

# Chapter 3

## Culture

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### I. What Is Culture?

**Culture** refers to *the beliefs, values, behavior and material objects that, together, form a people's way of life.*

- A. Culture has two basic components: **nonmaterial culture**, or *the intangible creations of human society*, and **material culture**, *the tangible products of human society*. Together, these two components describe a people's way of life. Culture also plays an important role in shaping the human personality. **Culture shock** occurs *when an individual suffers personal disorientation when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life.*
  - 1. SOCIOLOGY IN FOCUS BOX (p. 56)—Confronting the Yanomamö: The Experience of Culture Shock.
- B. Only humans depend on culture rather than instincts to ensure the survival of their kind.
- C. Culture is very recent and was a long time in the making.
- D. What sets primates apart is their intelligence. Human achievements during the Stone Age set humans off on a distinct evolutionary course, making culture their primary survival strategy.
- E. The concept of culture (a shared way of life) must be distinguished from those of nation (a political entity) or society (the organized interaction of people in a nation or within some other boundary). Many modern societies are multicultural, meaning that their people follow various ways of life that blend and sometimes clash.

### II. The Elements of Culture.

All cultures have five common components: symbols, language, values and beliefs, norms, and material culture, including technology.

- A. **Symbols** are defined as *anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share culture*. The meaning of the same symbols varies from society to society, within a single society, and over time.
- B. **Language** is *a system of symbols that allows people to communicate with one another.*
  - 1. SEEING SOCIOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE BOX (p. 58)—New Symbols in the World of Instant Messaging.
  - 2. Language is the key to **cultural transmission**, *the process by which one generation passes culture to the next*. Through most of human history, cultural transmission has been accomplished through oral tradition.

3. WINDOW ON THE WORLD—Global Map 3–1 (p. 60): Language in Global Perspective. Chinese is the native tongue of one-fifth of the world’s people. English has become the second preferred language in most of the world. Spanish is the preferred second language of the United States.
  4. Only humans can create complex systems of symbols, but some other animals have the ability to use symbols in communicating.
  5. The **Sapir-Whorf thesis** holds that *people perceive the world through the cultural lens of language*.
- C. **Values** are *culturally defined standards by which people judge desirability, goodness and beauty, and which serve as broad guidelines for social living*. Values are broad principles that underlie **beliefs**, *specific statements that people hold to be true*.
1. Robin Williams (1970) identified ten key values of U.S. culture:
    - a. Equal opportunity
    - b. Achievement and success
    - c. Material comfort
    - d. Activity and work
    - e. Practicality and efficiency
    - f. Progress
    - g. Science
    - h. Democracy and free enterprise
    - i. Freedom
    - j. Racism and group superiority
  2. Values within one society are frequently inconsistent and even opposed to one another.
  3. In general, the values that are important in higher-income countries differ somewhat from those in lower-income countries.
- D. **Norms** are *rules and expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members*. They may be either *proscriptive* or *prescriptive*.
1. There are two special types of norms that were identified by William Graham Sumner (1906):
    - a. **Mores** are *norms that are widely observed and have great moral significance*.
    - b. **Folkways** are *norms for routine, casual interaction*.
  2. Sanctions are a central mechanism of **social control**, *attempts by society to regulate people’s thoughts and behavior*.
- E. Sociologists distinguish between **ideal culture**, *social patterns mandated by cultural values and norms*, and **real culture**, *actual social patterns that only approximate cultural expectations*.
- F. Material culture reflects a society’s values and a society’s **technology**, *the knowledge that people apply to the task of living in their surroundings*.
- G. Many rich nations have entered a postindustrial phase based on computers and new information economy.

### III. Cultural Diversity: Many Ways of Life in One World.

The United States is the most multicultural of all industrial countries. By contrast, Japan is the most monocultural of all industrial nations.

