at_how_race_still_divides_us.html

subcultures

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Examples

Streetball subcultures



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy6vq0Pt8cc&feature=emb_title

subcultures

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Examples
comic con



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZN41gXXUILL&feature=emb_title

subcultures

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Are there subcultures on campus? In Newark? What are some of them?

Subcultures of resistance

Domination and the arts of resistance (James Scott)

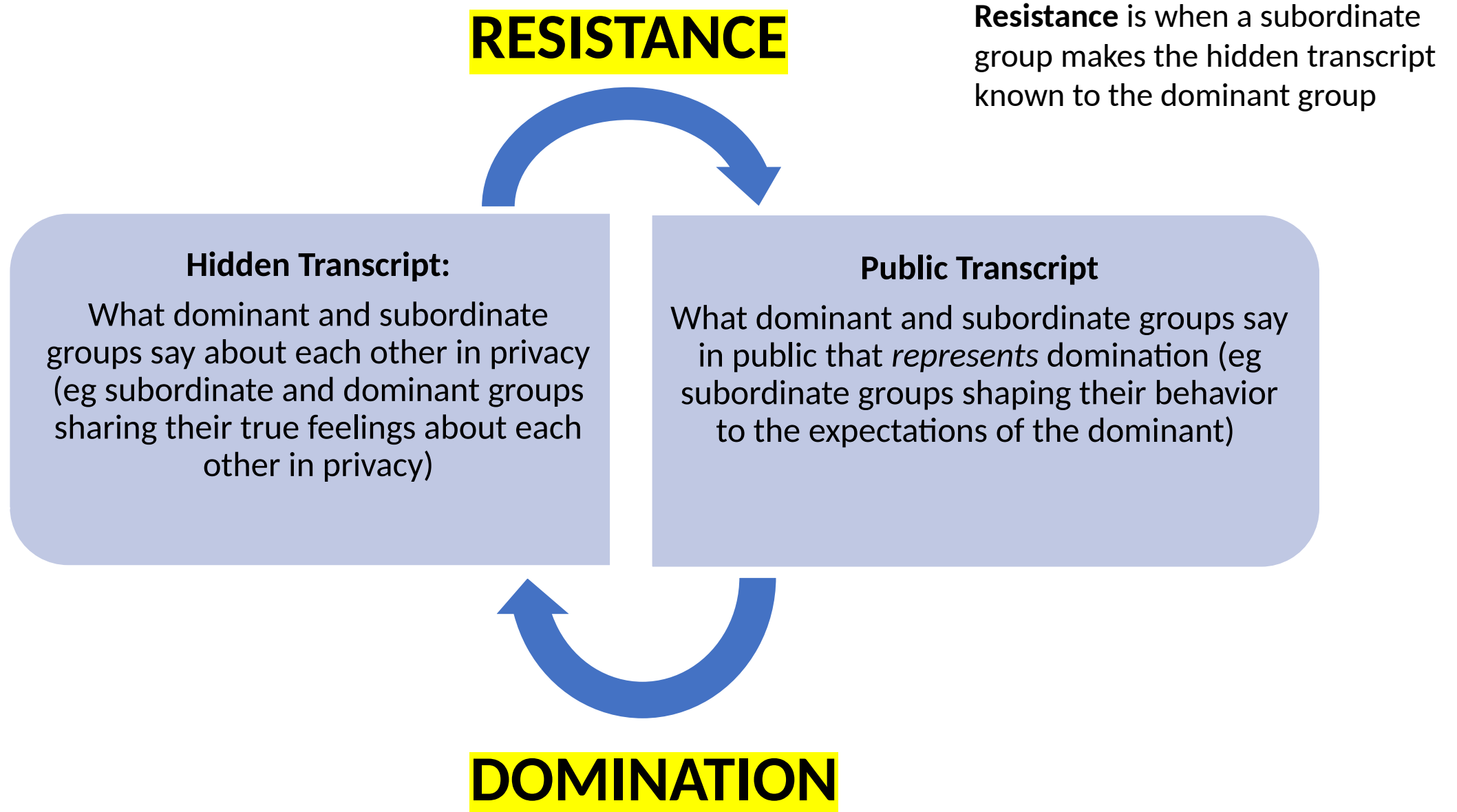
James Scott. 1992. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Yale University Press.

