

Chapter

4

Culture and Society



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Synopsis

Defining Culture

Elements of Culture

- Symbols
- Language
- Values
- Beliefs
- Norms
- Technology and Material Culture

The Web of Culture

Cultural Diversity

Subcultures

- High Culture, Folk Culture, and Popular Culture
- Countercultures
- Ideal and Real Culture
- Multiculturalism
- Idiocultures

4.1 Defining Culture

The term *culture* means different things to different people. Many people use the words *culture* and *society* interchangeably; however, they are different in their meanings. To a sociologist, a **culture** is a system of ideas, values, beliefs, knowledge, norms, customs, and technology shared by almost everyone in a particular society. In other words, culture is a society's entire way of life. A **society** is a group of interacting individuals who live in a specific geographical area, who are organized in a cooperative manner, and who share a common culture. Neither culture nor society can exist without the other; there can be no society without a culture, and likewise, no culture without a society. A culture is a society's system of common heritage. Each of us has a culture, because we were all raised in a society. We express our culture continuously in our dress, food, work, language, recreation, and other activities. We learn our culture from those within our society. Our families, friends, schools, and others teach us; and then we pass it on to future generations.

A comprehension of the elements of culture is vitally important to all interpersonal relationships, from personal to professional. Indeed, a time-honored anthropological axiom is that "in order to work with a people, it is essential to understand their culture" (Foster, 1952). In most discussions of culture, it is assumed that the various groups of people within a society share some expectations about how it works and how its members should behave. In the US, it is assumed that retail stores should take every reasonable step to maximize profits, including opening early in the day and remaining open through the evening hours—some even 24 hours a day. By contrast, in many Western European countries, it is traditional for retail stores to close for two or three hours in the middle of the day. This time is typically used to rest, enjoy an extended lunch, and spend time with family. Clearly, expectations

Culture

A system of ideas, values, beliefs, knowledge, norms, customs, and technology shared by almost everyone in a particular society

Society

A group of interacting people who live in a specific geographical area, who are organized in a cooperative manner, and who share a common culture

regarding business practices are not universal or biological. These practices make sense in the context of a culture and are indicative of the values and beliefs of that culture. Since behaviors of these types vary from one group or society to another, they are viewed as products of culture rather than as basic aspects of human nature. In other words, these behaviors are not programmed genetically, as in most other animal life—they are determined by culture. Humans are not born knowing which beliefs and behaviors are appropriate; they must be learned. By the time we are adults, most of what we come to recognize as culture is so embedded into our everyday lives that we often take it for granted. From the foods we eat to the religions we practice, our belief is that we are “normal” and everyone different from us is not.

Focal Point

Mark All That Apply



On January 1, 1892, 17-year-old Annie Moore from County Cork, Ireland, became the first person processed through Ellis Island in New York. Between 1892 and 1954, more than 12 million immigrants passed through Ellis Island (Kennedy, 2023). Today, an estimated 40% of US citizens can trace their ancestry to one of those early immigrants (Crowder, 2014). Other Americans can trace their ancestors even further back to the colonial era, when immigrants were arriving from England or as slaves on ships. Some recognize their ancestors as the first true indigenous peoples of this land, living here before the arrival of all the others. After the Revolutionary War, money was needed to pay for the cost of the war, among other things; the government needed to determine how to levy taxes. Familiar with population counts that had been required by the Crown, the new government devised a plan to count people who could then be required to pay taxes.

In 1790, the United States conducted its very first census, counting the number of people living within the thirteen states as well as the districts of Kentucky, Maine, and Vermont and the Southwest Territory (Tennessee). Approximately 650 US marshals rode on horseback, using only pencil and paper to count the heads of households and other persons living in their homes. It took the marshals 18 months to count the 3.9 million people living in the US at that time. The first census was relatively easy, with only six questions. They included the name of the head of household and the number of people living in the household, categorized as free White men over age 16, free White men under age 16, free White women, other free people, and slaves. At that time, slaves counted as three-fifths of a person and

American Indians were not counted at all because they were not required to pay taxes.

Since that first census over 200 years ago, one has been conducted every 10 years with alterations to the questions occurring nearly as frequently. For example, racial categories have changed regularly, with some groups expanding while others have been excluded altogether. As noted, American Indians were excluded from the first census and slaves were not acknowledged as complete people. During the 1850 census, racial categories included the rising number of racially mixed people. Racial classification included White, Black, and “mulatto” (mixed race)—with Black people and those of mixed race further categorized as either free or slave. It wasn’t until later that censuses included options other than White and Black. For example, the 1870 census reflected the end of slavery and added Chinese and American Indian to the racial categories, while the 1890 census further quantified mixed race people by adding “quadroon” (one-quarter black) and “octoroon” (any degree up to one-eighth black) to the “mulatto” category. Quantifying Black racial categories was designed to limit their access to resources. Not long after slavery ended, the United States entered a period of Jim Crow segregation, where people with any degree of Black blood were considered Black, regardless of their skin color. These categories stayed in place until the 1930s, but new categories of race were also added, such as “Mexican,” which was removed at the next census in 1940. Today, Mexicans are not classified as a race at all but rather are ethnically lumped together with other groups under the “Hispanic” category.

The biggest recent change to racial classifications occurred in 2000, when respondents were allowed for

the first time in history to mark more than one race. The 2000 Census questionnaire contained 15 race options, including an option for "Some other race." On a questionnaire item separate from race identification, individuals were asked to indicate whether their ethnicity was "Hispanic or Latino" or "Not Hispanic or Latino." Additional changes were made to the 2020 census to provide a more accurate view of how people self-identify in response to questions on origin and race; the results of these changes indicate a more multiracial and diverse population than previously measured (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Although the categories were revised between the 2010 and 2020 censuses, a look at some of the results reveals:

- Increases in all of the "race alone" or "in combination" groups from 2010 to 2020.
- In each racial category, the "in combination" multiracial populations for all race groups accounted for most of the overall changes.
- In 2010, 9% of the population identified themselves as belonging to two or more races; in 2020, 33.8% of the population identified as belonging to two or more races.
- The "some other race" alone or "in combination" group (49.9 million) experienced a 129% increase, which surpassed the Black or African American population (46.9 million) to become the second-largest "race alone" or "in combination" group.
- In 2020, 204.3 million people identified as White alone, a decrease of 8.6% since 2010 but still the largest race or ethnicity group in the US. Overall, 235.4 million

people reported as being White alone or in combination with another group.

- In 2020, 62.1 million identified as Hispanic or Latino, which includes people of any race, representing an increase of 23% since 2010 while the population not of Hispanic or Latino origin grew 4.3%.
- Other racial populations reporting as alone or in combination with another group in 2020 were: Asian (24 million), American Indian and Alaska Native (9.7 million), and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (1.6 million).

How we define race changes over time. The way race was defined in 2020 will likely change in 20 or 30 years. In addition, other cultures may see race differently than we do in the United States. For example, in the former South African system of racial separation known as *apartheid*, there were four legally defined racial categories: "White," "Native" (i.e., Black Africans), "Coloured," and "Asian." Established in 1948, those racial categories defined how people were treated—including what schools they went to, whom they could marry, whether they could vote, and much more. In 1991, South Africa officially abolished its system of racial separation.

The arbitrary categories of race found on censuses throughout US history suggest that race is socially constructed rather than biological. Race is defined and redefined to reflect the beliefs of our society at any given time. How will adding the "mark all that apply" instruction to the census change our definition of race in the future? How do you think official and everyday views on racial and ethnic classification will be affected by current policies about immigration reform, closing the door to people from certain countries?

Culture is one of the most complex sociological and anthropological concepts—and one of the most central concepts to understanding human behavior. Every society is made up of both material and nonmaterial culture. Material culture includes all tangible things within our society. Houses, architecture, art, clothes, toys, and tools, are all examples of our material culture. All objects created within a particular society are a part of that society's material culture. Nonmaterial culture comprises mostly nontangible items within a culture. Laws, language norms, values, beliefs, ideas, and customs are all components of nonmaterial culture.

Culture manifests itself in everything humans do—from birth to death, we experience culture. The clothes we place on our newborns, the way we wear our hair, our dating rituals, and our funeral and burial practices—all are parts of our culture. Culture is learned and shared with others within our society. Most people spend their entire lives in the culture in which they were born and often take for granted the way



Material culture includes all objects created within a particular society, such as this statue of the Buddha.

things are done. This is reinforced when visiting another country, where it is not uncommon for people to experience *culture shock*—a feeling of confusion, disbelief, or outrage at something found “normal” in another culture that is completely at odds with what is practiced in one’s own culture. In one extreme example, street kids were a familiar sight in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; these children were often abandoned by their families due to poverty and a government that had no formal social service agencies to deal with them. Left to survive on their own, the children often turn to begging or stealing to eat. Most street children living in alleys throughout the city were familiar with “child death squads.” Merchants knew that tourists were likely to experience culture shock when they saw children begging for money or food in public. Therefore, in order to protect their businesses, merchants sometimes turned to death squads to rid the alleys of street children. Members of death squads were often off-duty police officers hired by a group of shop owners to rid the area of begging street children. Death squads waited until nightfall and then moved in to kill the children living in alleys around the shops. By sunrise, the bodies of the children were discovered, often with their hands tied behind their back and their tongues cut out. While the practice of targeting street children has declined significantly, death squads continue to be an issue in Brazil, particularly among its poorest citizens. Culture shock can also occur within one’s own society. While we don’t expect to see homelessness and poverty in the United States to the degree found in Brazil, some would be shocked to learn that more than 500,000 people roam the streets of the US each night in search of a place to sleep and eat. When proper shelter cannot be found, these homeless may sleep in subways, public restrooms, automobiles, and under bridges. When we look at cultural practices that are very different from our own, it is easy to become judgmental.

The attitude that our own culture is superior to others, that our own beliefs, values, and behaviors are more correct than others, and that other people and cultures do things wrong compared to our own culture is known as **ethnocentrism**. Ethnocentrism was defined by Sumner (1906/1980, p. 13) as “that view of things in which one’s own group is the center of everything and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it.”

