

Culture

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- the components of culture
- cultural diversity and change
- American values

You walk into a youth center in a new town. There are people everywhere, hanging around a lobby desk, going through doors, buying things from vending machines. You can hear a basketball game going on and music playing. How do you know what to do first? You might ask yourself, "What are the rules in this place?"

Rules—most people don't like them very much. Still, human beings usually function within a framework of rules that serve as guidelines for living. Because there are an incredibly large number of possible ways for humans to go about their lives, a set of rules helps us organize ourselves in relation to other people.

In this chapter you will learn about the collection of rules called culture. A culture can be described by its values, norms, symbols, and knowledge. While there are some cultural universals, there is also much cultural diversity, and cultures change over time. Americans have held some traditional cultural values since the founding of the country, yet new American values are emerging even today.

What Culture Is

The rules that guide our behavior collectively are known as culture. Humans begin learning the rules of culture almost as soon as they are born, and they continue to be shaped by them all their lives. Culture is both basic and complex.

Every society, from the simplest to the most complex, has culture. **Culture** includes a society's beliefs, history, knowledge, language, customs, moral principles, and skills. It also consists of the objects people make and use that reflect their ways of life.

Culture and Society

Culture and society are not the same, even though it is almost impossible to talk about one without the other. A **society** is a large number of people who:

- * Live in the same area.
- * See themselves as separate and different from people outside their territory.
- * Participate in a common culture.

A society consists of social interactions among people who think of themselves as similar. That doesn't mean that differences don't exist within a society.

Did You Know?



Heredity and Culture

Culture is the set of things that society, not biology, passes on to the individual. However, the division between biology and culture is not clear cut.

Biology determines basic human needs and capacities. The hunger drive, for example, is biological. It makes us all want to eat. But what, how, and where we eat is determined by our culture.

How much of human behavior is inherited, and how much is learned? What is the dividing line between culture and biology?

Is the formation of families biologically or culturally based? What about crime? Is it provoked by biological aggression, or is criminal behavior shaped by the culture? Sociologists do not agree about the answers to these questions.

You might think that the behaviors that don't vary from one culture to another are the inherited ones. However, even this isn't as logical as it seems. For example, virtually all people in all societies use fire, but no one argues that the knowledge of how to use fire is inherited.

EXAMPLE: People who live in San Francisco may see themselves as different from those who live in Chicago, but they see inhabitants of both cities as part of the U.S. society. If they travel to Chicago, they will probably be able to get around all right because the rules—or the culture—would be familiar.

Cultural Traits

The smallest unit of a culture is the cultural trait. A **cultural trait** is a single object, action, or belief.

EXAMPLE: A wedding ring, a handshake, the belief that washing one’s hands helps prevent the spread of germs—these are cultural traits.

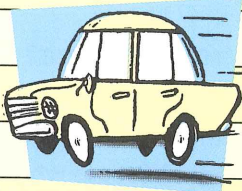



Cultural traits usually combine to form culture complexes. A **culture complex** is a set of interrelated traits.

EXAMPLE: All people eat, and many cultural traits surround this action. In the United States, the culture complex for eating would include knives, forks, spoons, plates, and all the customs that surround their use.

Cultural traits and complexes vary from one culture to another, but they usually are organized around a limited number of cultural patterns. People in many cultures prefer to eat a large meal at noon, whereas Americans prefer a large evening meal. The French prefer strong coffee, whereas most Americans enjoy a weaker brew. Soup is a staple breakfast food in many cultures. Yet some characteristics of eating are widely shared among cultures. People usually eat alone, with family members, or in small groups of people they know well.

Material and Nonmaterial Culture

Culture consists of concrete objects that can be seen and touched. Culture also consists of beliefs, values, and behaviors that cannot be touched. **Material culture** refers to the set of concrete objects created

Examples of Material Culture	
computers	
desks	
cars	
sofas	
books	
cooking utensils	
clothes	
skyscrapers	
jewelry	
Examples of Nonmaterial Culture	
ideas	
rules	
skills	
beliefs	
language	
social patterns	
work practices	
political systems	
economic systems	

or used by the people of a culture. Single objects of the material culture are called *artifacts*. **Nonmaterial culture** is composed of abstract human creations.

The two categories of culture are intertwined. For instance, the material objects created to make our lives easier or better, such as computers and cars, require that we learn particular skills to use them. The chart on page 23 gives examples of material and nonmaterial culture.

Real versus Ideal Culture

Did you ever see someone run a red light or cross the street midway between two intersections? People who break the rules usually know what the rules are. People

may agree about what should and shouldn't be done, but they don't always do as their culture directs.

The *ideal culture* is a collection of cultural beliefs that define what people in a culture should do and what they say they do. Most Americans would say you should cross streets at the corners. Even when someone confesses that he or she often jaywalks, that person almost certainly understands the "ideal" behavior.