Read pp 1-6, 136, 157-159, 198-200

Subcultures of resistance

- James Scott studied micro-level power relationships of highly oppressive conditions (slavery, caste system in India, etc)
- Central thesis: wherever there are relationships of power and/or domination there will be resistance
- Domination = the ability of a powerful group to control everyday life circumstances of less powerful groups

Concept overview: subcultures of resistance



Concept overview: subcultures of resistance

Three forms of resistance: subordinate groups making the hidden transcript visible to dominant groups



Direct opposition: direct political action that challenges the public transcript

Examples: strikes, protests, voting, petitions, organized political actions, sit-downs, sit-ins



Infrapolitics (indirect opposition): everyday ways that subordinate groups undermine the public transcript

Examples: gestures, political art or street art, symbolic appropriation, theft, pilfering, feigned ignorance, careless labor, foot-dragging, secret trade and production for sale, sabotage, arson, flight



Subcultures of resistance (indirect opposition): subcultures that are accessible to subordinate groups but not dominant groups

Examples: the blues, hip hop, some street gangs, Chicano movement (California, 1960s), punks (London 1970s)



Public transcript

Public transcript: everyday interactions between dominant and subordinate will symbolize that power relationship

“Performance of the subordinate will be shaped to appeal to the expectations of the dominant”

Public transcript

Example of public transcript:
Chris Rock stand-up bit about
how enslaved African-
Americans had to hide their
literacy skills

“The more menacing the
power, the thicker the mask”



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C99SZRbw50E&feature=emb_title

Hidden transcript

- Hidden transcript: the concealed dynamics of the relationship
- What dominant and subordinate groups say and do about each other in privacy

The abstract and general tone of the discussion thus far is best relieved by concrete illustrations of the possibly dramatic disparity between the public and the hidden transcripts. The first is drawn from slavery in the antebellum U.S. South. Mary Livermore, a white governess from New England, recounted the reaction of Aggy, a normally taciturn and deferential black cook, to the beating the master had given her daughter. The daughter had been accused, apparently unjustly, of some minor theft and then beaten while Aggy looked on, powerless to intervene. After the master had finally left the kitchen, Aggy turned to Mary, whom she considered her friend and said,

Thar's a day a-comin'! Thar's a day a-comin'! . . . I hear the rumblin ob de chariots! I see de flashin ob de guns! White folks blood is a runnin on the ground like a ribber, an de dead's heaped up dat high! . . . Oh Lor! Hasten de day when de blows, an de bruises, and de aches an de pains, shall come to de white folks, an de buzzards shall eat dem as dey's dead in de streets. Oh Lor! roll on de chariots, an gib the black people rest and peace. Oh Lor! Gib me de pleasure ob livin' till dat day, when I shall see white folks shot down like de wolves when dey come hungry out o'de woods.⁹

Hidden transcript

Folk heroes as
example of hidden
transcript -

Robin Hood, Harriet
Tubman, El Chapo,

folk hero noun



Save Word

Definition of *folk hero*

: a person who is greatly admired by many people of a particular kind or in a particular place

// He has become a *folk hero* in his home state because of the work he has done to help poor children.