Most groups in any society tend to be ethnocentric. Religious groups believe they know the truth and are more moral than others. Some will send missionaries to convert people from other religions, whom they may consider to be “backward” and “lost.” Scientists are equally likely to believe their methods are the best way to approach problems. Most US Americans believe monogamy is more “proper” than polygamy and that capitalism is far superior to communism. Most of us shudder when we read a headline such as “For Vietnamese, The Year of the Rat Starts with Lunch” (Hookway, 2008). Many of us are likely to consider people who scar their bodies to be masochists. We are likely to believe that people who refuse to drink milk are ignorant (or lactose intolerant) and that people who walk around half naked are shameless. However, we think it quite natural that in the US, women paint their lips and hang jewelry from their ears; that men tie a strip of cloth around their necks; and that people eat corn, which is considered chicken food in many cultures.

The opposite of ethnocentrism is **xenocentrism**, the belief that what is foreign is best—that our own lifestyle, products, or ideas are inferior to those of others. The strange, distant, and exotic are regarded as having special value. Cars made in Japan, watches made in Switzerland, beer brewed in Germany, fashions created in France, silks imported from India and Thailand, and gymnasts from Eastern

Ethnocentrism

The view that one’s own culture is superior to others and should be used as the standard against which other cultures are judged

Xenocentrism

The belief that what is foreign is best—that our own lifestyle, products, or ideas are inferior to those of others

European countries—all are believed to be superior to our own. In some instances, feelings of xenocentrism are so strong that people reject their own group. Thus, we find anti-American Americans, anti-Semitic Jews, priests who revolt against the church, Black people who reject a Black identity, and family members who scorn their kin network. Xenocentrism may focus on a product, an idea, or a lifestyle. Regardless of the focus, it is assumed that native techniques and concepts are inferior.

Another form of cultural bias is **temporocentrism**, the belief that our own time is more important than the past or future. Accordingly, historical events are judged not in their own context but on the basis of contemporary standards. Our tendency toward temporocentrism leads us to assume that current crises are more crucial than those of other periods; therefore, problems need to be solved now before it is too late. An associated belief is that actions taken now will have an enormous impact on life in the future. This belief could conceivably be warranted, as in the case of nuclear warfare that could end world civilization, but in most cases, what we do in our time will later be viewed as only a minor ripple on the stream of history.

Just as ethnocentrism is strongest among people with little education or exposure to other nations, temporocentrism is most prevalent among people who lack historical perspective. Even people with extensive educational training and a strong grasp of history tend to focus on the present, however. Politicians and social scientists view today as the critical time. Sermons, newspapers, and teachers stress that we are living in perilous times, that this is the age of transition.

Social scientists who study other cultures tend to be highly temporocentric, but most make special efforts to avoid ethnocentrism and xenocentrism. They attempt to view all behaviors, lifestyles, and ideas in their own context. The practice of examining cultures on their own terms and in relationship to their institutions and environment, rather than by the standards of another culture, is called **cultural relativism**.

According to the cultural relativistic perspective, an act, idea, form of dress, or other cultural manifestation is not inherently right or wrong, correct or incorrect. These things should be examined only in the context in which they occur; what is appropriate in one culture or context may be inappropriate in another. Nudity in the shower or at a nudist colony is appropriate, but nudity in the classroom is inappropriate. In some hunting societies, being overweight may have survival value and may serve as a source of admiration. Take a look at paintings created during the Renaissance in Europe and you will notice that many of the female subjects would not fit what some in Western society have long considered to be beautiful. While the focus in recent years has been on being comfortable in your own skin, in the US, being overweight and out of shape is still regarded by many as unhealthy and unadmirable. The practice of abandoning unwanted infants would be viewed as intolerable by most contemporary cultures. However, many cultures used to follow this practice; some still do. The point is that any aspect of a culture must be considered within its larger cultural context. Each aspect may be regarded as good if it is acceptable to the members and helps attain desired goals and bad if it is unacceptable or fails to achieve these goals.

Cultural relativism does not mean that a behavior appropriate in one place is appropriate everywhere, nor does it mean that all behaviors are condoned simply because they make sense in a cultural context. It is not a license to do whatever one would wish. Even though having multiple wives makes sense for many Saudi Arabian men, killing infants makes sense in some tribes living in the Amazon, and wearing

Temporocentrism

The belief that our own time is more important than the past or future

Cultural relativism

The belief that cultures must be judged on their own terms rather than by the standards of another culture

loincloths makes sense in some African cultures, these behaviors are not acceptable to most US Americans. They make sense in some societies because they are part of a larger belief and value system and are consistent with other norms appropriate to that cultural setting. Examining other societies on the basis of cultural relativism makes us less likely to ridicule or scorn the beliefs and habits of people from other cultures; more important, however, we won't make mistakes similar to those of the past by acting on ethnocentric beliefs.

Ethnocentrism can encourage racism, discourage integration efforts, increase hostility and conflicts among groups, and prevent changes that could be beneficial to all. Ethnocentrism can increase resistance to change and can encourage the exclusion of outsiders who may have something good to contribute. Carried to an extreme, ethnocentrism is destructive, as evidenced by the Nazis in Germany, who believed in the absolute superiority of the "White Aryan" race and culture. The result was the death of millions of people who did not fit into this category. While ethnocentric cultures have confidence in their own traditions, they discourage outsiders and thus protect themselves against change. Cultures that consider themselves superior tend to maintain the status quo—if our culture is already best, why change it?

Thinking Sociologically

1. Provide a behavior that is seen as "normal" in the United States but would likely cause culture shock for people from another country.
2. Explain a time when you have experienced culture shock within your own society.

Applying Cultural Relativism

The worth of cultural relativism goes beyond analyzing or judging other societies. That aspect is important for social scientists, but the cultural relativistic perspective is also important for anyone who comes into contact with people from different cultures. Consider, for example, teachers in the United States who are faced with a growing number of students from minority cultures and the prospect of teaching within bilingual education programs. Many teachers have been taught to judge students by the norms of White, middle-class children (See & Straus, 1985).

However, **norms** are different from culture to culture. For example, an American Indian student might pause two or three seconds before answering a question as a courtesy to the questioner. A Native Hawaiian student might interrupt a questioner because such behavior displays interest. Hispanic and Asian children might not maintain eye contact with the teacher because they were raised in cultures in which it is disrespectful to maintain eye contact with someone of higher status. In these situations, it is possible that teachers might interpret such children's actions as signs of being unprepared, inattentive, or disrespectful—and will treat them accordingly. This ethnocentrism on the part of the teachers could decrease their effectiveness. Roland Tharp, a professor at the University of California who studies culture and education among ethnic groups, notes, "Every little classroom is turning

Norms

Formal and informal rules of conduct and social expectations for behavior

into a United Nations . . . with all the hazards and complexities that involves. It's as if every teacher has to be a former U.N. Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar" (Marklein, 1991, p. 9D).

Cultural relativism is important in any type of situation that involves people with different cultural backgrounds. As sociologists See and Straus (1985, p. 69) note, "Utilizing the cultural [relativistic] approach in the practice of counseling, education, public administration, and the healthcare and service professions means that special attention is placed on how the individual one is dealing with analyzes situations given their particular cultural backgrounds, social characteristics, and group affiliations."

The approach also makes good business sense. The would-be entrepreneur from New York who visits the South and notices the lack of Jewish delicatessens might think she has stumbled upon a "gold mine." Assuming a commodity that is highly valued in one cultural region will be just as "hot" in another region might lead to a financial disaster.

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4.2 Elements of Culture

Understanding culture can sometimes be difficult; however, it can be easier if one knows the components of culture. As previously mentioned, nonmaterial culture comprises symbols, language, values, beliefs, and norms. Material culture is highly influenced by technology—the innovations and inventions occurring frequently in our society. The following is a more comprehensive look at each of these elements of culture.



(Adobe Stock)

Information from the media is often believed to be true—especially when it confirms what we already think or believe.

4.2a Symbols

The existence of culture depends on people's ability to create and understand symbols. A **symbol** is something that is used to represent something else. Words, numbers, flags, crosses, and kisses are symbols. During World War II, raising the middle and index fingers of one hand was the symbol "V" for victory; in other countries, it's a rude gesture. During the 1960s, the same gesture came to symbolize "peace." Raising the middle finger, or putting thumbs up or thumbs down, or spreading one's thumb and little finger ("hang loose" in Hawaii)—all convey particular meanings. In the same way, a stop sign is a symbol meaning "halt" and a cross is a symbol of Christianity.

Symbols are arbitrary designations. There is no necessary connection between a symbol and what it represents. There is nothing

Symbol

Something that is used to represent something else, such as a word, gesture, or object used to represent some aspect of the world

inherent in the act of holding one's thumb up that indicates we approve of something. Neither is there any inherent meaning in a gesture signaled by forming a circle with the thumb and forefinger and holding up the other three fingers. Many people in the United States use this gesture to signify that "all is fine." However, to use that same symbol in France and Belgium would convey a message that something or someone is of little or no worth. In other parts of the world, including Greece and Turkey, the gesture is considered vulgar and is used as an insult. It's no wonder that interpersonal relationships among people from different cultures are influenced by an awareness of the meanings attached to symbols.

It is important to realize that symbols are collective creations. They not only are products of group experiences and needs but also shape a group's experiences and future needs. Astute entrepreneurs—restaurateurs, physicians, retail store managers, and so forth—often use their insights about the clientele they are trying to attract and display symbols that are meaningful to their target groups (for example, a specific generation, born-again Christians, people of a specific culture or political persuasion). A dentist in a college town who is trying to build a clientele of students might be better off having the office radio tuned to rock music rather than to Mozart, having copies of *Rolling Stone* magazine available rather than *U.S. News & World Report*, and dressing casually rather than wearing a pin-striped suit. Many advertising agencies realize the importance of cultural symbols and distinguish between *general marketing*, which is aimed at the total population, and *segmented marketing*, which is aimed at specific groups. Segmented marketing uses symbols such as speech patterns (accents, slang), music, clothing, objects, hand signals, and other symbolic elements that are thought to be characteristic of the group the advertisers are trying to attract.