Sociologists are interested in both the ideal culture and the *real culture* that is reflected by people's actual behavior as it appears to an observer.

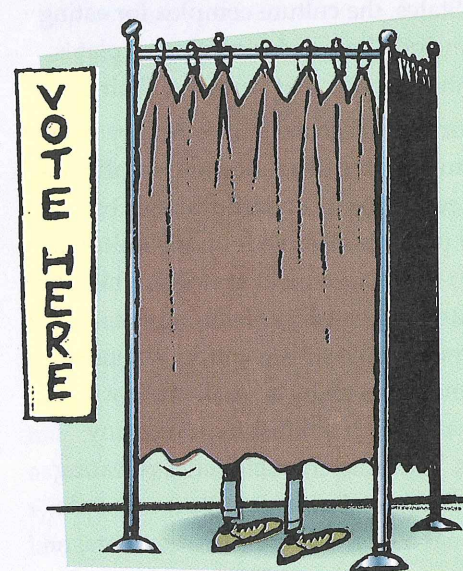
Sociologist's Perspective



Ideal versus Real Voting Patterns

Most Americans believe that as citizens of a democracy they have the responsibility to select public officials by voting in elections. How does this ideal behavior compare to the real?

When researchers at the University of Michigan asked Americans if they had voted in the 1996 presidential election, 72 percent said that they had voted. In contrast, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, only 48.8 percent of all eligible voters actually voted in the same election. Ideal and real culture are often very different.



Key Elements of Culture

Although cultural traits and complexes vary from society to society, all cultures consist of the same key elements: values, norms, symbols, and knowledge and beliefs.

Values

We each have our own personal values that shape our behavior. One person may value physical fitness and concentrate on running or working out in the gym. Another may value contributing to the community and may spend time helping out in the senior center. Whatever the differences in their personal values, if these two are part of the same culture, they share a general set of objectives as members of their society.

Cultural values are a collection of what is considered good, desirable, and proper in a culture. They reflect what people in a culture prefer as well as what they find important and morally right. Values are broad, abstract concepts that form the foundation for a whole way of life. The types of values held by a society help determine almost everything else about the culture.

Norms

Two people greet each other as they pass on the sidewalk. One says, "Good morning, how are you?"

"Good morning. How do you like this beautiful weather?"

"I love it. We'd better enjoy it while we can!"

Did You Know?



Greetings in Bhutan

In the Asian kingdom of Bhutan, people often greet one another by putting their hands together in a way that signifies prayer in American society. The hand motions are accompanied by both people sticking out their tongues in a way that would probably shock most Americans. It is the norm in Bhutan.

What are they doing? What does their exchange mean? They are acknowledging their acquaintance according to the norms of U.S. society.

Norms are the guidelines people follow in their relations with one another. They are shared standards of desirable behavior. Every society has many norms. These range from small things (Don't eat peanut butter from a knife) to major things (Do not kill another human being). Norms are divided into **two** categories according to the strictness by which they are enforced:

1. **Folkways** refer to everyday habits and conventions that people obey without giving them much thought.

EXAMPLES: replying to invitations and writing thank-you notes for gifts. People who violate folkways may be considered eccentric or rude, but as a rule they are tolerated.

2. **Mores** are norms that have powerful moral significance attached to them. Mores provoke intense reactions if they are broken.

EXAMPLES: prohibitions against incest, murder, and stealing.

Prohibitions against a society's most important mores are called **taboos**. Violators of taboos usually are considered unfit to socialize with others, and they may be exiled or executed.

A society enforces norms with laws and sanctions.

- * **Laws** are written rules of conduct that are enacted and enforced by

governments. Laws may formalize folkways (no littering) or may relate to major mores (laws against murder and robbery).

- * **Sanctions** are rewards or punishments. Rewards are called *positive sanctions*, and punishments are called *negative sanctions*.

- * *Informal sanctions* are given by individuals or groups.

EXAMPLE: Employee-of-the-week award (positive), grounding for a child who breaks a family rule (negative).

- * *Formal sanctions* are given by organizations or regulatory bodies, such as governments, police, corporations, and schools.

EXAMPLES: Fines for traffic violations (negative), suspensions from school (negative), medals for athletic performance (positive).

Did You Know?



The Donner Party

Cannibalism violates a major taboo in U.S. society, and those who practice it achieve a certain notoriety. A famous example is the Donner Party, a group of U.S. migrants to California in 1846–1847. They left Illinois under the leadership of George Donner. After considerable difficulty crossing the deserts of Utah, they were trapped by heavy snows in the Sierra Nevada

Mountains in November. Forced to camp for the winter at a small lake (now named Donner Lake), they suffered enormous hardships, and members of the group resorted to cannibalism in order to survive. Although the California courts penalized none of the survivors, other settlers shunned them. The Donner name remains forever associated with their grisly deeds.

