PART TWO

Individuals Within Society

Then I began to think, that it is very true which is commonly said, that the one-half of the world knoweth not how the other half liveth.

François Rabelais

CHAPTER 4

Culture and Society

MARK ALL THAT APPLY

On January 1, 1892, seventeen-year-old Annie Moore from County Cork, Ireland became the first person processed through Ellis Island in New York. Over the next fifty–two years, more than twelve million people passed through Ellis Island to start their new lives in America. Today, an estimated forty percent of U.S. citizens can trace their ancestry to one of those early immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). 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 Native Americans, 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, and 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 colonies. Approximately 650 U.S. 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 eighteen months to count the 3.9 million people living in America 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—free white men over sixteen years, free white men under sixteen years, free white women, other free people, and slaves. At that time slaves were counted as only three-fifths of a person, and Indians were not counted at all because they were not required to pay taxes.

Since that first census over two hundred years ago, one has been conducted every ten years with alterations to the questions occurring nearly as frequently. For example, racial categories have changed almost regularly, with some groups expanding while others were excluded altogether. As noted, Indians were excluded from the first census, and blacks were not considered as a complete person. During the 1850 census, racial categories included the rising number of racially mixed people. Racial classification included White, Black, and Mulatto (mixed race)—with Blacks and Mulattos further categorized as either free or slave. It wasn't until later that censuses included persons other than Whites and Blacks. For example, the 1870 Census reflected the end of slavery, but added Chinese and Indian to the racial categories. The Tenth Census in 1890 further quantified mixed race persons by adding Quadroon (one-quarter black) and Octoroon (any degree up to one-eighth black) to the Mulatto (one-half black) category. While quantifying Black racial categories may appear to have benefited persons with mixed race heritage, the distinction was designed, in fact, to limit their access to resources. Not long after slavery ended, the United States entered a period of Jim Crow segregation where persons 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, Mexican's are not classified as a race at all, but rather are ethnicity lumped together with other groups under the "Hispanic" category.

The biggest change to racial classifications occurred in 2000, when persons were allowed for the first time in history to mark more than one race. The 2000 Census questionnaire contained fifteen 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 is "Hispanic or Latino" or "Not Hispanic or Latino."

According to the U.S. Census, this new change reflects the growing number of interracial children and the increasing diversity throughout the country. After the data was tabulated, 2.4 percent of the population had identified themselves as belonging to two or more races. Of those, 4 percent were children under the age of eighteen years. Among the population of persons who marked two or more races, 93 percent identified themselves as only two races. The largest group of two races was "White" and "Other" with over 32 percent, followed by "White" and "Native American" with 15.86 percent, and "White" and "Asian" with 12.72 percent. The percentage of persons who chose "White" and "Black" as their race was 11.5 percent. Hawaii was the state with the largest population of persons who identified themselves as multiracial (24.1 percent).

How we define race changes over time. The way race was defined in 2000 will likely change in twenty or thirty 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, there were four legally defined racial categories—White, Black, Colored, and Indian. Established in 1950, 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. However, a person's racial classification could also change with their status; moving up or down the racial ladder was based on one's accomplishments. In 1991, South Africa officially abolished their system of racial separation.

The arbitrary categories of race found on the censuses throughout the history of the United States suggest that race is socially constructed, rather than biologically. 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?

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 persons who live in a specific geographical area, who are organized in a cooperative manner, and who share a common culture. Culture and society cannot 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 life to occupation. 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 America, people live in houses or apartments. We buy food in a supermarket or grow it ourselves, we have jobs, and we generally expect our spouses to be sexually faithful to us. In traditional Eskimo culture, by contrast, people lived for part of the year in houses made of snow. They hunted for food because no one had "jobs" in our sense of the word. In some circumstances, sexual infidelity was not merely tolerated but was even encouraged through a practice of "wife lending." 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 animal life—they are determined by the culture. Humans are not born knowing which beliefs and behaviors are appropriate. These 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 are not.

