

2. Culture

Objectives

- Explain the components of culture
- Examine cultural diversity and change
- Understand American values

Vocabulary

acculturation	culture complex	laws	self-fulfillment
counterculture	diffusion	material culture	society
cultural relativism	ethnocentrism	mores	subculture
cultural trait	folkways	narcissism	symbols
cultural universals	hedonism	nonmaterial culture	taboo
cultural values	internalization of norms	norms	technology
culture	knowledge	sanctions	

Background

Like most other people, students go about their lives without thinking about the culture and how it influences them. In this chapter, they can gain a wider perspective and become aware of what culture is and how it affects their everyday lives.

After learning what culture is, students learn about culture and society and see how cultural traits combine into cultural complexes. They also learn that a culture includes both material and nonmaterial forms. As they study Real vs. Ideal Culture, students also learn about those who follow the rules of culture and those who bend or break them.

Students next learn to identify and differentiate between the key elements that all cultures share—values, norms, symbols, knowledge, and beliefs. This provides them with an intellectual framework that helps them better understand themselves and their world. They learn how individual personal values differ from collective, moral cultural values, how norms guide people's behavior, and how, when broken, they are enforced by laws and sanctions.

Discussion of how people communicate through symbols in the form of language and signs helps to broaden students' awareness of a significant part of their culture. Students also can realize how important the knowledge and beliefs of a culture are because they greatly impact the technology, reality, and theories of our physical and social world.

Students next evaluate cultural variety. They learn that sociologists study this area by weighing the cultural universals that all cultures share, cultural diversity, and cultural change. Students also consider how increased contact between cultures and nations may lead the world toward one global culture.

The chapter closes by summarizing traditional American values—like work, success, and equality—with new and ever-changing ones—like self-fulfillment, narcissism, and hedonism.

Further Resources

Ben-David, Joseph and Terry Nicholas Clark.
Culture and Its Creators. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

For Discussion

Review

1. What is culture and what kinds of elements make up a culture?
 2. What are the key characteristics of a society?
 3. What two categories are norms divided into?
 4. What three areas do sociologists study when assessing variations among cultures?
2. What is the difference between ideal culture and real culture? Why don't people always act upon what they know is ideal? Give some examples of these differences in behavior.
 3. What is the difference between how conflict theorists and functionalists view ethnocentrism? What is your opinion? Offer examples.
 4. What factors make it possible or likely for the world's cultures to form and to become a global culture?

Critical Thinking

1. The culture complex for eating in the U.S. includes knives, forks, spoons, plates, and all the customs that relate to their use. What are some examples of cultural traits or culture complexes from other countries?

Activities

1. Live or Learn?

Divide students into groups of four. Ask each person in each group to make two lists, one of things in society that they think are inherited or biological, and the other listing things that they think are learned. Have each group compare their lists and discuss their findings.

2. Cultural Variety

Divide students into teams. Ask the teams to research, write, and deliver group reports on one aspect on cultural variety that interests them, such as subcultures, countercultures, ethnocentrism, and cultural relativism. Ask them to provide contemporary examples of these elements at work in society.

3. Internet: Cultural Crime

Ask students to search the Internet for criminal cases where the judge took cultural relativism into account when ruling on the case. (Refer

students to the box on page 32 in this chapter.) Ask them to find example accounts that they can refer to in order to form and support their own opinions when they present them to the class for discussion.

4. Special Sources:

U.S. Culture—Past, Present, and Future

Ask students to research magazine articles that address the issue of changing American values. Have them find specific information relating to self-fulfillment, narcissism, and hedonism. Ask them to look back on the history of American culture and compare these changing values to those of long ago. What are the differences? What do these evolving values say about U.S. culture? Are we headed in a positive direction? Why or why not? Have students to write a two-page essay summarizing their findings and conduct an open class discussion on the topic.

Name _____

2. Culture

As you read Chapter 2, write an answer to each question below.