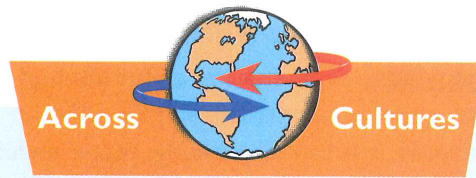
Symbols

Suppose you want your friends to know about your new dog. How would you go about it? Would you take your dog to school? Probably not. You have the ability to convey the news by using symbols. You may use words, and you may even draw a picture. **Symbols** are commonly understood gestures, words, objects, sounds, colors, or designs that have come to stand for something else.

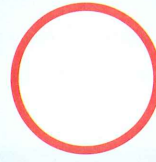
Different cultures use different symbols to stand for the same object, so there is no obvious, natural, or necessary connection between a symbol and what it stands for. If you speak English, your new pet is a “dog,” but if you speak Swahili, it would be a “mbwa.” Some symbols, such as many traffic signs, are understood by people who speak many different languages. Symbols can be divided into **two** categories:

1. **Language** is the organization of written or spoken symbols into a standardized system with rules for putting the symbols together. Language not only allows people to communicate about present interests and needs, but also allows them to reflect on the past and imagine the future. The study of language can reveal much about a culture.

EXAMPLES: The language of the Samoans, who live on an island, includes very precise information about fishing and boating in the Pacific. The language of Eskimos makes many fine distinctions about different kinds of snow. Arabs have hundreds of words to describe



The Meaning of Circles



The circle is a central symbol for the Oglala Sioux of North America. They believe the circle to be sacred because the Great Spirit caused many things in nature to be round—the sun, the moon, even the stems of plants. The Oglala make their tipis circular, they camp in a circular formation, and they sit in a circle at ceremonies.

camels and horses. Americans distinguish among sedans, convertibles, sports utility vehicles, and vans.

2. **Signs** are nonverbal. In some ways signs are more flexible than language because they can communicate across languages. People in many cultures use their hands to make commonly understood signs.

EXAMPLES: During World War II, Winston Churchill’s famous “V” formed with two fingers symbolized victory for the Allies. The different positions of a Buddha statue’s hands and fingers may convey teaching, calm, and caution as well as many other messages.

Knowledge and Beliefs

Knowledge is an element of culture that attempts to define what exists, or the reality of the world. It includes those things people understand as members of the culture as well as the particular kinds of knowledge needed to function in the culture.

EXAMPLE: A culture's history and sciences are part of its knowledge. In a highly tech-

nological society such as ours, principles of mathematics, engineering, and physics are very important.

A culture also has **beliefs**. These are its theories and ideas about the nature of the physical and social world. Not all beliefs can be proven. Sociologists are interested in how people decide what to count as knowledge and what to count as beliefs.

Elements of Culture		
Values	<p><i>Broad, abstract, and basic ideas that reflect what is desirable, proper, good, preferred, important, and right.</i></p> <p>Cultures value such ideas as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Freedom of expression. * Strong families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Competition. * Loyalty to a leader. * Religious beliefs.
Norms	<p><i>Guidelines; shared standards of behavior.</i></p> <p>Folkways—group habits and conventions, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Greetings. * Child-raising customs. 	<p>Mores—moral standards such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Taking care of the homeless. * Honesty. <p>Laws, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Marriage and divorce laws. * Laws against murder. <p>Sanctions, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Raises and promotions. * Fines.
Symbols	<p><i>Commonly understood gestures, words, objects, sounds, and designs that stand for something else.</i></p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Words. * Maps. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Diagrams. * Traffic signs. * Logos. * National anthems. * Emergency vehicle sirens.
Knowledge and Beliefs	<p><i>Culture's definition of reality.</i></p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * History. * Science. * Medicine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Skills needed to perform the work of the society. * Ways of doing things. * Ways of making things.

Cultural Variety

Each culture is different from all others, partly because it has adapted to meet the special circumstances of a particular group of people in a particular place.

EXAMPLE: A group of people living on a tropical island will eat the fruit that grows there and learn to catch and eat fish in the surrounding ocean. They obviously will not hunt seals and polar bears.

Cultures may also vary according to the society's social circumstances, such as its technological development, language, beliefs, and history. These factors help determine how a group organizes to meet basic human needs. When we study the variation among cultures, we look at **three** things: cultural universals, cultural diversity, and change inside cultures.

1 Cultural Universals

Can you imagine a culture that doesn't have families, music, or some type of housing? Almost all cultures have these elements. Features that are common to all cultures are called **cultural universals**.