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 is comprised of mostly non-tangible 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 dying 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 things are done. This is reinforced when visiting another country where it is not

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

uncommon for people to experience culture shock—a feeling of confusion, disbelief, or outrage by something found "normal" in another culture completely at odds with what is practiced in one's own culture. For example, street kids are a familiar sight in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. These children are often abandoned by their families due to poverty and a government that has no formal social service agencies with which 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 would sometimes turn to death squads to rid the alleys of street children. Members of death squads were mostly off duty police officers hired by a group of shop owners to rid the area of begging street children. Death squads would wait until nightfall and then move in to kill the children living in alleys around the shops. By sunrise the bodies of the children would be discovered, often with their hands tied behind their back and their tongues cut out. While the practice of targeting street children has declined, 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 hundreds of people roam the streets of America 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, 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 that they know the "truth" and are more moral than others. Some will send missionaries to convert people, whom they consider to be backward and lost, from other religions. Scientists are equally likely to believe their methods are the best way to approach problems. Most Americans believe that 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 "Restaurant in China Serves Rat 30 Ways" (*Wall Street Journal*, May 31, 1991). 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 and that people who walk around half-naked are shameless. However, we think it quite natural that American 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 European countries 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, blacks 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 **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 fat may have survival value and may serve as a source of admiration. In America, however, fatness is regarded as unhealthy and rarely serves as a source of admiration. The practice of abandoning unwanted infants would be viewed as intolerable by most contemporary cultures; however, many cultures used to follow this practice, and 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 relativity 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 as one would wish. Even though having multiple wives makes sense for many Saudi Arabian men, killing female infants makes sense in a Brazilian tribe, and wearing loincloths makes sense to African Bushmen, these behaviors are not acceptable to most 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; but, more importantly, 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 that 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 seen as "normal" in the United States but likely seen as a 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 the 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 and Strauss 1985).

However, **norms** are different from culture to culture. For example, a Native American student might pause two or three seconds before answering a question as a courtesy to the questioner. A 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 the teachers might interpret such children's actions as signs of being unprepared, inattentive, or disrespectful—treating them accordingly. This ethnocentrism on the part of the teachers could decrease their effectiveness. Ronald Tharp, a professor at the University of California who studies culture and education among ethnic groups, notes, "Every little classroom is turning 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, 9D).

Cultural relativism is important in any type of situation that involves people with different cultural backgrounds. As sociologists See and Strauss (1985, 69) note, "Utilizing the cultural [relativistic] approach in the practice of counseling, education, public administration, and the health-care 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 that a commodity that is highly valued in one cultural region will be just as "hot" in another region might lead to a financial disaster.

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 is comprised of symbols, language, values, beliefs, and norms. In addition, material culture is highly influenced by technology or the innovations and inventions occurring frequently in our society. The following is a more comprehensive look at each of these elements of culture.

Symbols

The existence of culture depends on people's ability to create and understand symbols. A **symbol** is something

FIGURE 4-1 THE ELEMENTS OF CULTURE

Non-Material	
Symbols	An object or event that represents another object or event only because people agree as to its 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 are considered their beliefs
Norms	Shared rules that define how people are supposed to behave under particular circumstances
Emotions	Inner reactions to experiences. Societies enculturate (teach) its 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 preference for certain experiences over others
Laws	Norms defined by political authorities as principles that members of a society must follow
Perceptions	Interpretations of cultural phenomenon which may vary from person to person due to his or her 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 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 and adaptation to the cultural and natural environment

Source: The Elements of Culture (Basirico and Bolin, in Arcaro and Haskell, 2010, p. 39.

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. 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 inherent in the act of holding one's thumb up that indicates we approve of something. Neither is there anything inherent in an "A-Okay" 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 it to signify that "all is fine." However, to use that same symbol in France and Belgium would convey a message that a person is of

A symbol, such as a flag, is an integral part of a culture—a culture's existence depends on the ability of that cultures members to understand it. Symbols are arbitrary designations in that a connection between a symbol and what it represents may not necessarily exist.

little or no worth. In Greece and Turkey, it would suggest an insulting sexual invitation. In parts of Italy, it would be an offensive reference to one part of the female anatomy. 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 are not only products of group experiences and needs, but they 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, yuppies, born-again Christians, Italians, or liberals). 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 and 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*, aimed at the total population, and *segmented marketing*, aimed at specific ethnic, racial, or other 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.