- [Bonnie and Clyde](#) – United States, bank robbers who evaded retribution in the 1930s.
- [Andrés Bonifacio](#) – Philippines, "The Father of the [Philippine Revolution](#)".
- [Hristo Botev](#) – Bulgarian folk hero, poet, revolutionary.
- [Mohamed Bouazizi](#) – Tunisian fruit vendor who immolated himself in protest of government mistreatment and sparked a successful revolution in that country and the [Arab Spring](#).
- [Daniel Boone](#) – United States, an American [pioneer](#) in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.
- [John Brown](#) – United States, attempted to lead a slave revolt in the south by [raiding Harper's Ferry](#), helped spark the [American Civil War](#).^[8]
- [Antonio Canepa](#) – Sicily, founder of the Volunteer Army for the Independence of Sicily, he is considered a hero by the [Sicilian nationalists](#).
- [Butch Cassidy](#) – United States, outlaw and train robber.

Scott's concept of resistance

Summary thus far:

Scott is studying relationships between dominant and subordinate groups.

Domination = the ability of a powerful group to control everyday life circumstances of less powerful groups

Scott characterizes interactions between dominant and subordinate groups as (1) public transcripts, (2) hidden transcripts, and (3) hidden transcripts becoming visible

Scott's concept of resistance = when subordinate groups make the hidden transcript known and visible to dominant groups

Infrapolitics

- Open political resistance (organized protest, petitions, electoral politics, voting, etc) is only one, **tiny** part of resistance
- In everyday life, open political resistance is often not feasible
- What does that mean? Why is open political resistance often not feasible for subordinate groups?
- “Infrapolitics are necessary under conditions of great peril”

Infrapolitics

- infrapolitics are the everyday ways that subordinate groups undermine the public transcript
- infrapolitics challenges the dominant groups claims to power, often in form of symbols
- “Resistance to the legitimacy of power is the actual threat to power”

Infrapolitics - gestures

1. Gestures

Example – progressive non-white congress women respond to Trump's last state of the union address

https://www.democracynow.org/2020/2/10/democracy_now_the_squad_sotu

Ilhan Omar: “My presence tonight is resistance.”

Rashida Tlaib: “But also, I don't know about wearing white, because, I mean, the suffrage movement didn't always — it didn't include the brown, black women.” And so, it was hard for me. So, I remember, Ilhan is like, “Well, wear something else.” I was like, “Ooh, I'm going to wear a Palestinian thobe.”

AOC: “Ayanna and I both decided not to attend. And like Rashida said and as Ayanna says, there's no right or wrong way to protest. And so, whether we attended or whether we didn't attend, all of us showed up in that same spirit of resistance to a culture of white supremacy into the concentration of power, the authoritarianism of this administration.”



Infrapolitics - art

- Are there power hierarchies in aesthetics? Whose aesthetics are valuable?
- How is street art a challenge to accepted standards of aesthetics and beauty



Other forms of infrapolitics

symbolic appropriation



Infrapolitics = the cultural and structural underpinning to visible political action

Why?

Subcultures of resistance

subcultures of resistance are subcultures that are accessible to one audience (subordinate groups) but not another (dominant groups)

- I.e: “this way of life makes sense to us, but not to you”

“The opposition of subcultures to the mainstream enters into public arena in codes, symbols, and disguised behaviors.”

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NOTE: Subcultures of resistance are about culture, not politics, but they are shaped by political domination

Subcultures of resistance

Why subcultural resistance?

1) culture reflects social status, “social location generates distinctive experiences and values, we should expect those shared characteristics to appear in their ritual, dance, drama, dress, folktales, religious beliefs, etc (page 157)

2) Subcultures of resistance are “a riposte to an official culture that is almost invariably demeaning”

- Riposte = make a quick clever reply to an insult or criticism.

2. Subcultures of resistance

Examples of subcultures of resistance

The blues



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hZMHLGMpzc&feature=emb_title

2. Subcultures of resistance

Examples of subcultures of resistance

Hip hop

^ from 26-36 min and 49-50 min

“for people who grow up in an oppressive-type of environment, cultural expression is medicine”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qpGYDl1-scw>

2. Subcultures of resistance

Other examples of subcultures of resistance?