Most sociologists assume that the ability to use symbols is uniquely human and that other animals do not communicate symbolically or deal with abstractions. Unlike other animals, human beings can use symbols to understand reality, to transmit messages, to store complex information, and to deal with an abstract symbolic world. Our success or failure in many relationships, from personal to professional, often depends on our ability to communicate symbolically.

4.2b Language

The most important set of symbols is **language**. Language, among humans, is the systematized use of speech and hearing (including signing for the deaf) to convey or express feelings and ideas. It is through language that our ideas, values, beliefs, and knowledge are transmitted, expressed, and shared. Other media—such as music, art, and dance—are also important means of communication; language, however, is uniquely flexible and precise. It permits us to share our experiences from the past and present, to convey our hopes for the future, and to describe dreams and fantasies that may bear little resemblance to reality. Some scientists have questioned whether thought is even possible without language. Although language can be used imprecisely and can seem hard to understand, it is the chief factor in our ability to transmit culture.

All human societies have languages. Although there are thousands of different languages in the world, linguistic behavior, as such, is universal. Some societies cannot read or write their language, but they all have a spoken language. Language

Language

The systematized use of speech and hearing (or signing) to communicate feelings and ideas

seems to be uniquely human—at least as we currently conceptualize it. It is possible that other animals use other forms of language that we do not yet fully understand; however, based on our current understanding, the use of language appears to be one of the basic distinctions between human beings and other forms of life. This difference between humans and other animals has traditionally been thought of as a difference in *kind*, not merely in *degree*.

Note, for example, the difference between a human being and a chimpanzee, believed to be one of the most intelligent animals. Numerous experiments (Hayes, 1951; Kellogg & Kellogg, 1933) over the past 60 years by psychologists who reared both infants and chimpanzees lead most sociologists to conclude that language is the key to understanding differences between the two forms of life. Chimpanzees lack the neural equipment to either generate speech or comprehend language. Although chimps emit sounds and respond to commands, their sounds do not constitute a system of symbols and their responses do not involve a system of shared definitions and meanings. Chimpanzees also lack the type of pharynx found in humans, a pharynx with size, shape, and mobility crucial to the production of speech. Epstein (2000) sees the inability of chimpanzees to develop language as a critique of the Animal Rights movement's attempt to grant rights to prevent the capture and exploitation of chimpanzees and bonobos. One important question this raises is whether language as we know it (that is, verbal communication) is the only form of language.

Language is so basic to culture and essential for human interaction and social organization that it is often taken for granted, but we can only speculate as to its origins. Did it begin with the imitation of sounds in nature, such as running water or wind in the trees? Did it start with the utterance of grunts, sighs, coughs, and groans? Did it originate in calls and sounds that came to be shared by group members and later expanded to include new experiences and objects? We do not know. There do seem to be attributes shared by many of the world's languages, however. Regularities of words over time and place, and the widespread use of certain words, indicate that language is an integral and universal part of culture. Linguistic symbols are learned and shared just like other cultural elements.

Cultures develop not only a verbal and written language but also a nonverbal language of gestures, expressions, mannerisms, and even the use of space. Latin American and North American (Canadian and US American) cultures, for example, use space between people differently during conversation. For Spanish speakers, standing close conveys cordiality and sincerity, whereas for English speakers, it conveys pushiness. The distance that English speakers see as proper for conversations, Spanish speakers see as cold. Knowledge of another culture's nonverbal or "silent" language is invaluable for any type of interaction that involves people from different cultures, such as international businesspeople, lawyers, politicians, or diplomats. Business deals and international agreements often rely heavily on the private interaction of a few high-powered individuals. A deal might easily be soured if one party interprets the other's normal speaking distance as either pushy or standoffish.



(Adobe Stock)

Language is used to convey feelings and ideas; it is the most important set of symbols in a culture. Although not all societies are able to read and write their language, all societies possess a spoken language.

Suppose that you are a lawyer hired by an American electronics company that relies on Japanese parts. Part of your job entails securing a long-term contract to ensure that the company can continue to import the parts it needs for its products. It might help you, in your negotiations with the lawyers that represent the Japanese firm, to learn about the nonverbal language used by Japanese people in their conversations and how they interpret some of our nonverbal language. What do they consider to be a polite standing or sitting distance between people? Are there any American gestures that we tend to use in our communication with others that might be offensive to Japanese people? What are some Japanese gestures that convey warmth, trust, and honesty?

Language influences people's thoughts and experiences to a greater degree than is generally recognized. In 1929, Edward Sapir argued that "We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation" (Sapir, 1929)—that is, a group's use of language can help build their perception of reality.

This line of thinking was further developed by Benjamin Whorf and eventually came to be known as the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** (although they never published a formal hypothesis together on the matter). While working for an insurance company, Whorf—who would later study under Sapir—noted that workmen handling barrels of gasoline were very careful about matches and cigarettes when the barrels were full, but they became careless around empty barrels despite the fact that dangerous explosive vapors were still present. In other words, the use of the word *empty* to refer to a barrel influenced the workers' perception and consequent behavior (Whorf, 1941). He would later reflect on this example as an indication that language influences the way we perceive things and how we behave.

As examples, note how words such as *snow* or *banana* create a certain mental image. What do you see when you hear those words? Would you see something different if precise words or symbols existed for snow depending on whether it was falling, drifting, frozen, fresh, compacted, in a cone, and so on? Would you behave differently (drive your car, go skiing, eat it, build a snowman) depending on your perception? Is a banana just a banana? Or, as to most Filipinos, do bananas differ in their sizes, colors, and uses, thus requiring precise words or symbols to convey the type of banana desired—the same way words like Red Delicious and Granny Smith convey very different ideas about apples, especially to your US American relative who is a master apple pie baker? Interpreters of languages such as Hebrew, Russian, or German often find that no parallel word exists in English for the word they are trying to translate. Thus, they can only try to convey in English the "reality" of the word they are translating. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis appears to be valid in that our perceptions of reality can be influenced by our language. Words can conjure up strong emotions because of what they may symbolize to certain people. Consider, for example, how the word "woke" has become politicized. Deriving originally from urban slang, "woke" means to be aware of social injustices, and refers to thinking critically, analytically based upon evidence, about systemic social issues. It is often portrayed by political right-wing conservatives as a negative term that is characteristic of liberal political thinking. Languages are learned, shared, and transmitted from one generation to another; they are a central element of culture.

There has been great debate in recent years about whether or not our native language actually constrains our ability to understand a concept, such as time or space. Current research suggests that one's language does not prevent one from

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis

The hypothesis that societies with different languages perceive the world differently because their members interpret the world through the grammatical forms, labels, and categories their language provides

being able to understand something, but that language does shape how often and how deeply we think about certain things, and perhaps even our attitudes or feelings toward something (Deutscher, 2010). For example, one thing that differentiates English from languages such as French, Italian, or German is that nouns in English are not gender specific. If an object is gendered because of language (for example, *la* or *el* in Spanish), it may be possible that this affects our perceptions, our attitudes, or even the way we use an object.

This connection between perception and language reveals the necessity of studying foreign languages. Learning a foreign language is important not only because it allows us to speak to non-English speaking people but also because it allows us to see their view of reality and what they deem important. For those whose work involves interaction with people from different countries—foreign diplomats, ambassadors, politicians, international businesspeople and lawyers, social workers, or others—being able to speak directly, rather than through an interpreter, is essential for complete understanding. Another important question to consider is whether language as we know it (that is, the way in which humans use verbal communication) is the only form of language.

Thinking Sociologically

1. Is language a distinctively human activity? Explain why or why not.
2. Relate the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis to your personal life or academic field of study. Show how the language or the specific terminology in your discipline influences your perceptions of reality and your experiences.
3. Pick any group of which you are a member and identify the words that group uses that may have special meaning to members of that group. Think about how those same words may mean different things to non-group members and how the word has special connotations that only members of the group fully appreciate and understand. How do those words influence the way that people in the group interpret certain events?

4.2c Values

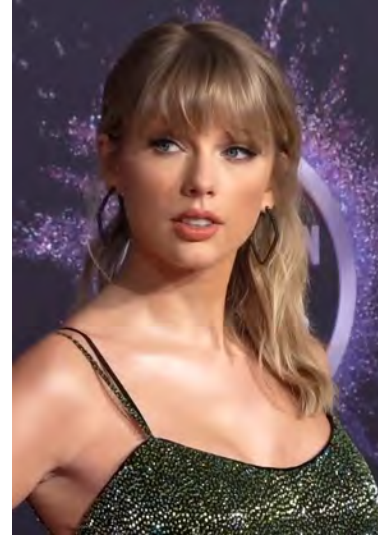
Values are ideas shared by the people in a society regarding what is important and worthwhile. Our values are the basis of our judgments about what is desirable, beautiful, correct, and good—as well as what is undesirable, ugly, incorrect, and bad. Most values have both positive and negative counterparts, which are reciprocally related. If you place a high positive value on fighting for your country, for example, you probably place a high negative value on draft dodgers. If you value monogamy, you probably disapprove of those who engage in extramarital sexual relationships. Values are often emotionally charged; they are things we believe are worth defending.

Values

Ideas and beliefs shared by the people in a society about what is important and worthwhile



(Neil Grahowsky/Montclair Film Festival, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia)



(Cosmopolitan UK, CC BY 3.0, via Wikimedia)

Values are the basis for our moral judgments and are shared by the members of a society. Shaped in part by television and other mass media outlets, values have reciprocally related positive and negative counterparts.