Only humans can assign symbols to represent the objects around them; this is one of the things that makes humans different from animals and enables us to create cultures. The difference is not one of degree. It is not that humans have better reasoning ability than animals. Rather, it is a fundamental difference in kind. Most sociologists assume that the ability to use symbols is uniquely human and that animals do not communicate symbolically or deal with abstractions. Unlike 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.

Language

The most important set of symbols is **language**. Language, among humans, is the systematized usage of speech and hearing 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, but language 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

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.

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. Like symbols, language is uniquely human, which is one of the basic distinctions between human beings and other forms of life. Like the use of symbols, the difference between humans and animals is 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 and Kellogg 1933) over the past sixty 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 that this raises is whether or not 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 of 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 (Canada and the United States) 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 pushy or standoffish.

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 to learn how they interpret some of our nonverbal language. What do they consider to be 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 generally recognized. In 1929, Edward Sapir argued that people see and interpret the world through the grammatical forms, labels, and categories provided by their language. He contended that societies with different languages actually perceive the world differently—that is, they do not just use a different set of labels to describe the same things.

This idea is known as the **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**. While working for an insurance company, Benjamin Whorf, a student of Sapir, noted that workman handling barrels of gasoline were very careful about matches and cigarettes when the barrels were full, but they became careless and caused many accidents once the label *empty* had been applied to a barrel. In other words, the application of the word *empty* to a barrel influenced the workers' perception and consequent behavior (Whorf 1941). Intrigued by this finding, he began to study different cultures to see whether the language they used influenced people's behavior. He found that language does influence 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 a precise word or symbol 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 size, colors, and uses and require precise words or symbols to convey the banana desired? 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: Our perceptions of reality are greatly influenced by our language. 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 being able to understand something that language does shape how often and how deeply we think about certain things, and perhaps even our attitudes or feelings towards 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 affects our perceptions, our attitudes, or even the way we use an object.

Regardless of how and why the connection between perception and language exists, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis helps us to realize 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 as 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.

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.

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 those who refuse to fight. If you value marital sexual exclusiveness, you probably disapprove of those who engage in extramarital sexual relationships. Values are often emotionally charged because they stand for things we believe to be worth defending.

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, the 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 his or her 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

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.

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. 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 societies such as the Chinese or subcultures such as the Navajo see themselves as living in harmony with nature. Residents of Canada and the United States are more conscious of being "on time" than those in Asia and the Middle East.

Most cultures, despite diversity in their populations, tend to share certain value patterns. In American society, Sociologist Robin M. Williams (1970) described fifteen value orientations important in United States American life and are still are at the core of U.S. American culture today:

1. **Achievement and Success** We stress personal achievement, especially secular occupational achievement.
2. **Activity and Work** Every able–bodied person should work and not expect handouts.
3. **Moral Orientation** People should know the difference between right and wrong.
4. **Humanitarian Motives** We should help others who are in a crisis.
5. **Efficiency and Practicality** We should strive to be as efficient and thrifty as possible.
6. **Process and Progress** Our society favors technology and innovations.
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. **External Conformity** Everyone should adhere to similarity and uniformity in speech, manners, housing, dress, recreation, politically expressed ideas, and group patterns.
11. **Science and Rationality** We know that science can solve problems, and we have faith in those who strive to make life better for us.
12. **Nationalism** We believe in the American system—it's institutions, government, and education.
13. **Democracy** Our system advocates majority rule.
14. **Individualism** We believe in personal responsibilities.
15. **Racism and Group Superiority** We evaluate people based on group performance and placement within society.

The extent to which such traditional U.S. 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 American society (Brunner 2003; Coon and Kemmelmeier 2001; Kester 2001).

It must be kept in mind that these are general themes in American values, which change constantly. 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 independence and conformity, or equality and racial differentiation? 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." Other explanations may reflect the beliefs of different regions of the country.

