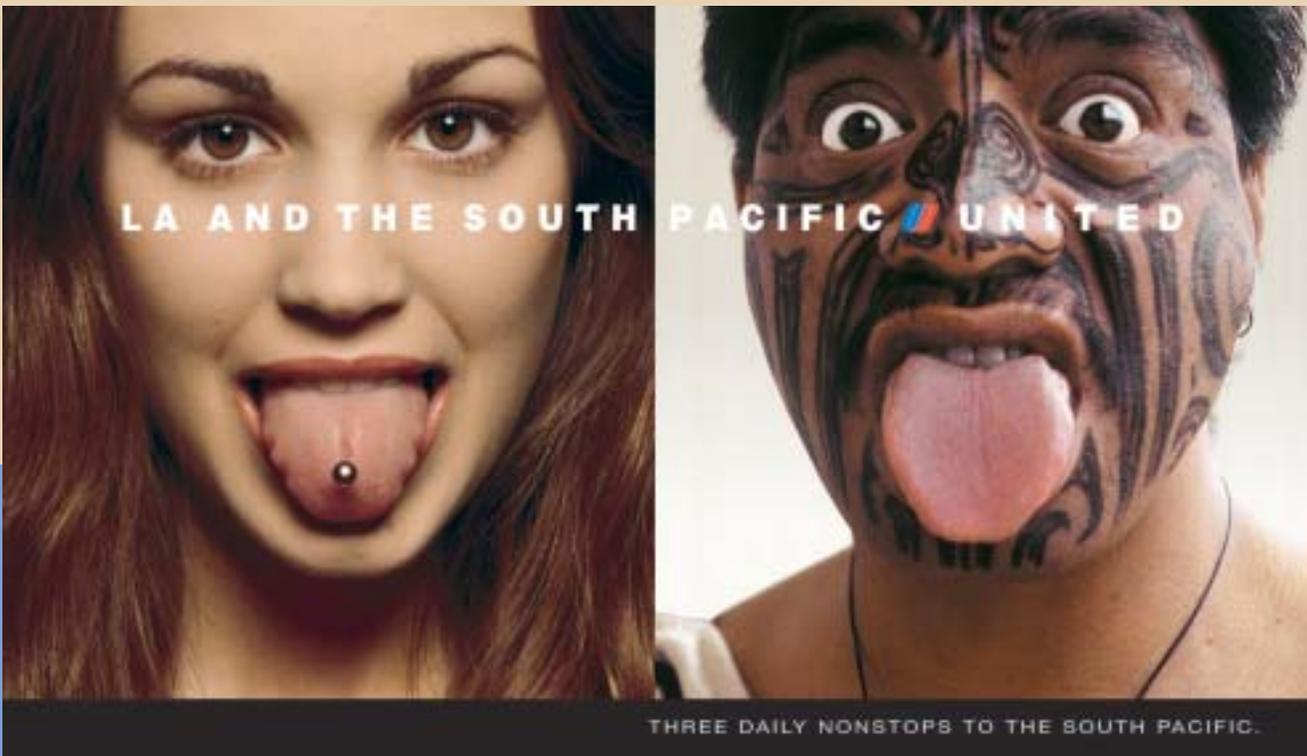


CHAPTER
3

CULTURE



Culture and Society

Development of Culture around the World

- Cultural Universals
- Innovation
- Globalization, Diffusion, and Technology

Elements of Culture

- Language
- Norms
- Sanctions
- Values

Culture and the Dominant Ideology

Cultural Variation

- Aspects of Cultural Variation
- Attitudes toward Cultural Variation

Social Policy and Culture: Bilingualism

- The Issue
- The Setting
- Sociological Insights
- Policy Initiatives

Boxes

SOCIOLOGY IN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY: Cultural Sensitivity on the Beat

SOCIAL INEQUALITY: Dominant Ideology and Poverty

Each culture has its own forms of individual expression, as this billboard for United Airlines illustrates. The young woman from Los Angeles shows off her tongue stud while the South Pacific islander puts on a ceremonial tattooed face.