- A. **High culture** refers to *cultural patterns that distinguish a society's elite*; in contrast, **popular culture** designates *cultural patterns that are widespread among a society's population*. High culture is not inherently superior to popular culture.
- B. **Subculture** refers to *cultural patterns that distinguish some segment of a society's population*. They involve not only differences but also hierarchy.
- C. **Multiculturalism** is *an educational program recognizing the cultural diversity of the United States and promoting the equality of all cultural traditions*.
  1. Multiculturalism stands in opposition to **Eurocentrism**, *the dominance of European (especially English) cultural patterns*.
    - a. SEEING OURSELVES—National Map 3–1 (p. 66): Language Diversity across the United States. The 2010 U.S. Census reports that 20 percent of people over the age of five speak a language other than English in their home.
  2. Supporters of multiculturalism argue that it helps us come to terms with our diverse present and strengthens the academic achievement of African-American children. Some call for **Afrocentrism**, *the dominance of African cultural patterns in people's lives*.
  3. Opponents of multiculturalism argue that it encourages divisiveness rather than unity.
- D. **Counterculture** refers to *cultural patterns that strongly oppose those widely accepted within a society*.
- E. Cultural change.
  1. As cultures change, they strive to maintain **cultural integration**, *the close relationship among various elements of a cultural system*.
  2. William Ogburn's (1964) concept of **cultural lag** *refers to the fact that cultural elements change at different rates, which may disrupt a cultural system*.
  3. Three phenomena promote cultural change:
    - a. Invention, the process of creating new cultural elements.
    - b. Discovery, recognizing and understanding an idea not fully understood before.
    - c. Diffusion, the spread of cultural traits from one cultural system to another.
- F. Ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.
  1. **Ethnocentrism** is *the practice of judging another culture by the standards of one's own culture*.
  2. Sociologists tend to discourage this practice, and instead advocate **cultural relativism**, *the practice of judging a culture by its own standards*.
- G. Some evidence suggests that a global culture may be emerging.
  1. Three key factors are promoting this trend:
    - a. Global economy: the flow of goods.
    - b. Global communications: the flow of information.
    - c. Global migration: the flow of people.

2. Three limitations with the global culture thesis:
  - a. Global culture is much more advanced in some parts of the world than in others.
  - b. Many people cannot afford to participate in the material aspects of a global culture.
  - c. Different people attribute different meanings to various aspects of the global culture.
3. THINKING ABOUT DIVERSITY: RACE, CLASS & GENDER BOX: (p. 68) Early Rock-and-Roll: Race, Class and Cultural Change. This box shows how rock-and-roll mirrored aspects of U.S. culture as well as how U.S. culture was influenced by early rock-and-roll.

#### IV. Theories of Culture.

- A. The structural-functional approach depicts culture as a complex strategy for meeting human needs.
  1. **Cultural universals** are *traits that are part of every known culture*.
  2. Critical review.
    - a. The strength of the structural-functional analysis is showing how culture operates to meet human needs.
    - b. The weakness of the structural-functional approach is that it ignores cultural diversity and downplays the importance of change.
- B. The social-conflict approach is rooted in the philosophical doctrine of *materialism* and suggests that many cultural traits function to the advantage of some and to the disadvantage of others.
  1. Critical review.
    - a. The social-conflict analysis recognizes that many elements of a culture maintain inequality and promote the dominance of one group over others.
    - b. It understates the ways that cultural patterns integrate members of society.
- C. **Sociobiology** is *a theoretical approach that explores ways in which human biology affects how we create culture*. Sociobiology has its roots in the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin.
  1. Critical review.
    - a. Sociobiology may promote racism and sexism.
    - b. Research support for this paradigm is limited.

#### V. Culture and Human Freedom

- A. Culture as constraint. Humans cannot live without culture, but the capacity for culture does have some drawbacks.
- B. Culture as freedom. Culture forces us to choose as we make and remake a world for ourselves.
- C. THINKING GLOBALLY BOX (p. 73): The United States and Canada: How Do These National Cultures Differ? This box explains that Canada has a somewhat more collectivist culture than the more individualistic United States.