William's 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 the 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

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

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.

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, Summer, and Webber (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 (e.g., Kanter 1983; Peters and 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.

Thinking Sociologically

1. Critique the values suggested by Williams. What differences do you believe exists between the ones he suggested more than forty 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.

Norms

Norms are elements of non-material 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 U.S. 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 gowns or bathing suits. If you eat vegetables with a spoon or attend class in a gown or bathing suit, the chances are you will not be arrested or beaten; however, you may receive some smiles, glances, or occasional comments from others. Why? It may be easier to use a spoon for eating vegetables, and on hot days, a bathing suit may be more comfortable attire. The reason that people would express mild disapproval is that these behaviors violate folkways that exist in the United States.

Like other norms, folkways are learned in 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 the 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? No written rules are being violated in these situations, and no one is being 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 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 a few states and a strong taboo in many other states. 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, imprison, or even kill without retaliation. Laws, therefore, are formalized legislated norms that are enforced by a group designated for that purpose. In contrast, folkways and mores (unless they are made into laws) are enforced only by the members of society themselves, not by a separate group designated as enforcers.

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 does not come from formal law-enforcement officials but, rather, from the informal interaction of members of society. Members of society follow most norms, but adherence is not rigid. Adaptations to changing conditions are possible, and a certain degree of deviation from existing norms is both possible and beneficial for the effective functioning of society.

Indeed, 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,

> 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, 46)

In this case, you might decide to deviate from the norms in order 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."

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.

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.

SOCIOLOGY AT WORK

Teen Girls Help FBI Nab Cyber Stalkers

In 2008 there were an estimated 220 million Internet users in the United States, representing over 72 percent of the population. According to Nielsen Online Data (2008), the average person spends over thirty–seven hours per month on the Internet and views an average of 1,489 web pages during that time. While adults access the Internet regularly, the number of children online continues to grow. Children use personal computers for numerous reasons, including school assignments, often requiring them to access information from several online sources. In addition to school work, young persons are using the Internet to play games and to socialize. Over 90 percent of young people between twelve and seventeen years of age access the Internet regularly. In 2007, an estimated 55 percent of them had a profile on a social networking site such as Facebook or MySpace, and 47 percent admitted to uploading personal pictures onto their profile for others to view (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2007).

The fear of children becoming the victims of online predators continues to grow in conjunction with the number of young people accessing the Internet. Parents, law enforcement, and advocacy groups search for new ways to lessen the possibility that children will fall victim to pedophiles skilled in the behaviors of young people online. The FBI estimates that at any given time twenty thousand sexual predators are lurking online to persuade children to provide personal information about themselves or, even worse, to meet them outside their homes.

According to the Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the number of incidents of predators communicating with children is intensifying. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began trying to learn as much about the behavior of young people online to combat the possibility they would be convinced to meet a predator offline. However, the agents were not familiar with the sites or language used by young Internet users, and pedophiles caught on quickly, lessening the chances they would be caught.

The FBI decided to enlist the help of young people to train agents in the online culture of children. An agent sought the help of his daughter and some of her friends who regularly used the Internet and were familiar with the behaviors of other young people. When the girls first arrived, they administered a multiple choice and true/false test to measure the agents' knowledge of teen culture. Every agent failed the test. According to fourteen-year-old Mary, one of the trainers, "They, like, don't know anything." Her friend Karen, another fourteen-year-old, rolled her eyes and added, "They're, like, do you like Michael Jackson?"—obviously indicating how outdated the agents were on their understanding of young people.

By 2005, the girls had trained over five hundred FBI agents from around the country on music, movies, and computer language, particularly the abbreviations used by young Internet users. As a result, within the first few years, the FBI arrested over 2,600 online sexual predators. The agents continue to receive regular training; however, Mary and Karen are no longer the trainers because, at age sixteen, they are too old. To stay on top, the FBI makes certain their training comes from young persons knowledgeable in the culture of teenagers who regularly use the Internet.