Some of the similarity among cultures comes from universal human needs. We are all basically alike physically—we must eat, find shelter, take care of children, and deal with aging and ill parents. Every human community begins with these same circumstances.

Another cause of cultural similarities can be found in the dynamics of group life. Groups must organize in order to function, and almost all have some form of leadership.

EXAMPLES: Chiefs, priests, mayors, prime ministers—all are cultural responses to the need for leadership.

Groups must also teach their organization to newcomers and children.

EXAMPLES: Family members, day care centers, schools, community colleges, libraries, and even the Internet meet these needs.

2 Cultural Diversity

Although cultural universals can be identified, there is still great diversity among the world's many cultures. This diversity is often evident within a single nation, with some groups holding cultural beliefs and customs that differ from those of the majority.

Subcultures and Countercultures

Almost no country has a single set of accepted norms and values. Although people share a cultural tradition, all cultures contain diversity. **Subcultures** form when people share some broad cultural traditions but also follow values and norms that are unique to their group.

EXAMPLES: Subcultures may spring up around some occupations or places of work, such as among hospital workers. Subcultures may be defined by racial or ethnic groups, regions of a country—the South, the Midwest—or age groups—teenagers, senior citizens.

Complex modern societies depend on various subcultures—such as the military, the police, teachers, and religious leaders—for many functions. (We use the term *subculture* for such a group when we are discussing the values and behaviors their



Cultural Universals

In 1945, anthropologist George Murdock published a list of over sixty cultural universals. The manner in which these cultural features are expressed varies from culture to culture.

members share that are particular to their group.) Subcultures are often seen as strengthening a society and making it more interesting. However, sometimes subcultures intend to challenge the values of the larger society. When a group rejects the values and norms of the larger culture and replaces them with a new set, the subculture formed is called a **counterculture**.

EXAMPLES: Gangs, hippies, skinheads, militia groups.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism—a term coined in 1906 by sociologist William Graham Sumner—is the tendency to assume that one's own culture and way of life are "normal" and superior to all others. Perhaps because we learn so much of our culture without really thinking about it, most people have some degree of ethnocentrism. We tend to see our own group as the defining point of culture. The consequences of such views are sometimes enormous.

Examples of Cultural Universals

Athletic sports.	Language.
Bodily adornment.	Laws.
Cooking.	Marriage.
Dancing.	Medicine.
Decorative art.	Music.
Family.	Myths and legends.
Food habits, taboos.	Personal names.
Funeral ceremonies.	Religious rituals.
Games.	Social status.
Gift giving.	Surgery.
Housing.	Tool making.
Inheritance rules.	Visiting.

Conflict theorists say that ethnocentrism leads to conflicts between groups in a society. For example, in the United States, ethnocentrism has led to conflict between black and white Americans because it promotes stereotypes based on prejudice. Ethnocentrism can also be seen as a cause of war among nations. On the other hand, functionalists note that ethnocentrism promotes group pride and can help make a country strong.



Ethnocentrism: A Two-Way Street

Sociologists often look for culture-centered behavior and views. One way to spot ethnocentrism is to compare two or more groups' descriptions of each other. Consider the following descriptions by Native Americans and Europeans, written in the early days of European settlement of North America:

"We know now who they are; these Wapsinis [white people] who then came out of the sea to rob us of our land; starving wretches! With smiles they came, but soon became snakes or foes . . . They were allowed to live with us . . . as our friends and allies . . . But alas they brought also fireguns and fire water, which

burned and killed. Also baubles and trinkets of no use; since we had better ones. . . . [They] said more land, more land we must have, and no limits could be put to their steps and increase."

—From the traditional history of the Lenni Lenape, the Delaware Indians

"In respect to us, they are a people poor, and, for want of skill and judgment in the knowledge and use of our things, do esteem [value] our trifles before things of great value . . . [It] may be hoped, if means of good government be used, that they may in short time be brought to civility and the embracing of true religion."

—From Captain Arthur Barlowe's account of a voyage to Virginia, 1585



Cultural Relativism

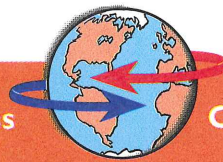
The opposite of ethnocentrism is **cultural relativism**, the argument that behavior in one culture should not be judged by the standards of another. Cultural relativism is the view that people's behavior and values should be viewed from the perspective of their own culture. This view emphasizes that different social contexts produce different norms and values. Practices such as polygamy (multiple wives) and bullfighting must be studied within the contexts of the cultures in which they are found.

While cultural relativism does not suggest that we must unquestionably accept every cultural practice, it does require an effort to evaluate norms and values in the light of their source.