Most of our basic values are learned early in life from family, friends, the mass media, and other sources within society. The value of saving money, for example, may be conveyed directly by parents or others but may also be reinforced in more subtle ways, as through proverbs. Most of us are familiar with common sayings such as, “A penny saved is a penny earned” or “Waste not, want not” (values that convey frugality or the value of saving money). By whatever manner they are conveyed or learned, values are generally shared and reinforced by those with whom we interact. Placing a high value on religious faith, honesty, cleanliness, freedom, money, children, education, or work serves as a general guide for our behavior and the formation of specific attitudes. Since values indicate what is proper or improper, they tend to justify particular types of behavior and to forbid others.

When basic values are in conflict, we usually place them in a hierarchy of importance and behave in ways consistent with the most important. During a war, for example, the value of patriotism may overcome the value that human life is precious, or vice versa. When it is impossible to place our values in a hierarchy to resolve a conflict, we may feel guilty or suffer mental stress.

To give another example of value conflict, consider the case of a parent who enjoys spending time with the family. If job demands take this parent away from the family for extended periods, the parent is likely to feel stress. To avoid stress, the parent could quit their job, take the family along on job trips, justify the job demands as being in the best interests of the family, compromise on both family and job demands, or leave the family. Some of these choices may be impossible, however. Quitting the job or taking the family along may not be realistic alternatives, and divorce may conflict with social and religious values. Mental stress is likely to result when choices are impossible. The alternative courses of action, as well as the choice selected, will generally be consistent with the values of the society and with those most important to the individual.

Sometimes, our stated values and our behavior are inconsistent. We may place a high value on freedom of the press but want to censor Communist writings. We may place a high value on individualism but want to punish people whose behavior

is inconsistent with our definition of appropriate behavior. Our true values are often reflected more by what we do than by what we say. If we say we value education but have no interest in attending classes or paying for public schools, or if we say that we value simplicity but spend money conspicuously to display our wealth, our actions expose our real values.

Since values are learned cultural products, they differ from one society to another. US Americans, for example, tend to be individualistic, using personal characteristics and achievements to define themselves, while societies such as Japan and the Israeli kibbutzim focus more on group harmony, unity, and loyalty. North Americans tend to see themselves as dominant over nature, while the Chinese and Navajo see themselves as living in harmony with nature. Residents of the United States see time as linear, while some Eastern cultures see time as cyclic. (Lewis, 2014)

Most cultures, despite diversity in their populations, tend to share certain value patterns. Sociologist Robin M. Williams (1970) described several value orientations important in US American life that are still at the core of US American culture today:

1. *Individualism* We believe in personal responsibility.
2. *Achievement and Success* We stress personal achievement—especially secular, occupational achievement.
3. *Activity and Work* Every able-bodied person should work and not expect handouts.
4. *Humanitarianism* We should help others, especially those who are in need.
5. *Efficiency and Practicality* We should strive to be thrifty and not waste resources (time or materials).
6. *Progress* We value innovation and believe things can always be improved.
7. *Material Comfort* Through hard work, we can use our money to buy a house, cars, and other material possessions.
8. *Equality* Everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.
9. *Freedom* We believe in freedom to pursue our goals.
10. *Science and Technology* Our society favors technology. We know that science can solve problems, and we have faith in those who strive to make life better for us.
11. *Democracy* Our system advocates majority rule.
12. *Racism and Group Superiority* We evaluate people based on group performance and placement within society.

The extent to which such traditional US American value orientations have changed has become a topic of study in recent years, especially in light of the effects of globalization and increased diversity in US society (Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2001; Kester, 2001). It must be kept in mind that these are general themes in US values, and they are subject to change. They are often in conflict, and they are not all exhibited in a single person's behavior. Sometimes, they even appear to be inconsistent. How can we value both efficiency and material comfort, equality and racial superiority? Some of the explanations for these inconsistencies lie in whether the value is applied generally or specifically. A person might say, for example, "Our society

believes strongly in freedom of the press, but I don't want my town library to carry novels with explicit sex in them." Another explanation may be that these conflicting values reflect the beliefs of different regions of the country.

Figure 4-1 The Elements of Culture

Nonmaterial	
➤ Symbols/Language	Objects or events that represent other objects or events only because people agree as to their meaning
➤ Values	Subjective reactions to experiences expressed in terms of good or bad, moral or immoral, the ideals that people look up to but do not necessarily achieve or pursue
➤ Beliefs	The ideas people hold about what is true and/or real
➤ Norms	Shared rules that define how people are supposed to behave under particular circumstances
➤ Emotions	Inner reactions to experiences; societies enculturate (teach) their members to associate certain emotions with specific situations and to experience these emotional states at various intensities depending on the context
➤ Attitudes	Likes and dislikes and general preferences for certain experiences over others
➤ Laws	Norms defined by political authorities as principles that members of a society must follow
➤ Perceptions	Interpretations of cultural phenomena that may vary from person to person due to each individual's unique experience as a member of society
➤ Aspirations	Ambitions and goals that are valued and desired within a culture
➤ Technological knowledge	Human knowledge of the techniques and methods for subsistence (how one makes a living, acquires the calories for survival) and/or control of and adaptation to the cultural and natural environment
Material	
➤ Artifacts	The material products of culture, past and present
➤ Technology	The tools and products used for subsistence and/or control of and adaptation to the cultural and natural environment

Adapted from "The Elements of Culture," by L. A. Basirico and A. Bolin, 2010, in T. Arcaro and R. Haskell (Eds.), *Understanding the Global Experience: Becoming a Responsible World Citizen*, p. 39. Copyright 2010 by Taylor & Francis.

Williams states that most conflicts between value systems in the United States occur between those centering on individual personalities and those organized around categorical themes or conceptions. Group discrimination and racism, as categorical themes, are contrary to other central values of US society. Each of these values has a historical base and a complexity far greater than is evident in this brief discussion. Evidence does suggest, however, a decline in racist beliefs over several decades. Legislation has forced movements away from enforced segregation and public discrimination, and Congress has passed civil rights acts and a series of laws that forbid discrimination because of race, sex, religion, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence. Thus, while a central value may continue to exist which grants privilege based on group or racial affiliation, some evidence suggests that this particular theme may be fading. What do you think of Robin Williams's value list?

Do these still lie at the core of US American values? Have any changed, faded, or been added? This is an important question to consider as the political climate shifts over time.

An understanding of value systems can be useful for many people in their work. In a discussion of how to manage organizational conflict, for example, Hampton et al. (1982) emphasize the importance of being able to recognize that competing value systems are often the source of the conflict. They state the following:

Instances of inadequate sharing of values and of competing goals are numerous. Individual self-actualization versus collective will is one value conflict that has been and will be fought on many battlefields. At a business level, salespeople value company responsiveness to the customer, while production personnel value equilibrium and predictability; engineers value ingenuity and quality, while finance values the profit margin; marketing emphasizes gross income, while the credit department values minimum credit loss, and so on. (p. 635)

A way to deal with these competing value systems is to try to create common values. Some experts on how to manage corporations suggest that successful organizations do this by developing stories, slogans, myths, and legends about the corporation (Kanter, 1983; Peters & Waterman, 1982). These help to decrease conflict and create a greater sense of mutuality. The “human relations school of management” relies heavily on the notion that sharing values is important for members of large corporations.



As this photo shows, racial segregation was still in existence in the 20th century.

(Library of Congress/John Vachon, 1938)

Thinking Sociologically

1. Critique the values suggested by Williams. What differences do you believe exist between the ones he suggested more than 40 years ago and the ones we have today? Discuss why you think values have changed or have stayed the same.
2. To what extent do people have the right (or obligation) to impose their values on others (parents on children, a religious group on those of other religions, a culture on a subculture, etc.)? Illustrate with specific examples.
3. In thinking about a group, culture, or subculture of which you are a member, identify some central values. Discuss how they may be reciprocally related to other elements of culture that are listed in Figure 4-1 (*The Elements of Culture*).

4.2d Beliefs

Beliefs are views that people share about what is true or what really exists. This may at first seem to be an odd statement because we associate *truth* and *reality* with fact, not belief. Of course, many perceive these shared views as facts—otherwise a belief would have no strength. Beliefs can underlie almost any social situation or social institution. (We will talk extensively about social institutions in Part Four of this book.) Often, the word *belief* brings to mind conceptions of a supernatural or creative force, ideas about the nature of existence, or religion. However, people can hold beliefs about what it means to be a family, what constitutes an appropriate form of government, or what economic system benefits society most, among many other things.

Let's return to the example of religion. This is a social institution about which people have very strong beliefs. Again, it's difficult at first to think of the tenets of a religion as agreements rather than absolute truths. Indeed, if we thought of them as agreements, these tenets would be difficult to follow. But religious beliefs aren't considered true because they've been empirically proven—they are considered true because believers have agreed that it is so. Consider indigenous Australians' beliefs about *the Dreaming*, which they describe as a time before now, when things could happen that can't happen anymore, and a time when men, women, and creatures were not as they are now. Often, the world is described as being the way it is now because of something that happened in the Dreaming. Old men and women are said to know a lot about what happened, and what they say about the Dreaming is regarded as true (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2015). These beliefs form a shared view about reality for Australian Aboriginal peoples. Related to the Dreaming are *songlines* or *Dreaming Tracks*. A songline can be followed by recalling the words of a song, which acts as a kind of lyrical map, making it possible to navigate vast distances safely. Historically, these trips were referred to by nonindigenous Australians as “walkabouts.” Indigenous Australian groups of people would undertake these journeys for spiritual reasons, as an act of pilgrimage (such as retracing an ancestor's steps), or for a variety of other reasons, including survival, kin, and trade. In fact, Aboriginal peoples still undertake these journeys today, although they will often drive along the songlines instead of walking (Morrison, 2017).

It is important to note that beliefs do not simply emerge from nothing and are not completely arbitrary. They develop out of people's relationship to things that are essential to their survival, be they land, the environment, resources, social arrangements, and so on. Think for a moment. If you adhere to a particular religious view or belief system, who or what is the central spiritual element or figure within that belief system? Think of how powerful and how central that belief is to your life. Perhaps you believe it is the only explanation for existence. Yet, for you, the Dreaming is not likely to be the force that guides your life. It may not be real to you. So, what makes someone's views on existence “real”? Sharing views with others who have the same viewpoint gives these views power and strength, in a sense making them real. Is the Dreaming real? To you, perhaps it is not. To Indigenous Australian peoples? Yes, absolutely, without a doubt. It is the collective sharing of a viewpoint, the agreement that something is real, that constitutes a belief. That is why it is essential for likeminded believers to congregate with each other often, so that they can reinforce their collective views.

