14.S: Summary and Questions

The band takes a final bow and exits the stage. The lights come up and people begin streaming out of the auditorium. One performance ends but a multitude of others continues. The security guard continues to present a picture of authority, ensuring orderly behavior. A woman smiles as a man makes a show of opening the car door for her. And Jayden promises to call Dakota sometime next week.

This chapter has highlighted the many different kinds of performance that interest anthropologists. Under anthropology’s holistic approach, performance connects to topics from many earlier chapters, including rituals (Religion chapter) and gender (Gender and Sexuality chapter). As we have shown, explicit attention to various performance-based frameworks allows anthropologists to identify the learned and shared patterns of ideas and behaviors that constitute human experience and living. We started the chapter by noting that performance can be many things at once, making it important to so much of human cultural experiences. Cultural performances are the events that most readily fit the Western notion of a performance: clearly defined moments of heightened salience of some feature of a culture’s values or social structure. These performances call attention to issues that might otherwise go unnoticed by audience members and consequently can inspire or instigate action. Such performances also can preserve aspects of a culture or facilitate cultural revitalization. Performing culture, on the other hand, refers to the many diverse ways in which individuals both reflect and create cultural norms through daily activities, interactions, and behaviors. Culture does not, indeed cannot, exist simply as an abstract concept. Rather, it arises from the patterned flows of people’s lives—their ongoing performances.

Anthropologists who study performance are interested in many of the same topics as other anthropologists, including: gender, religion, rituals, social norms, and conflict. Performance provides an alternative perspective for exploring and understanding those issues. Rather than studying rituals from a structural-functional perspective, for example, anthropologists can focus on performance and thereby better identify and understand theatrical structure and how
communities use performance to accomplish the work of rituals. In short, performance anthropologists are interested not only in the products of social life but in the processes underlying it.

(P.S. Good luck Jayden and Dakota!)

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

What is the difference between studying something that is performance and studying something as a performance? Why is this distinction important?

What is the role of performance in reflecting social order and values on the one hand and challenging these and leading to social change on the other? Provide examples of each.

Explain the relationship between performance and cultural constructions of gender.

How are descriptive and performative utterances different from each other, and what role to each play in verbal performance?

What roles do performances play in everyday life, especially as these relate to hegemonic discourses?

**GLOSSARY**

Agency: An individual’s ability to make independent choices and act upon his/her will.

Community of practice: a group of people who engaged in a shared activity or vocation, such as dance or medicine.

Cultural Performance: A performance such as a concert or a play.

Discourse: Widely circulated knowledge within a community.

Hegemonic discourses: Situations in which thoughts and actions are dictated by those in authority.

Hegemony: Power so pervasive that it is rarely acknowledged or even recognized, yet informs everyday actions.

Performativity: Words or actions that cause something to happen.

Performing culture: Everyday words and actions that reflect cultural ideas and can be studied by anthropologists as a means of understanding a culture.

Personal front: Aspects of one’s clothing, physical characteristics, comportment, and facial expressions that communicate an impression to others.

Polysemy: Settings, situations, and symbols that convey multiple meanings.

Presentation of self: The management of the impressions others have of us.

Reflexivity: Awareness of how one’s own position and perspective impact what is observed and how it is evaluated.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Lauren Miller Griffith is an assistant professor of anthropology at Texas Tech University. Her research agenda focuses on the intersections of performance, tourism, and education in Brazil, Belize, and the USA. Specifically, she focuses on the Afro-Brazilian martial art capoeira and how non-Brazilian practitioners use travel to Brazil, the art’s homeland, to increase their legitimacy within this genre. Dr. Griffith’s current interests include the links between tourism, cultural heritage, and sustainability in Belize. She is particularly interested in how indigenous communities decide whether or not to participate in the growing tourism industry and the long-term effects of these decisions.

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NOTES


5. See Anya Peterson Royce, Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in Cross-Cultural Perspective (Walnut Creek, Altamira Press, 2004).


15. Ibid.


27. Ibid.


30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., 171.

32. Ibid.

33. Turner, Anthropology of Performance.

34. Ibid., 74.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.


40. Ibid.

41. Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology.

42. Bauman and Ritch, “Informing Performance.”

43. Royce, Performing Arts.

44. Royce, Performing Arts, 44.

45. Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology.


47. Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology.


49. Bauman, Others’ Words, 4.

50. Bauman, Verbal Art.

51. See Guss, Festive State.
52. Bauman, Verbal Art.


58. Guerrón-Montero, “Can’t Beat Me Own Drum.”


60. Conquergood, “Health Theatre.”


63. Ibid.

64. Ibid., 7.


73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. Hancock quoted in Feld, “Pygmy Pop,” 5.