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, to split atoms, and to produce sophisticated patriotic 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 at the rice terraces built several thousand years ago on mountainsides in Asia, which included water distribution systems that seem difficult to improve on today. These rice fields produced food for generations of families and communities without the aid of diesel tractors, complex machinery, or hybrid rice plants; many are still in use. Anthropologists know of countless instances of the survival of people under conditions that few members of "highly developed" cultures could endure. The adobe huts of Native Americans, the igloos of the Eskimos, or the bamboo houses of rural southeast Asia—none of which have indoor plumbing, heating, or air conditioning—would be inadequate homes for 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, the technology is developed by a handful of specialists, and so the general population is less technologically proficient than 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 a technology so that they can apply knowledge to master the environment and to 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.

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 of 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, 1980) 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 insure that children are cared for, how we regulate power, how we insure 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 and Bolin 2010, 42). Some of the universal institutions found throughout the world include family, economics, politics, religion, health care, 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 of 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 (Figure 4.1) without understanding the relationship between the elements of culture and institutions. They use the analogy of a rubber band ball to illustrate the relationship between the elements of culture and institutions to a rubber band ball:

"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, health care, 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, 43).

In order to help understand the relationship between the elements of culture and institutions within any

FIGURE 4-1 WEB OF CULTURE

	Non-Material Culture						Material Culture	
Structures/ Institutions	Symbols	Values	Beliefs	Norms	Emotions	Laws	Artifacts	Technology
Family Kinships								
Educational Systems								
Economic Systems								
Government/ Political systems								
Religious/Magical Systems								
Sex & Gender Systems								
Healthcare Systems								
Military Systems								
Arts and Leisure Systems								
Non-kinship Assoc./ Interest Groups								

Source: The Web of culture (Basirico and Bolin, in Arcaro and Haskell, eds., 2010, p.45.)

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 (priest, minister, rabbi, justice of the peace), what the bride is wearing, rings, invoking 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 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 and the institutions and how they may reinforce each other.

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

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

A culture is not simply an accumulation of isolated symbols, languages, values, norms, behaviors, and technology. It is a complex and diverse system of many interdependent factors influenced by physical circumstances—climate, geography, population, and plant and

animal life. Eskimos traditionally eat meat almost exclusively, live in igloos or huts made of skins, and dress 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, the stage of technological development, or the 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, the ideal and real cultures, and social institutions.

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 or women's athletic team, chemistry or social work club, or some others. More often subcultures reflect racial or ethnic differences, such as those found among Black, Polish, or Chinese Americans. Other subcultures develop around occupations: corporate, military, medical, or factory work. The Mormons, Amish, Muslims, 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, reggae, and homosexual 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 the 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 among cultures but also in the diversity of thinking and behaving of different people within a culture as well.

Thinking Sociologically

Richard Bernstein (1990, 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.

POLICY DEBATE

Bilingual Education vs. English Immersion

One of the most controversial policy debates in the United States concerns bilingual education—education that involves two languages. In the United States, these languages are English and a minority language. This debate has had a long, stormy history in the United States. In the mid-1800s, various states with large immigrant communities passed laws that allowed education in languages other than English—for example, German in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania—but then repealed those laws after World War I, largely due to nationalistic sentiments (Romaine 1989). The debate was revived when the federal government passed the Bilingual Education Act 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, 4) and that there are "special education needs of a great many students whose mother tongue is other than English" (Stoller 1976, 50). This spurred many sociologists, educators, and linguists to implement bilingual education programs in communities with large numbers of people with limited English proficiency (LEP). As of 2009, more than five million public school students had LEP; and the number is increasing (CQ Researcher, 2009). The hope was that bilingual education would reduce the LEP students' sense of alienation in an all-English world (Haugen 1987). Although some bilingual education programs are designed to maintain the native language and culture of the child ("maintenance programs"), most are aimed at providing a transition to English and to mainstream American culture ("transitional programs") (Hakuta 1986). Today, the minority language predominantly at issue is Spanish. This is becoming increasingly true as the U.S. continues a rapidly increasing shift in the racial make-up of the youth (under age eighteen) population and involves important issues of identity, learning and assimilation (Saulny 2011). Whites are now a minority of the youth in ten states. Not surprisingly, some of these states have the highest tensions over immigration and bilingual education. Whereas the controversy in the 1960s and 70s focused on the pros and cons of bilingual education, a backlash from opponents of bilingual education in the 1980s and 90s who decried its ineffectiveness has sharpened the debate to bilingual education vs. "English immersion" (CQ Researcher 2009). While the debate is still highly politically charged, it has shifted somewhat to include arguments about the pedagogical effectiveness of the respective programs.