Beliefs

Views that people share about what is true or what really exists

Now, think back to the previous section on values. Think about how the values of a society or culture are reciprocal, both stemming from and reinforcing that society's or culture's beliefs. What we collectively feel is good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust, is related to what we collectively feel really exists. In the next section, we talk about norms. As you read about norms, think, too, how these are reciprocally related to beliefs.

4.2e Norms

Norms are elements of nonmaterial culture and are rules of conduct or social expectations for behavior. These rules and social expectations specify how people should and should not behave in various social situations. They are both *prescriptive* (they tell people what they should do) and *proscriptive* (they tell people what they should not do).

Whereas values are abstract conceptions of what is important and worthwhile, social *norms* are standards, rules, guides, and expectations for actual behavior. Norms and values are likely to be conceptually consistent, but values are less situation bound and are more general and abstract. Norms link values with actual events. *Honesty* is a general value; the expectation that students will not cheat on tests is a norm. Most norms permit a range of behaviors—that is, some kinds or degrees of overconformity and underconformity are expected and tolerated, particularly in some settings or situations. We would not criticize a starving man for lying to get food, for example.

An early US American sociologist, William G. Sumner (1840–1910), identified two types of norms, which he labeled “folkways” and “mores.” They are distinguished not by their content but by the degree to which group members are compelled to conform to them, by their degree of importance, by the severity of punishment if they are violated, or by the intensity of feeling associated with adherence to them. **Folkways** are customs or conventions. They are norms, in that they provide rules for conduct; but violations of folkways bring only mild censure. In the United States, most adults are expected to eat vegetables with a fork rather than a spoon or knife or chopsticks, and most students attend classes in pants or skirts rather than ballgowns or bathing suits. If you eat vegetables with a spoon or attend class in a gown, the chances are you will not be arrested or beaten; however, you may receive some smiles, glances, or occasional comments from others. Why? People would express mild disapproval because these behaviors violate folkways that exist in the United States.

Like other norms, folkways are learned through interaction with others and are passed down from generation to generation. Folkways change as culture changes or when we enter different situations. Our tendency is to accept folkways as appropriate without question. Why do suburbanites fertilize lawns and keep them trimmed? Why do people avoid facing one another in elevators? Why are people expected to chew food quietly and with their mouths closed? There are no written rules governing these situations, and if they are violated, no one is physically harmed. These are simply the folkways of our culture, the set of norms that specify the way things are usually done, and people who violate these norms are punished only mildly if at all.

Mores are considered more important than folkways, and reactions to their violation are more serious. They are more likely than folkways to involve clear-cut distinctions between right and wrong, and they are more closely associated with

Folkways

Norms of conduct of everyday life that bring only mild censure or punishment if they are violated

Mores

Norms of conduct associated with strong feelings of right or wrong, violations of which bring intense reaction and some type of punishment

the moral values a society considers important. Violations of mores inspire intense reactions, and some type of punishment inevitably follows. The punishment may involve expulsion from the group, harsh ridicule, imprisonment, or in some cases even death. Why don't people have sex in public? Why don't physicians end the life of elderly people who have terminal illnesses? Why don't people betray their country's well-being for money? Actions such as these violate cultural mores. Mores that prohibit something, that state, "thou shalt not," are **taboos**. To love and care for one's children is a **mos** (the Latin singular of *mores*); to commit incest (marry or have intercourse) with them or neglect them is a taboo. In the United States, people who murder, commit treason, or engage in incest are widely regarded as sinful and wicked. They violate the mores of society by engaging in taboo behaviors.

Since folkways and mores differ only in degree, it is sometimes difficult to tell them apart. Furthermore, because folkways and mores are elements of culture, they vary from one society or subculture to another. The physical punishment of children may be a folkway in some cultures and a taboo in others. Killing may be rewarded in war but condemned in one's local community. Marriage between same sex couples may be acceptable in some states and a strong taboo in others. To function effectively in a culture, one must learn the culture's appropriate folkways and mores.

Certain norms about which a society feels strongly may become laws, which are formal, standardized expressions of norms enacted by legislative bodies to regulate particular types of behaviors. **Laws** do not merely state what behaviors are not permitted; they also state the punishment for violating the law. Ideally, the punishment should reflect the seriousness of the crime or civil offense and should be carried out by a judicial system. This system legitimizes physical coercion and is above the control of any individual member of a society. Within the boundaries of their duties, members of a judicial system can use physical force and imprisonment or even kill without retaliation. Laws, therefore, are formalized legislated norms that are enforced by a group designated for that purpose. In contrast, only the members of society themselves—not a separate group designated as enforcers—enforce folkways and mores (unless they are made into laws).

When a law does not reflect folkways and mores, its enforcement is likely to be ignored or given low priority. Although certain actions may be formally defined as illegal in certain communities (shopping on Sundays, smoking marijuana, having sex outside of marriage), enforcement is ignored because of changing folkways or mores that grant a degree of social approval to the behavior. This suggests that conformity to the norms of society comes not from formal law enforcement officials but from the informal interaction of members of society. Members of society follow most norms, but adherence is not rigid. Adaptation to changing conditions is possible, and a certain degree of deviation from existing norms is both possible and beneficial for the effective functioning of society.

However, it is important to realize that cultural norms (folkways and mores) are not always beneficial for a society, group, or individual. Some norms may actually be harmful—what Erich Fromm (1965) calls the "**pathology of normalcy**." Thus, we can follow cultural norms when they do not harm us, but we do not always have to follow them. You might be able to improve the quality of your life if you analyze the costs and benefits of the norms you are expected to follow by society or by your peer group. As one clinical sociologist notes:

Taboos

Mores that prohibit something

Mos

Singular form of *mores* (from the Latin)

Laws

Formal, standardized expression of norms enacted by legislative bodies to regulate certain types of behavior

Pathology of normalcy

The concept that cultural norms are not always beneficial for a society, group, or individual

Is it part of your peer subculture to take the easy way through school rather than to read, research, study, learn basic skills, and treat teachers and others with respect even while you disagree with them? The benefit of following peer-group norms of little work might be a degree with “no sweat,” but the costs may be educationally empty school years, boredom, a bad conscience, a lack of pride in oneself, few solid accomplishments, and lifelong deficits in skills such as reading, writing, and critical thinking. Researching and analyzing the student subculture may show a pathology of normalcy. (Cohen, 1985, p. 46)

In this case, you might decide to deviate from the norms to maximize your gains. The process of violating norms beyond the range of group acceptability is called “deviance,” and the process of applying sanctions to obtain social conformity is known as “social control.”

4.2f Technology and Material Culture

In addition to the nonmaterial aspects of culture—symbols, language, values, norms, and laws—there are certain material techniques and products used by societies to maintain their standards of living and their lifestyles. The practical production and application of these techniques and products is a culture’s **technology**. Technology applies the knowledge gained by science in ways that influence all aspects of culture. It includes social customs and practical techniques for converting raw materials to finished products. The production and use of food, shelter, and clothing as well as commodities and physical structures are also aspects of a society’s technology. These physical products are **artifacts**. A society’s artifacts can be very diverse: beer cans, religious objects, pottery, art, pictures, typewriters, computer terminals, buildings and building materials, clothes, books, and even contraceptive devices. Material artifacts reflect the nonmaterial culture—symbols, beliefs, values, norms, and behaviors—shared by the members of a society.

Artifacts provide clues to a society’s level of technological development. Americans, especially those of European descent, take great pride in their level of technology. The ability to perform heart transplants, split atoms, and produce sophisticated missiles, supersonic jets, computers, and environmentally controlled living and working conditions leads us to perceive our type of culture as superior, advanced, and progressive. This perception is often accompanied by a belief that cultures with a low level of technological development are inferior and not progressive.

These are subjective perceptions, however, not scientific criteria for evaluating cultures. A more objective evaluation of what some call “less developed” cultures indicates that they possess an amazing degree of skill and ingenuity in dealing with the environment. Many apparently crude techniques are based on fundamental principles of engineering. Today, people marvel

Technology

The application of non-material and material knowledge by a society to maintain its standard of living and lifestyle

Artifacts

Physical products or objects created through human actions



An Ethiopian woman makes dough from banana stems. Such production and use of food is part of her material culture, which helps maintain her society’s standard of living and lifestyle. It also reflects her society’s technology—the knowledge gained and applied by its members.

(iStock)

at the Ifugao rice terraces in the Cordillera mountain range of the Philippines, which include water distribution systems that seem difficult to improve on today. These rice fields have produced food for generations of families and communities without the aid of diesel tractors, complex machinery, or hybrid rice plants. Anthropologists know of countless instances of the survival of people under conditions that few members of “highly developed” cultures could endure. Living in homes built of adobe, snow, or bamboo, people have survived without indoor plumbing, heating, or air conditioning for generations—conditions that would be considered inadequate or even intolerable by most members of more technologically advanced cultures. Yet these people’s technology is suited to and perfectly adequate for their particular lifestyles. It could be argued that in more developed nations, technology is only truly understood by a handful of specialists. People may be dependent on their cars, computers, and cell phones, but most are unlikely to be able to fix these devices without outside assistance. Thus, the general population is less versed in their own technology than are members of so-called “primitive” groups.

The goals and consequences of technology and the production of material goods are being seriously questioned today. Does a high level of technology increase happiness and improve family life? Do complex technologies bring us clean air and pure water or help us conserve natural resources? All cultures possess technology in the sense that they all apply knowledge to master the environment and interact effectively with nature. It is a mistake to dismiss a culture’s technological system because it appears less developed or complex than our own.