3 Change

What do the U.S. cultures of the 18th and 21st centuries have in common? Although we certainly can identify some common elements—a representative government, the English language, immigrants—many things are different. Our population, means of travel and communication, values, and economy have all changed. Slavery is gone.

Across



Cultures

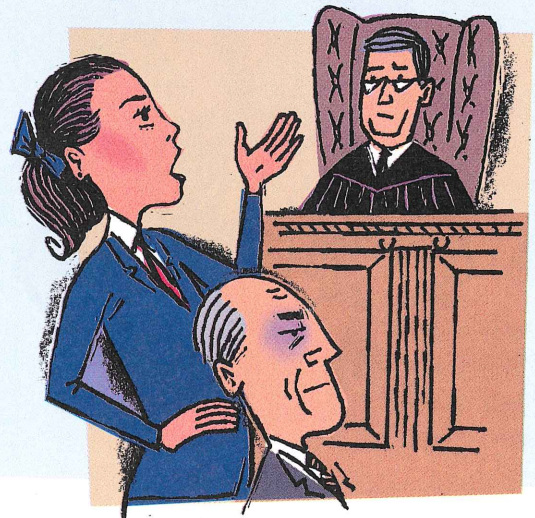
Culturally Correct or Murder?

In 1989, a New York judge acquitted a Chinese immigrant of the most serious charges against him after he beat his wife to death with a hammer. He was sentenced to only five years' probation largely because the judge took cultural relativism into consideration.

The immigrant found out that his wife was having an affair, and, according to an expert on Chinese culture who testified at the trial, husbands in China often severely punish their wives for such behavior. According to the judge, the defendant took his Chinese culture with him when he immigrated to the United States.

The Brooklyn district attorney, Elizabeth Holtzman, disagreed and angrily asserted that "Anyone who comes to this country must be prepared to live by and obey the laws of this country."

What do you think?



All cultures change, continually, sometimes very slowly and at other times with sudden, jolting events.

Stability and Change

Every culture needs stability in order to run smoothly, even to survive. A society's stability rests largely on its ability to convince its members to conform, partly by applying sanctions but also through **internalization of norms**.

People begin to learn the norms of their society so early in their lives that it often doesn't occur to them that they might break them. They also expect the other people around them to follow norms. Internalization is the process by which an individual makes society's norms a part of his or her own set of attitudes and beliefs. We internalize folkways—such as eating with a knife and fork or driving on the right side of the road—as well as mores—such as only marrying one person at a time or refraining from eating human flesh. Most of us do not do these things simply because we fear punishment. When norms are internalized, a person conforms to society's expectations without need of punishment or reward.

Despite the need for stability, a society cannot stay the same forever. Many forces combine to bring about change. Some are as simple as the desire for something different. Some change comes about from a significant invention, such as the electric light or the computer. Other changes may be catastrophic, such as conquest by a people of another culture.

Types of Change

Change can occur in both material and nonmaterial culture, and it can begin in many different ways. A change in one area of life usually means that other areas will be altered as well. Changes can occur in **two** areas.

I. Changes in Values and Belief.

"I found the mind of a female, if such a thing existed, was thought not worth cultivating. I disliked the trouble of thinking for myself and therefore adopted the sentiments of others—fully convinced [that] to adorn my person and acquire a few little accomplishments was sufficient to secure me the admiration of the society I frequented."

—Eliza Southgate, in a letter to her cousin, May 1801

Seventeen-year-old Eliza Southgate revealed that she had internalized some values and beliefs that characterized U.S. society 200 years ago. Education for girls who had schooling was usually limited to reading, writing, and simple arithmetic. Well-to-do families would sometimes send their daughters to a "finishing school," where they were taught the social skills of a hostess.

Over the years since 1801 these U.S. values and beliefs have changed dramatically. Women's rights advocates formed an ongoing social movement. This long-term, conscious effort to promote social change helped bring about new values and ideas.

Today the beliefs that women will not work outside the home and that they need little education have vanished. Many areas of life, from education to business to politics, have changed in response. Thus change in values and beliefs can spread to other areas so that the entire society is transformed.

2. Changes in Technology. Many people find great delight in keeping up with new gadgets and integrating them into their lives. Most of us, however, don't stop to think about how the effect of new material objects ripples through society. Gadgets are the result of **technology**—the knowledge and tools people use to shape and mold their environments for practical purposes.

Technological change can occur in **two** ways:

i. Discovery involves recognizing new phenomena in the universe and/or developing a new understanding of elements that are already known.

EXAMPLES: As astronomers have developed more powerful telescopes and used satellites and rocket technology, they have contributed to our understanding of Earth and its place in the universe. Likewise, discoveries of new vaccines and treatments for diseases have contributed to better health and longer lives for many people.

ii. Invention results when existing cultural items are combined into a form that did not exist before.