Advocates of bilingual education claim that because federal policy has been responsible for the presence of a large part of the LEP population in the United States—for example, through the acquisition of territory (such as Puerto Rico) and through wars (such as Vietnam and the Mexican-American Wars)—there should be continued federal policy for bilingual education (Hakuta 1986). Proponents also claim that a "white, Anglo" education is demeaning and psychologically harmful to minority groups (Bernstein 1990). The crux of their argument is that teaching students in their native languages builds a stronger foundation for success in English and academics (Crawford 2009). They contend that this is because when students receive lessons in their native language, the teachers can teach at the same level that they teach English-speaking students, rather than having to simplify it in English to make it understandable to LEPs. Thus, the more the students develop their cognitive and literary skills overall, the more likely they are to acquire English-speaking skills. Proponents of bilingual education say that it is the best chance for LEP students to partake fully in the opportunities of American life (Bernstein 1990, 48).

High Culture, Folk Culture, and Popular Culture

Herbert Gans (1975) identified three "taste cultures" within the larger culture, including 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.

The National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE), for example, has argued that bilingual education programs have led to "improved academic achievement test scores, reduced rates of school dropout and student absenteeism, increased community involvement in education, and enhanced student self-esteem" for LEP students. NABE suggests that this overall improvement in the effectiveness of education benefits not only minority group members but also the future economic productivity of the United States as a whole. Additionally, it lays the foundation for improving the linguistic competencies of all Americans and enhances their understanding, tolerance, and appreciation for other cultures (Hakuta 1986)

On the other side, one of the strongest arguments presented against bilingual education and in support of English immersion contends that bilingual education delays students mastery of English (Jost 2009) and the research to support the effectiveness of bilingual education is inconsistent. Opponents of bilingual education feel that research on English immersion shows better academic gains for students. Further, however, and perhaps at the center of their argument, is their emphasis on assimilation into U.S. culture and that English is necessary for economic success in the United States (Hakuta 1986). Supporters of English immersion, additionally, feel that teaching students in their native language through bilingual programming could lead parents to the conclusion that English may not be necessary, after all, in order to succeed. The problem is compounded by the segregation of bilingual students from English-speaking students, which decreases the chances for full assimilation into American culture (Hakuta 1986). Interestingly, some opponents of bilingual education are immigrants who had to learn English and assimilate quickly upon coming to the United States at a young age. They insist that a bilingual education would have impeded their integration into American society (Romaine 1989, Porter 2009). Many opponents feel that the United States is becoming too ethnically diverse at a time when there is strong need to pull the various parts together; and the opponents argue that too much cultural diversity leads to a lack of common ground (Bernstein 1990). They maintain that bilingual education leads to cultural pluralism, rather than assimilation, and thus has negative consequences for members of minority groups and for the nation as a whole.

Clearly, the debate over bilingual education is more than a debate about language. It is a debate about cultural pluralism versus cultural assimilation and the values of each, as well as about the most effective ways of learning how to speak English.

Countercultures

A **counterculture** is a subculture that adheres to a set of beliefs and values that "rejects and opposes significant elements of the dominant culture of which it is a part" (Johnson 2000, 65). 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 60's, and some extreme right-wing religious groups of the 1980s can all be classified as countercultures. The norms and values of each of these groups were sharply in contrast with those held by conventional middle-class groups. Often, these values are not merely different from those of the dominant culture, but 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 the salvation of the world through its conversion to Krishna Consciousness. The Krishna counterculture entails considerable ritualism, ceremony, shaved heads, chant-ins, proselytizing in airports, and other

activities often viewed as countercultural. The youth movement of the 1960s, which included political activists, dropouts, 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 among youth to countercultural trends among extreme right-wing adults. Some right-wing religious groups in the 1980s and 1990s have been behind the bombing of abortion clinics, while less extreme groups have made efforts to legalize corporal punishment, mandate prayer in the public schools, and demand the inclusion of creationism in the school curriculum. With the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah 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, both domestic and foreign terrorists, disagreed with governmental policies and chose to take revenge on the citizens of our society.