A common phenomenon that all societies face at times is a disconnect between material culture and nonmaterial culture. The tendency for material culture (in particular, technology) to outpace nonmaterial culture (especially norms, values, and beliefs) is called **cultural lag**. William F. Ogburn (1922) noted this phenomenon. An example of cultural lag in contemporary Western societies is that we have the technology to keep people alive through life support systems when, in some cases, a person’s brain has deteriorated to the point where recovery is no longer possible. While the technology exists to keep people alive in those instances, our norms and values pertaining to death have not evolved to the point where we are clear about what we should do.

Cultural lag

The tendency for nonmaterial culture to lag behind material culture

Thinking Sociologically

Think about and discuss the cultural lag that exists between computer technology, in the forms that we use every day (such as laptops, smartphones, and tablets), and our norms and values in everyday life regarding such things as personal relationships and education.





Sociology *at Work*

New Technology, New Dangers for Kids

The Pew Research Center reports that as of 2015, 76% of all adult internet users use a social networking site—an increase from 8% in 2005 (Rainie, 2014). For many, social media sites have become an important part of everyday life. In 2018, 74% of adult Facebook users accessed the site daily (Pew Research Center, 2018). While teens are more likely to use YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, or Snapchat than Facebook, their overall use of social media is more pervasive than that of adults. What's more, as of 2018, 95% of teens report having a smartphone (or at least access to one), up from around 75% in 2015 (Lenhart, 2015; Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Social media sites are more a part of our lives than ever before, and it would seem that teens have both increased access to these sites and reduced supervision while using them as advances in technology and social media outpace societal norms surrounding their use—a phenomenon known as *cultural lag*.

These drastic changes in our use of technology have even become a running joke online, where users reminisce about the now extinct “computer room” of the '90s—a place where families housed their communal desktop computer and children had to vie with siblings for a turn to use it. The idea seems quaint now, but the move away from a single computer kept in a common area of the house may be no laughing matter. The FBI has consistently recommended keeping computers in the open, where they can be monitored by parents, because at any given time, an estimated 500,000 pedophiles are lurking online (FBI, 2011a).

Many people are now familiar with the tactic of pedophiles posing as teens or children to befriend potential victims online. In the past, the FBI has combated this approach by posing as children and teens themselves in order to catch these online predators. But the tactics of predators are changing as fast as the technology at their disposal.

According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the number of incidents of “sextortion” (the use of nonphysical coercion, primarily online, to acquire sexual content from children) has been on the rise (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, 2018). The tactics employed in these crimes are as much about blatant manipulation and blackmail as they are about deception. Sextortion occurs most frequently

via social media and messaging apps on phones and tablets. Offenders may threaten to hurt the child or family members or to post previously acquired sexual content of the child online, and the children targeted may feel they have no choice but to comply with the offender's escalating demands.

To combat this relatively new form of sexual exploitation, the Crimes Against Children Research Center recommends raising public and bystander awareness, mobilizing the education system, and calling upon the technology industry to develop interventions as well as a combination of public outreach, police training, and legislation to encourage victims to reach out to law enforcement (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2016). But even as we try to get a handle on the use of smartphones and social media to victimize children, another new threat is emerging.

Online gaming is only increasing in popularity and predators are catching on. Parents who vigilantly monitor their children's use of social media may be unaware that video gaming platforms pose an additional threat (FBI, 2011a). Many online games feature voice chat, and gaming forums provide yet another way for predators to connect with children.

Clearly, steps need to be taken to combat cultural lag and reduce the risk that children will fall victim to online predation. This begins with education and awareness, but it might also involve a blast from the past: Perhaps the “computer room” of the '90s needs to make a comeback—with extra space for smartphones, tablets, and gaming consoles.



Many online games feature voice chat, and gaming forums provide yet another way for predators to connect with children.

(Adobe Stock)

4.3 The Web of Culture

Where does culture come from? This is a question that sociologists and anthropologists (especially) have been examining since the birth of these disciplines. One answer is that cultures arise from agreements between people within a social system (be it among people within a geographic region, such as a country, or an organization) about things that are essential to their survival (Babbie, 1977) and in response to environmental factors. Social systems develop mechanisms and sets of rules to meet basic survival needs such as how reproduction practices are regulated, how we ensure that children are cared for, how we regulate power, how we ensure that basic material needs are met, how knowledge is disseminated, how we provide for spiritual nourishment, and more. Some of the things that are necessary for a social system to survive are universal, and some are distinct to particular organizations. Sociologists refer to these sets of rules as **institutions** (Basirico & Bolin, 2010, p. 42). Some of the universal institutions found throughout the world include family, economics, politics, religion, healthcare, and education.

These certainly are not the only institutions that exist. You will learn more about these institutions in Part 4 of this book. Culture, then, refers to all those ways of life (practices and what we think) that both stem from and shape social institutions. It is important to understand the relationship between culture and institutions because without that understanding, it is easy to become judgmental of other cultures.

Basirico and Bolin refer to a “web of culture” and emphasize that it is difficult to understand the elements of culture (refer back to Figure 4-1) without understanding the relationship between these elements and institutions. They use the analogy of a rubber band ball to illustrate the relationship between the elements of culture and institutions:

Think of the separate rubber bands as elements of culture—values, beliefs, norms, symbols, technology, and so on. Now, think not just of one value, one belief, one symbol, and so on but think of the hundreds of examples of values, beliefs, norms, symbols, and so forth in a particular place. Imagine that each rubber band represents one value, belief, symbol, norm, etc. Further, imagine that other rubber bands represent social institutions—the family, the economy, politics, religion, education, healthcare, and so forth. Think of how intertwined the strands of a rubber band ball are and how they create something solid, real, and tangible that is much more than the individual strands. The relationship between the elements of culture and institutions is a little like that ball in that they create a whole culture that is greater than the individual parts. (2010, p. 43)

To understand the relationship between the elements of culture and institutions within any particular culture, Basirico and Bolin suggest using a matrix to analyze your observations of that culture (see Figure 4-2). They provide an instructive example of how you might analyze a wedding ceremony in the United States. First, think of what you might observe at such a ceremony. For example, you might notice who is performing the ceremony (a priest, minister, rabbi, or justice of the peace), what the bride is wearing, the exchanging of rings, the use of the word “God,” a limousine, a father “giving away” the bride, and many other things. Next, try to place each of these observations in the “web of culture” matrix. Notice that you might be

Institutions

A stable cluster of values, norms, statuses, and roles that develops around basic goals that are necessary for social systems to survive

able to place some of your observations in more than one box. Now, think a little more conceptually about the relationship between each of the elements of culture that you observed, the institutions involved, and how they may reinforce one another.

Figure 4-2 Web of Culture

	Nonmaterial culture						Material culture	
Structures/institutions	Symbols/ Language	Values	Beliefs	Norms	Emotions	Laws	Artifacts	Technology
Family kinships								
Educational systems								
Government/political systems								
Religious/magical systems								
Sex and gender systems								
Health-care systems								
Military systems								
Arts and leisure systems								
Economic systems								

Adapted from "The Joy of Culture" by L. A. Basirico, and A. Bolin, 2010, in T. Arcaro, and R. Haskell (Eds.), *Understanding the global experience: Becoming a responsible world citizen*, p. 45. Copyright 2010 by Taylor & Francis.

Imagine using this analytical approach to examine entire cultures in detail. Imagine again using this method to examine a culture that is very different from yours, perhaps even one that may seem deviant, and how it would help you to understand that culture in a nonjudgmental way. The web of culture approach is one way you can understand cultures in a culturally relativistic manner.

4.4 Cultural Diversity

A culture is not simply an accumulation of isolated symbols, language, values, norms, behaviors, and technology. It is a complex and diverse system of many interdependent factors influenced by physical circumstances like climate, geography, population, and plant and animal life. Traditionally, Indigenous Alaskan and Inuit peoples often ate a diet heavy in meat, lived in houses insulated by or made entirely of snow, and dressed in furs. Many societies in tropical rain forests have diets composed primarily of fruits and vegetables, live in shelters made of leaves and branches, and wear few clothes. Physical circumstances, however, may have less influence on a culture's functioning than such social factors as contact with other cultures, stage of technological development, or prevailing ideologies (the assertions and theories characteristic of the group). The complexity and diversity

of a culture can be better understood by examining various units of a culture, such as subcultures, countercultures, idiocultures, ideal and real cultures, and social institutions.

4.5 Subcultures

It is rare to find a society that has a single culture shared equally by all its members. This could happen only in small, isolated, nonindustrial societies. Most societies include groups who share some of the cultural elements of the larger society yet also have their own distinctive set of norms, values, symbols, and lifestyles. These units of culture are **subcultures**. Subcultures exist within the confines of a larger culture. There are thousands of subcultures within a society, and all of us belong to several at any given time. For example, in college, you may be a member of a sorority or fraternity, young Democrats or Republicans, men's or women's athletic teams, or a chemistry or social work club, among others. Often, subcultures reflect racial or ethnic differences, such as those found among Black, Polish, or Chinese Americans. Other subcultures develop around occupations, such as corporate, military, medical, or factory work. Mormon, Amish, Muslim, and other groups form religious subcultures. Some are based on geography, such as those found in the South and New England; others are based on wealth and age. There are also drinking, drug, and LGBTQ subcultures. Every society that has diverse groups of people has subcultures. All subcultures participate in the larger, dominant culture but possess their own set of cultural elements.

At times, the dominant culture and the subculture may conflict to such a degree that tremendous stresses occur and a crisis results. Members of the subculture may be required by the dominant culture to register for the military even though they value pacifism. The subculture may value the use of particular drugs but be forbidden by the dominant culture to obtain them. Also, note how subcultural differences are at the heart of the policy issue selected for this chapter: bilingualism. Can or should Spanish, Japanese, or Arab immigrants to the United States be able to retain their native language in their places of work? Can or should children in public schools be given reading materials and exams in their native language when that language is not English? Subcultural differences and the rights of specific religious, ethnic, or other minority groups are central to many legal and policy debates. An understanding of subcultures makes us realize the importance of differences, not merely between cultures, but between individuals within a culture as well.