Technology and Cultural Lag

Sociologist William F. Ogburn made some observations about cultural change based on the division of material culture from nonmaterial culture. According to Ogburn, material culture changes more readily than nonmaterial culture. So material culture usually changes first, and the nonmaterial culture must adjust to accommodate it.

Cultural lag refers to the time in between the changes, when the nonmaterial culture is still adapting to new material conditions. Ogburn acknowledged that change can occur the other way around—with nonmaterial culture changing first—but he believed that this pattern occurred much less often.

Although inventions take place in areas outside technology, technological inventions often bring about significant change.

EXAMPLE: The invention of atomic weapons brought about a change in the organization and functions of armies, and, perhaps even more importantly, changed the whole world's attitude toward war. It also resulted in a myriad of other changes, such as nuclear power plants, that can bring inexpensive power to cities across the country.

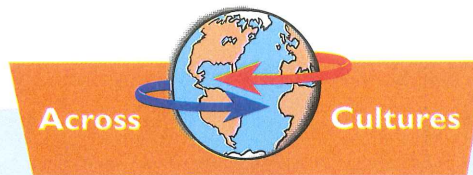
Ways of Changing

Cultural change often takes place through **diffusion**, the spreading of cultural items from group to group or society to society. Diffusion can occur in many ways—through exploration, military conquest, missionary work, mass media, or tourism.

EXAMPLE: Long ago, the Chinese invented thin noodles. Marco Polo brought them back to his native Italy, where they were called *spaghetti*. Italians brought spaghetti to the United States, where it has become a staple of the American diet.

Diffusion leads to **acculturation**, the modification of the culture of a group as a result of contact with a different culture.

Many other factors may bring about cultural change, including the physical environment, population, and wars. The chart on page 36 gives examples of how cultures change.



African Cattle Ranches

Modern countries sometimes try to help others around the world by sharing technological knowledge. But this diffusion doesn't work when knowledge of the local customs and beliefs is ignored.

In one African project, planners ignored advice from locals not to create cattle ranches in the project area because they would conflict with customs of the native inhabitants. In protest, thousands of people tore down fences, burned pastures, and rustled cattle because the ranches were built on their ancestral lands. The guerrilla activities continued until foreign managers were replaced with locals, who used traditional agreements between villages to end the rustling.



Examples of Cultural Change				
Diffusion	Acculturation	Environment	Population Shift	War
Marco Polo carries noodles from China to Italy.	Italians begin eating noodles. When they migrate to the United States, Americans' diets change.	A volcano's eruption ruins the land for farming. There is widespread poverty.	Declining birth rates lead to school closings. Entire towns disappear in some communities.	Farmers become soldiers.
The explorers of the Americas bring smallpox, which nearly wipes out some native groups.	Potatoes brought to Europe from the Americas become a staple food, and the European population experiences huge growth.	The discovery of gold in Colorado in 1849 produces boom towns and encourages immigration from China.	Population increases lead to overcrowding and shortages of food and supplies. Famines occur.	Refugees take their customs to new countries.

Toward a Global Culture

Technological innovations of the 20th century, such as communications technology, radio, television, motion pictures, and the Internet, have allowed such increased contact among nations that some people think we are headed toward a global culture. If a common global culture emerges in the future, today's nations may someday function more like subcultures than separate cultures.

Many people believe that the Internet will speed creation of a global culture. There are few restrictions on who provides information on the Internet and who gets it, so that people from all cultures and all walks of life (those who have computers and Internet access, that is) can have equal access to information and communication.

Did You Know?



Internet Statistics

The Internet is growing much faster than anyone ever imagined. In 1998 the number of people connected to the Internet was about 37 million. The figure had grown by mid-2000 to about 332 million worldwide. The growth, however, is geographically uneven. Only about 1% of those connected in mid-2000 lived in Africa.

American Values

Each country has its own blend of cultural values that makes it different in some ways from all others. Some values have shaped the United States for many generations, whereas others are emerging and changing as our culture changes.

Traditional American Values

Traditional American values have influenced many generations of Americans. These include success, work, moral concern and humanitarianism, efficiency, progress, equality, freedom, and patriotism.