1. What is the difference between material and nonmaterial culture? List some examples.

2. What are laws? How can laws affect folkways and mores?

3. List the five elements that all cultures share and explain each.

4. Make distinctions between cultural universals, cultural diversity, and changes that occur within cultures.

5. What are some traditional cultural values that Americans hold?

Name _____

2. Culture

Find the best answer for each item. Then circle that answer.

1. What is a single object, action, or belief as well as the smallest unit of culture?
 - a. material culture
 - b. cultural trait
 - c. nonmaterial culture
 - d. cultural value
2. Which of these is a set of interrelated traits?
 - a. counterculture
 - b. cultural relativism
 - c. culture complex
 - d. diffusion
3. What are cultural values?
 - a. collection of what is considered good, desirable, and proper in a culture
 - b. material items that a culture places value on
 - c. standard of behavior set up in a particular culture that the entire society strives for
 - d. guidelines people follow in the workplace
4. What is the term for everyday habits and conventions that people obey without giving them much thought?
 - a. norms
 - b. values
 - c. rules
 - d. folkways
5. What are commonly understood gestures, words, objects, sounds, colors, or designs that have come to stand for something else?
 - a. sanctions
 - b. mores
 - c. symbols
 - d. narcissism
6. What is an element of culture that attempts to define what exists or the reality of the world?
 - a. knowledge
 - b. technology
 - c. diffusion
 - d. cultural relativism
7. What are subcultures?
 - a. people who completely segregate themselves from the larger group
 - b. groups of people who share some broad cultural traditions but also follow values and norms that are unique to their group
 - c. people who live in the same area
 - d. people that share the same political beliefs
8. Which of these is a principle that behavior in one culture should not be judged by the standards of another?
 - a. cultural relativism
 - b. internalization of norms
 - c. global culture
 - d. hedonism
9. What is the process by which cultural items are spread from group to group or society to society?
 - a. acculturation
 - b. taboo
 - c. diffusion
 - d. internalization of norms
10. What is narcissism?
 - a. extreme self-righteousness
 - b. tendency to seek pleasure above all other values
 - c. subtle, yet effective communication through body language and symbols
 - d. extreme self-centeredness

Name _____

2. Culture

Read each description, and write the letter of the correct term on the line.

- Rewards are called _____ and punishments are called _____.
 - mores/norms
 - folkways/taboo
 - positive sanctions/negative sanctions
 - acculturation/narcissism
- _____ are given by organizations or regulatory bodies, such as governments, police, corporations, and schools.
 - Signs
 - Formal sanctions
 - Folkways
 - Symbols
- Nonverbal signs are sometimes considered more flexible than language because they can communicate across _____.
 - continents
 - languages
 - barriers
 - beliefs
- The theories and ideas about the nature of the physical and social world are called _____.
 - beliefs
 - laws
 - mores
 - folkways
- Some of the similarities among cultures come from _____.
 - universal human needs
 - common ancestry
 - genetic similarities
 - common expectations
- 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(n) _____.
 - acculturation
 - counterculture
 - nonmaterial culture
 - acculturation
- _____ is the tendency to assume that one's own culture and way of life are "normal" and superior to all others.
 - Narcissism
 - Diffusion
 - Ethnocentrism
 - Hedonism
- A society's stability rests largely on its ability to convince members to conform, partly by applying sanctions but also through _____.
 - diffusion
 - internalization of norms
 - acculturation
 - cultural relativism
- Diffusion leads to _____, the modification of the culture of a group as a result of contact with a different culture.
 - hedonism
 - culture complex
 - counterculture
 - acculturation
- Patriotism implies pride in one's country and its values, but it is also closely connected to _____.
 - mores
 - ethnocentrism
 - hedonism
 - sanctions

Essay Question

If the world's cultures merged into one global culture, what elements do you think it would consist of and why? Do you think there would be any negative ramifications? What positive aspects do you foresee?