Subcultures

Groups of people who share in the main culture of a society but also have their own distinctive values, norms, and lifestyles

Thinking Sociologically

Richard Bernstein (1990, p. 48) wrote the following about bilingual education:

What's at stake . . . is nothing less than the cultural identity of the country. Those who argue that bilingual education is a right make up a kind of informal coalition with those who are pressing for changes in the way the United States is perceived—no longer as a primarily European entity to which all others have to adapt, but as a diverse collection of ethnic groups, each of which deserves more or less equal status and respect . . .

Those on the other side insist that diversity is all well and good; but they argue that bilingual education could lead to an erosion of the national unity, a fragmentation of the nation into mutually hostile groups.

Use the knowledge about culture presented in this chapter to discuss why and how the policy debate over bilingual education is much more than a debate about language usage in schools.

4.5a High Culture, Folk Culture, and Popular Culture

Herbert Gans (1974) identified three “taste cultures” within the larger culture: high culture, folk culture, and popular culture. **High culture**, or elite culture, reflects the tastes of the wealthy, affluent, or upper classes. Individuals of high culture may distinguish themselves from those considered “beneath them” through language, education, housing, etc. They will often see themselves as more “cultured” than ordinary people. Members of high culture will attend the finest restaurants, operas, ballets, and socialize with others who belong to their inner circles. Folk culture is distinctively different from high culture. **Folk culture** reflects the tastes of the working class or ethnic groups. Craft fairs, bluegrass or jazz festivals, NASCAR—all are examples of folk culture. **Popular culture** tends to reflect the tastes of the masses within a society. Music, art, dance, radio, linguistic trends, and literature produced and consumed by members of society are part of popular culture. For example, Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, Halloween, *Monday Night Football*, soap operas, and baseball games are part of popular culture in the United States. In this case, culture is constructed by, and shared among, common persons such as you and me.

High culture

The materials and ideas of wealthy, affluent, or upper classes (in contrast to popular culture)

Folk culture

The culture of the working class or ethnic groups

Popular culture

The trends, social activities, and shared experiences of everyday people (in contrast to high culture)



The Burning Man Festival is a type of popular culture event that focuses on values of self-expression, anti-consumerism and creativity.

(BLM Nevada, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia)

4.5b Countercultures

A **counterculture** is a subculture that adheres to a set of beliefs and values that are in opposition to the dominant culture of which it is part. Because they accept such beliefs and values, members of a counterculture may behave in such radically nonconformist ways that they may drop out of society. Dropping out may mean either physically leaving or ideologically and behaviorally leaving by rejecting the dominant values and working to change them.

Delinquent gangs, the Hare Krishna religious sect, hippies of the 1960s, and some extreme right-wing religious groups of the 1980s can all be classified as countercultures. The norms and values of such groups sharply contrast with those held by conventional middle-class groups. Often, counterculture values are not merely different from those of the dominant culture but are in opposition to them. Delinquent gangs may grant prestige and social approval for lawbreaking, violence, theft, or the use of drugs to achieve their goals of dominance and material success. The stated goal of the Hare Krishna religious sect is to achieve unity and peace in the world through propagation of a consciousness of Krishna. The Hare Krishna counterculture of the '60s entailed shaved heads, chanting and dancing in the streets, selling books of their teachings in airports, and other activities often viewed as countercultural. The youth movement of the 1960s—in which many of your grandparents or older adults you know were involved and which included political activists, drop-outs, and hippies—actively challenged the dominant cultural norms of hard work, financial success, conformity of dress, sexual restrictiveness, military superiority, and White supremacy. Perhaps the pendulum has swung away from countercultural trends on the Left to countercultural trends on the Right. Starting in the '80s and '90s, some right-wing religious groups have targeted abortion clinics, sometimes escalating to extreme violence, including arson, bombing, and murder. Less extreme groups made efforts to legalize corporal punishment, mandate prayer in public schools, and demand the inclusion of creationism in school curriculums. With the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma and the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York, a greater awareness of terrorist countercultures exists within the United States. The individuals behind these deadly attacks, domestic and foreign terrorists, disagreed with governmental policies and chose to take revenge on the citizens of our society.

Counterculture

A subculture that adheres to a set of norms and values that sharply contradict the dominant norms and values of the society of which that group is a part in culture of a society but also have their own distinctive values, norms, and lifestyles



Policy Debate

Bilingual Education: Two-Way Immersion Programs

A controversial policy debate in the United States concerns bilingual education—education that involves two languages. In the US, this would mean teaching in English as well as an additional language. This debate has had a long, stormy history in the US. In the mid-1800s,

various states with large immigrant communities passed laws that allowed education in languages other than English. German was the most popular second language, and Ohio was the first state to pass bilingual education legislation in 1839 (McCabe, 2016). Many such laws were

repealed, however, after World War I—largely due to nationalistic sentiments (Romaine, 1989).

The debate was revived when the federal government passed the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) of 1968. The legislation recognized that “the use of a child’s mother tongue can have a beneficial effect upon his [sic] education” (Haugen, 1987, p. 4) and that there are “special education needs of a great many students whose mother tongue is other than English” (Stoller, 1976, p. 50). This spurred many sociologists, educators, and linguists to implement bilingual education programs in communities with large numbers of people who qualified for limited English proficiency (LEP). The hope was that bilingual education would reduce the LEP students’ sense of alienation in an all-English world (Haugen, 1987).

Whereas the controversy of the 1960s and ’70s focused on the pros and cons of bilingual education, a backlash from opponents—who decried its ineffectiveness—in the 1980s and ’90s sharpened the debate. The arguments during this time centered largely on bilingual education versus “English immersion” (Jost, 2009). Although some bilingual education programs were designed to maintain the native language and culture of the child (“maintenance programs”), most were aimed at providing a transition to English and to mainstream US American culture (“transitional programs”) (Hakuta, 1986).

Today, the minority language predominantly at issue is Spanish. This is becoming increasingly true as the US experiences a rapid shift in the racial makeup of the youth population (under age 18) and involves important issues of identity, learning, and assimilation (Saulny, 2011). White people are projected to be a minority of the youth nationwide by 2020 (Frey, 2018). Not surprisingly, this has increased tensions over immigration and bilingual education. As of 2015, 4.8 million public school students were English language learners (ELLs), up from 3.8 million in 2000 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Clearly, the question of what to do about bilingual education is not going away any time soon.

These days, a new kind of bilingual education program is gaining prominence, and while it offers an interesting vision of the way forward, it is not without its own problems and controversies. On the surface, *two-way immersion programs* (also known as *dual language education*) correct a lot of the problems inherent in the bilingual education programs of the past. While programs institutionalized as part of the BEA inadvertently “perpetuated the continued racialization of Latinx and other minoritized communities by framing them as ‘the other’ to the mainstream white norm” (García, 2017, p. 19), in two-way immersion programs, “English-dominant and target-language-dominant



Two-way immersion programs correct a lot of the problems inherent in the bilingual education programs of the past.

students are purposefully integrated with the goals of developing bilingual skills, academic excellence, and positive cross-cultural and personal competency attitudes for both groups of students” (Lindholm-Leary, 2001, p. 30). In theory, such programs not only help ELLs develop high proficiency in English but they also help such students maintain their first language, help English-dominant students learn a second language, and encourage positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors in all students. Given the research demonstrating the cognitive and neurological benefits of bilingualism, which extend from early childhood and into old age (see Marian & Shook, 2012), interest in two-way immersion programs is only increasing.

But this inherent attractiveness is perhaps the greatest issue with this innovative approach to bilingual education. For two-way immersion classrooms to function, schools need to attract both ELLs and English-dominant students. However, as White, middle-class interest in two-way immersion grows, ELLs are being pushed out of the very programs designed to help them. This can turn two-way immersion programs into “one-way” dual language programs featuring classrooms full of English-dominant children who are instructed in two languages. As integration gives way to gentrification, these programs cease to be a win-win for English-dominant and ELL students alike and instead benefit only the former. Other benefits of integrated two-way immersion programs—such as the development of positive cross-cultural attitudes—also disappear (Williams, 2017). Proponents of two-way immersion programs have suggested several solutions—including using lottery systems for enrollment as well as making the training and hiring of bilingual teachers a top priority and incentivizing bilingual college students to pursue teaching so that the number of two-way immersion programs can be expanded to include more schools (Williams, 2017).

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(continued)

However, it is possible that we are not looking for answers in the right places. So far, all the approaches taken to bilingual education “position the locus of social change at the level of individuals in ways that obscure the structural barriers confronting Latinx children and communities” (García, 2017, p. 16). In other words, by focusing on individual people and not on society at large, perhaps we are missing a bigger issue. This argument holds that:

The failure of bilingual education to meet these lofty goals should not be interpreted as a failure of bilingual education, but rather as a failure of U.S. society to address the underlying racialization processes that relegate Latinx and other minoritized communities to second-class status in U.S. society. (Flores & García, 2017, p. 16)

Is it possible, then, that no bilingual education program will succeed until underlying inequalities are addressed?

4.5c Ideal and Real Culture

In most cultures, differences exist between what people are supposed to do and what they actually do. The **ideal culture** consists of the norms and values people profess to follow; the **real culture** consists of the norms and values they actually follow. If you were asked to tell a foreign visitor about the norms and values of US Americans, for example, you would probably describe the ideal culture, mentioning such topics as freedom, democracy, equal rights, monogamy, marital fidelity, and educational opportunity for all. The actual culture differs considerably from the ideal, however. The very poor are less likely to get a good education, marital infidelity is common, and many people have several spouses during their lives.

Some anthropologists express this distinction between real and ideal culture in terms of *explicit culture* and *implicit culture*. These terms may be more accurate than *real* and *ideal*, since both types of culture are real in the sense that they actually exist. The point is that stated cultural norms and values are not always practiced. Students should be sensitive to distinctions of this sort. The speed limit may be 55 mph, but many people drive at speeds of 65 or higher. Honesty in the classroom may be the norm, but cheating can be widespread. Clashes between ideal and actual practices may be avoided through rationalizations or flexibility in social control. A student might defend cheating on a test by arguing that “everyone does it.” It would be impractical for police to arrest everyone who exceeds the speed limit, so they concentrate instead on extreme violations.