Success

In American culture, whether one succeeds or fails is believed to be due largely to one's own efforts. We are encouraged to believe that anyone who works hard

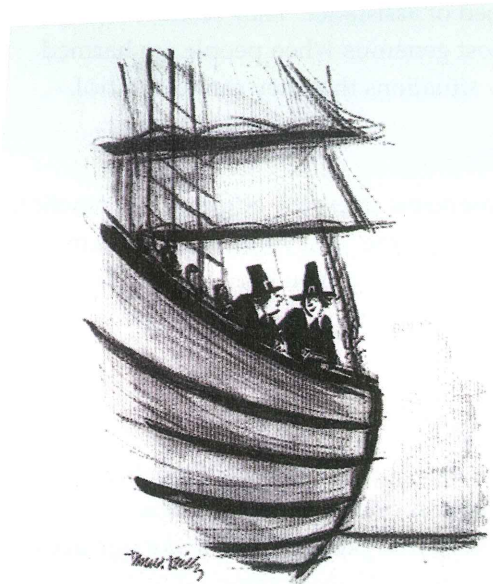
and takes advantage of opportunities can make it to the top. As there is only so much room at the top, this value may leave many people feeling as if they have failed. In midlife, many Americans redefine "success" for themselves.

Work

Most Americans believe they should work hard, and laziness is generally frowned upon. We talk about people having a "work ethic" when they work hard.

Moral Concerns and Humanitarianism

Americans usually have strong opinions and tend to base their judgments on their sense of right and wrong. Americans differ, however, on the degree to which a common morality should be applied to all.



"Religious freedom is my immediate goal, but my long-range plan is to go into real estate."



Basic American Values

In his influential 1970 book *American Society*, sociologist Robin Williams offered a list of basic American values that have remained relatively stable through time: achievement, efficiency, material comfort, nationalism, equality, and the supremacy of science and reason over faith. Of course,

not all people in the United States agree on one set of values, so Williams's list is controversial. However, other sociologists and anthropologists, including Talcott Parsons and Margaret Mead, have researched the same topic and have come up with very similar basic American values.

Examples of Values

achievement	material comfort
efficiency	nationalism
equality	supremacy of science and reason over faith

Despite their belief that individuals are responsible for their own success, Americans have a soft spot for people in need of assistance. They seem to be most generous when people are harmed by situations that they cannot control.

Efficiency

Americans stress the efficient and practical. "Saving time" is a value that drives many lives—do what you have to do in the most efficient way possible so that you will get more done.

Progress

Americans are optimists. We believe our history is one of ongoing progress. We believe that progress will make our lives

better, and that we can continue to improve and perfect our way of life. Some critics say that progress in the United States is blind—that we build skyscrapers, factories, and roads without any regard for their effects on the physical environment. On the other hand, the quality of people's lives in many areas has improved as a result of developments in medicine and technology. The belief in progress is closely tied to the idea that science can and eventually will overcome all natural and human-made difficulties.

Equality

"All men are created equal." This phrase from the Declaration of Independence means that the basic American value of equality has been there since the beginning of our country. Without a belief in equality and confidence in the ability of the average

person, a democratic form of government would not make sense. On the other hand, by *equality* Americans mean that every individual has (or should have) equal opportunity. This ideal has not yet been realized, but we are working on it.

Across Cultures

Americans in Paris

Americans traveling to Paris often return home with tales of abuse at the hands of the French people. Americans criticize the French for being snobbish and rude. In return, the French often claim that Americans are boorish, loud, and disrespectful of their culture.

Part of the conflict rests in the difference between French and American values

regarding efficiency and practicality.

Many Parisians value a long, relaxing visit to a sidewalk café; Americans often take their coffee and run. Parisians name their streets after literary figures, artists, and philosophers; Americans frequently number their streets or name them after trees. Differences in values shape people's lives and influence their views of others.

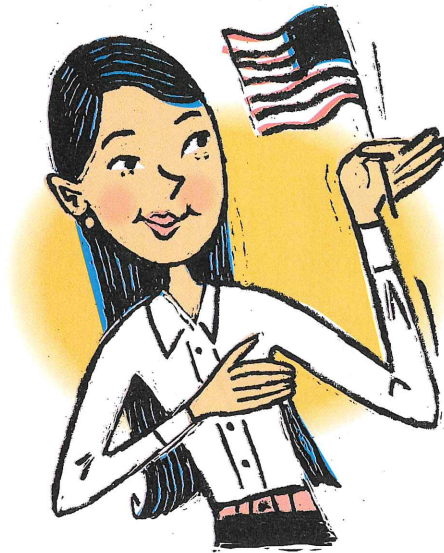


Freedom

Perhaps there is no greater American value than freedom. By freedom, Americans generally mean freedom from governmental controls. We believe we should be free to reach the goals we choose, speak our minds freely, associate with whom we wish, travel where we wish, and be safe from our government spying on us or taking our things unlawfully.

Patriotism

Americans are inclined to believe that the United States is a better, stronger country than all the rest, and that the American way of life is superior to all others. Patriotism implies pride in one's country and its values, but it is also closely connected to ethnocentrism.



Changing American Values

The preceding list of traditional values is not exhaustive. You might think of others you believe most Americans hold. What about consumerism? Are we a nation of consumers? Do we place a high value on having “stuff”? What do you think?