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** is the culture they actually do follow. If you were asked to tell a foreign visitor about the norms and values of 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"—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 fifty-five, but many people drive

Auto racing is an example of folk culture, which reflects the tastes of the working class or ethnic groups.

at speeds of sixty-five 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, "everyone does it." Police rarely arrest all who exceed the speed limit, concentrating instead on extreme violations.

Although cultures vary in their symbols, language, and behavior, and in their subcultures, countercultures, 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. Like American suburbanites, African Bushmen and Mongolian nomads socialize and train their members in the ways of the culture, provide for work and leisure activities, and establish leaders and rulers.

Multicultural

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 America 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 they would come together and form a common

culture, including language, values, norms, etc. Other groups have traditionally been excluded, including African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. Multicultural refers to a move to recognize the contributions of all cultures within America. 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 contributions they make to the United States.

Idiocultures

Gary Fine (1979) has argued that every group forms its own culture to a certain extent and 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. When the Johnson Warehouse is destroyed in the biggest fire that ever happened in the town, they might come to refer to any big story as a "Johnson." Similarly, stories dealing with improper behavior by politicians might come to be called "Watergates" and 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.

CHAPTER REVIEW

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 ethnocentric behavior 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.

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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 actually 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 expressions of norms.

11. In addition to the nonmaterial aspects of culture such as these, 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 does follow (its real culture).

14. Multiculturalism is beginning to replace the belief that only those belonging to the dominant group (European) 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 to lessen misperceptions and increase understandings among people from diverse cultural settings.

Key Terms

artifacts Physical products or objects created through human actions

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

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

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

culture The systems of ideas, values, beliefs, knowledge, norms, customs, and technology shared by almost everyone in a particular society

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

Folk culture The culture of the working class or ethnic groups

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

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

ideal culture The norms and values that people profess to follow

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

institution A stable cluster of values, norms, statuses, and roles that develops around a basic social goal

language The systematized use of speech and hearing to communicate feelings and ideas

laws Formal, standardized expressions of norms enacted by legislative bodies to regulate certain types of behaviors

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

norms Formal and informal rules of conduct and social expectations for behavior

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

popular culture Trends, social activities, and shared experiences of everyday people (in contrast to elite culture)

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

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

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

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

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

taboos Mores that prohibit something

technology The application of nonmaterial and material knowledge by a society to maintain its standard of living and lifestyle

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

Discussion Questions

1. Make a list of leisure activities that might be considered high culture. Do the same for folk and 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. Describe what is meant by value conflict. Give examples. How are such conflicts resolved?
6. Joe listens to his radio (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

1. Something that is used to represent something else is a/an __________.

   a. ideal culture
   b. folkway
   c. more
   d. symbol

2. What does the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis suggest?

   a. Our language shapes both ours perceptions of reality and our behavior
   b. Language simply reflects one's perception of reality and behavior
   c. Some form of language has been found to be used by chimpanzees
   d. In some remote areas, verbal language is forbidden

3. Social norms are ________.

   a. either prescriptive or proscriptive
   b. consisting of several types

c. 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. more

5. Mores that prohibit something are called _____.

   a. laws
   b. social censure
   c. taboos
   d. folkways

6. Social control is essentially the ______.

   a. process of applying social sanctions
   b. formal expressions of norms
   c. method of prohibiting something
   d. 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. When does cultural lag occur?

   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 can assign symbols to represent the objects around them. T/F

13. Subcultures have their own norms and values, but 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

1. D
2. A
3. D
4. A
5. C
6. A
7. D
8. A
9. A
10. B
11. F
12. F
13. T
14. T
15. F