Although cultures vary in their symbols, languages, and behavior—and in their subcultures, countercultures, and real and ideal cultures—all share some basic concerns known as **cultural universals**. People in all cultures must have food, shelter, and protection. All people face illness and death, and every society has a kinship system with taboos on incest. From US suburbanites to indigenous populations in Africa and Mongolia, all cultures socialize and train their members in the ways of their culture, including work and leisure activities, and establish leaders.

Ideal culture

The norms and values that people profess to follow

Real culture

The norms and values that people actually follow and practice, which may or may not be the same as the ideal culture

Cultural universals

Aspects of culture that are shared by all people, such as symbols, shelter, food, and a belief system

4.5d Multiculturalism

As mentioned in the introduction, throughout the history of the United States, the emphasis has been on monoracial categories rather than multiracial ones. In addition, the belief has been that the US is a “melting pot” where all people, regardless of nationality or skin color, have assimilated into one culture. The problem with this assumption is not everyone was welcomed into the pot. Historically, only persons of White European decent were invited, with the idea that they would come together and form a common culture, including language, values, norms, etc. Other groups have traditionally been excluded, including African Americans, American Indians, Hispanics, and Asians. Multiculturalism refers to recognizing the contributions of all cultures within the US. Instead of promoting assimilation, there is a need to recognize a pluralistic society where diverse groups live together and each is recognized not for their ability to lose their ancestral heritage but for the unique and diverse contributions they make to the United States.

4.5e Idiocultures

Gary Fine (1979) has argued that every group forms its own culture to a certain extent, and he called these created cultures **idiocultures**. An *idioculture* is a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs created through group interactions. Members of a group share particular experiences and recognize that other members will understand references to a shared experience. Members of one group, for example, might roar with laughter whenever the word *cashew* is mentioned because it triggers a memory of a shared humorous experience. All small groups have a culture that is unique to themselves but that is, nevertheless, part of a larger cultural pattern. The group itself forms the group’s idioculture; thus, idiocultures do not exist when a group is first formed. They are created from the opening moments of group interaction when people begin to learn names and other information about one another. With time, rules are established, opinions expressed, information exchanged, and events experienced together.

Suppose, for example, that a newspaper has just been established and that the editors, reporters, typesetters, and other employees have come together for the first time. Initially, they will have shared no experiences, but as they work together, they will develop unique ways of interacting. At first, the reporters may go out for coffee individually, but eventually they might decide to delegate one person to get coffee for everyone. “Gathering background information” might become a euphemism for wasting time. After a local warehouse is destroyed in the biggest fire in town history, they might come to refer to any big story as a “warehouse” (just as stories dealing with the improper behavior of politicians and others now frequently take on the suffix “-gate,” after Watergate). The task of writing the relatively uninteresting daily reports about weddings, funerals, and meetings might come to be called the “trivia.” After a few unpleasant arguments, the reporters might agree never to comment on one another’s stories. After working together for an extended period, the group would develop its own jargon and set of customs that would not be understood by an outsider.

Idioculture

The system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs that is unique to a given group

Sociology Students in Real Life

Charles Ashton Newhall

Graduating class: 1998



Charles Ashton Newhall

Favorite sociology course: “Intro to Sociology”

How has sociology helped you in your job or in your life?

“[As] managing general partner of a venture capital firm . . . the concepts I learned like cultural relativism and dramaturgy are directly applicable to financing start-ups globally. Innovation often requires challenging social mores, forcing me to substantiate a point of view—usually as the minority opinion; gaining a perspective on worlds so different to my own and the benefits of traveling bring to mind the sociological premise of going beyond and questioning everyday assumptions. Financing the innovation economy is usually about disruption of the status quo. Having sociology as a major and anthropology as a minor opened my mind to many possibilities.”

Chapter

4

Wrapping it Up



Summary

1. A *culture* is a society's social heritage—the system of ideas, values, beliefs, knowledge, norms, customs, and technology that everyone in a society shares.
2. A *society* is a group of people who share a common culture. Some of the most significant elements of a culture are symbols, language, values, norms, and technology.
3. Societies consist of material and nonmaterial culture. *Material culture* includes all things tangible within society, while *nonmaterial culture* involves all intangible aspects of society, such as norms and values.
4. When we encounter a culture different from our own, we may experience culture shock. This is often the result of our own *ethnocentrism*, where we judge another culture based on our own.
5. The idea of *cultural relativism* suggests that cultures must be judged on their own terms, not by the standards of another culture. Acts, ideas, and products are not inherently good or bad; they must be judged in the cultural context in which they happen.
6. *Symbols* are arbitrary representations of something. The use of symbols is a human capability that allows us to make sense of reality, transmit messages, store complex information, and deal with an abstract world.
7. Our most important set of symbols is language, which enables us to transmit and store our social heritage. The importance of language to humans is illustrated in studies comparing the development of children and of animals such as chimpanzees.
8. It has been demonstrated that language influences how we perceive and experience the world. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggests that the use of different languages by different societies causes them to perceive the world very differently. Rather than simply seeing the same world with different labels, they may perceive different realities.
9. *Values* are conceptions about what is important and of worth. They are learned and shared cultural products that justify particular types of behavior. People in the United States tend to value achievement, success, work, a moral orientation, and humanitarian concerns, among other things.
10. Values indicate what is important, whereas norms are rules of conduct—the standards and expectations of behavior. Norms are of two types: *folkways*, which are customs or conventions that provoke only mild censure if violated, and *mores*, which are far more important and provoke severe punishment if violated. Laws are the formalized and standardized expression of norms.
11. In addition to the nonmaterial aspects of culture, there are material and technological aspects as well.
12. *Subcultures* are groups within a society that share the common culture but have their own distinctive set of cultural complexes. A *counterculture* is a type of subculture adhering to a set of norms and values that sharply contradict the dominant norms and values of the society of which the group is a part. To a certain extent, all groups possess localized cultures of their own, which are known as *idiocultures*.
13. The culture a society professes to follow (its *ideal culture*) differs from the culture it actually follows (its *real culture*).

14. *Multiculturalism* is beginning to replace the belief that only those belonging to the dominant group (in the US, Europeans) make relevant contributions to our culture.
15. Understanding the various elements of culture is useful in a variety of occupational settings, including health professions, service organizations, politics, public administration, education, business, and others as well as in your personal life. Sociologists have come to be used as cultural translators who help avoid misperceptions and increase understanding among people from diverse cultural settings.

Discussion Questions

1. Make a list of leisure activities that might be considered high culture. Do the same for popular culture. How might you explain why you participate in some of these activities and not in others?
2. How many examples can you give of symbols using only your hand and fingers? Can you think of any that mean different things in different contexts or to people of different cultures? Have any of these changed over time?
3. Discuss the significance or accuracy of the statement, "Societies with different languages actually see or perceive the world differently."
4. How would an understanding of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis help politicians to evaluate whether the United States should promote bilingual education programs?
5. What is *value conflict*? Give examples. How are such conflicts resolved?
6. Joe listens to his music (quietly, with earphones, of course) and Mary reads her *New York Times* in their sociology class. Is this illegal, forbidden, or harmful behavior? Why is the professor likely to disapprove of such behavior?
7. Discuss ways in which existing student norms may not be beneficial, or may even be harmful, to students.
8. Using the concepts of *ethnocentrism* and *cultural relativism*, discuss the impact that a bilingual education might have on understanding other cultures.
9. How might multiculturalism affect people's attitudes toward bilingual education programs?
10. Think about the subcultures, countercultures, or idiocultures of which you are a member. Differentiate these, and explain the differences.
11. Differentiate between real and ideal cultures. Why are they seldom one and the same?

Pop Quiz for Chapter 4

1. Something that is used to represent something else is a/an _____.
 - a. deal culture
 - b. folkway
 - c. mos
 - d. symbol
2. What does the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggest?
 - a. Our language shapes both our perceptions of reality and our behavior.
 - b. Language simply reflects one's perception of reality and behavior.
 - c. Chimpanzees use some form of language.
 - d. In some remote areas, verbal language is forbidden.
3. Which of the following is true of social norms?
 - a. They are either prescriptive or proscriptive.
 - b. They consist of several types.
 - c. They are rules of conduct or social expectations for behavior.
 - d. All of the above
4. Wearing a swimsuit to class most likely violates a _____.
 - a. folkway
 - b. American value
 - c. taboo
 - d. mos

5. Mores that prohibit something are called _____.
 - a. laws
 - b. social censure
 - c. taboos
 - d. folkways
6. Social control is essentially which of the following?
 - a. The process of applying social sanctions
 - b. A formal expression of norms
 - c. A method of prohibiting something
 - d. The same as a taboo
7. The material techniques and products a society uses to maintain its standard of living are the society's _____.
 - a. culture
 - b. values
 - c. mores
 - d. technology
8. Cultural lag occurs when _____.
 - a. changes in material culture occur more rapidly than changes in nonmaterial culture
 - b. artifacts and norms are too advanced for a culture's technology
 - c. folkways and mores are inconsistent
 - d. symbols in a society are misunderstood
9. Among whom is temporocentrism most prevalent?
 - a. People who lack historical perspective
 - b. Americans from upper-income families
 - c. People who fear foreigners
 - d. People who only prefer foreign goods
10. A unit of culture that rejects the society's dominant culture and prescribes an alternative one is best described as a(n) _____.
 - a. subculture
 - b. counterculture
 - c. idioculture
 - d. multiculture
11. All symbols involve words or written language. T/F
12. Only humans assign symbols to represent the objects around them. T/F
13. Subcultures have their own norms and values, but they also exist within the confines of a larger culture. T/F
14. All societies have institutions to meet their broad goals. T/F
15. For most people, values seldom conflict. T/F