Over time new values emerge as the culture changes. Because they are new, these values are often hard to identify. However, scholars have pointed out that a new cluster of closely related values has appeared in recent years:

- * Self-fulfillment.
- * Narcissism.
- * Hedonism.

Self-fulfillment

Much emphasis has been placed in recent years on **self-fulfillment**, on the commitment to thoroughly developing one's talents and potential. Sociologist Robert Bellah says that values only have meaning if a person's “inner self” is in tune with them.

Evidence of this value of self-fulfillment is apparent in the growth of the “self-help” movement. Health clubs, diet centers, magazines, books, seminars, and web sites all challenge people to improve themselves and to experience life to its fullest. Self-help books have become big business for publishers across the country because of this new emphasis on self-improvement.

Psychologist and survey researcher Daniel Yankelovich views the shift toward self-fulfillment as positive. He believes that an emphasis on self-fulfillment will balance the ill effects that come from the traditional success value—the belief that satisfaction comes only from material gain.

Narcissism and Hedonism

Some sociologists believe that the emphasis on personal fulfillment borders on **narcissism**, or extreme self-centeredness. In “getting in tune with ourselves,” we forget about others. A closely related concept is **hedonism**, or the pursuit of pleasure above all other values.

Sociologist's Perspective

Habits of the Heart



“Individuals are each in his or her own way confused about how to define for themselves such things as the nature of success, the meaning of freedom, and the requirements of justice.” So writes sociologist Robert Bellah in *Habits of the Heart*. Bellah has identified a restlessness in U.S. society that relates to a struggle to interpret the meaning of traditional values, such as success, freedom, individualism, and equality.

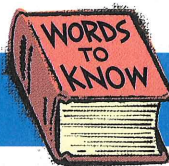
Chapter 2 Wrap-up

CULTURE

A culture is the system of values, norms, symbols, and knowledge a society shares. It is made up of cultural traits that combine into culture complexes. Culture is both material (objects) and nonmaterial (abstract creations), both ideal and real.

Sociologists have identified cultural universals that all cultures share. Yet cultures are diverse as well. Cultures can change through diffusion and acculturation and in response to environmental changes, population shifts, and war.

When a culture changes, its values, beliefs, and technology change. U.S. culture has both traditional and emerging values.



- acculturation**—process of acquiring the culture of a group or society other than one's own. *p.* 35
- beliefs**—theories and ideas about the nature of the physical and social world. *p.* 28
- counterculture**—group that rejects the values and norms of a larger culture and replaces them with a new set. *p.* 30
- cultural relativism**—principle that behavior in one culture should not be judged by the standards of another. *p.* 32
- cultural trait**—single object, action, or belief produced by a culture. *p.* 23
- cultural universals**—features of societies that are common to all cultures. *p.* 29
- cultural values**—collection of what is considered good, desirable, and proper in a culture. *p.* 25
- culture**—system of values, norms, symbols, and knowledge that a society shares. *p.* 22
- culture complex**—set of interrelated cultural traits. *p.* 23
- diffusion**—process by which cultural items are spread from group to group or society to society. *p.* 35
- ethnocentrism**—tendency to assume that one's own culture is normal and superior to all others. *p.* 30
- folkways**—everyday habits and conventions of a people. *p.* 25
- hedonism**—pursuit of pleasure above all other values. *p.* 41
- internalization of norms**—largely subconscious process in which a culture's norms become part of an individual's own set of attitudes and beliefs. *p.* 33
- knowledge**—element of culture that attempts to define what exists or the reality of the world. *p.* 28
- laws**—written rules of conduct enacted and enforced by governments. *p.* 26
- material culture**—set of physical objects (artifacts) constructed by the people of a culture. *p.* 23
- mores**—traditional rules of a people or a society that have powerful moral significance attached to them. *p.* 26
- narcissism**—extreme self-centeredness. *p.* 41
- nonmaterial culture**—abstract creations by the people of a culture, such as ideas, rules, and beliefs. *p.* 24
- norms**—guidelines, including folkways and mores, that people in a culture follow in their relations with one another. *p.* 25
- sanctions**—rewards and punishments. *p.* 26
- self-fulfillment**—thorough development of individual talents and potential. *p.* 40
- society**—large number of people who live in the same area, see themselves as separate and different from people outside their territory, and participate in a common culture. *p.* 22
- symbols**—commonly understood gestures, words, objects, sounds, colors, or designs that stand for something else. *p.* 27
- subculture**—group of people who share some of the broad traditions of a culture but also follow values and norms that are unique to them. *p.* 29
- taboo**—prohibition against one of society's most important mores. *p.* 26
- technology**—knowledge and tools people use to shape and mold their environments for practical purposes. *p.* 34