Nacirema culture is characterized by a highly developed market economy which has evolved in a rich natural habitat. While much of the people's time is devoted to economic pursuits, a large part of the fruits of these labors and a considerable portion of the day are spent in ritual activity. The focus of this activity is the human body, the appearance and health of which loom as a dominant concern in the ethos of the people. While such concern is certainly not unusual, its ceremonial aspects and associated philosophy are unique.

The fundamental belief underlying the whole system appears to be that the human body is ugly and that its natural tendency is to debility and disease. Incarcerated in such a body, man's only hope is to avert these characteristics through the use of the powerful influences of ritual and ceremony. Every household has one or more shrines devoted to this purpose. The more powerful individuals in this society have several shrines in their houses, and, in fact, the opulence of a house is often referred to in terms of the number of such ritual centers it possesses. . . .

While each family has at least one such shrine, the rituals associated with it are not family ceremonies but are private and secret. The rites are normally only discussed with children, and then only during the period when they are being initiated into these mysteries. I was able, however, to establish sufficient rapport with the natives to examine these shrines and to have the rituals described to me.

The focal point of the shrine is a box or chest which is built into the wall. In this chest are kept the many charms and magical potions without which no native believes he could live. These preparations are secured from a variety of specialized practitioners. The most powerful of these are the medicine men, whose assistance must be rewarded with substantial gifts. However, the medicine men do not provide the curative potions for their clients, but decide what the ingredients should be and then write them down in an ancient and secret language. This writing is understood only by the medicine men and by the herbalists who, for another gift, provide the required charm. . . .

The daily body ritual performed by everyone includes a mouth-rite. Despite the fact that these people are so punctilious about care of the mouth, this rite involves a practice which strikes the uninitiated stranger as revolting. It was reported to me that the ritual consists of inserting a small bundle of hog hairs into the mouth, along with certain magical powders, and then moving the bundle in a highly formalized series of gestures.

(*Miner 1956: 503–04*) ■ 

Additional information about this excerpt and about those that open each subsequent chapter can be found in the SocWorld CD-ROM that accompanies this text.



Anthropologist Horace Miner cast his observant eyes on the intriguing behavior of the Nacirema. If we look a bit closer, however, some aspects of this culture may seem familiar, for what Miner is describing is actually the culture of the United States (“Nacirema” is “American” spelled backward). The “shrine” is the bathroom, and we are correctly informed that in this culture a measure of wealth is often how many bathrooms are in one’s house. The bathroom rituals make use of charms and magical potions (beauty products and prescription drugs) obtained from specialized practitioners (such as hair stylists), herbalists (pharmacists), and medicine men (physicians). Using our sociological imagination we could update the Nacirema “shrine” by describing blow-dryers, braided dental floss, Water Piks, and hair gel.

We begin to appreciate how to understand behavior when we step back and examine it thoughtfully, objectively—whether it is our own “Nacirema” culture or another one. Take the case of Fiji, an island in the Pacific. A recent study showed that for the first time eating disorders were showing up among the young people there. This was a society where, traditionally, “you’ve gained weight” was a compliment and “your legs are skinny” was a major insult. Having a robust, nicely rounded body was the expectation for both men

and women. What happened to change this cultural ideal? With the introduction of cable television in 1995, many Fiji islanders, especially girls, have come to want to look like the thin-waisted stars of *Melrose Place* and *Beverly Hills 90210*, not their full-bodied mothers and aunts. By understanding life in Fiji, we can also come to understand our own society much better (Becker 1995; Becker and Burwell 1999).

As aspects of culture become globalized—whether through the media or governmental interaction or economic transaction—how do societies change? How does our society change as we encounter cultures very different from our own? What accounts for cultural variation between and within societies? In this chapter we will see just how basic the study of culture is to sociology. We will examine the meaning of culture and society as well as the development of culture from its roots in the prehistoric human experience to the technological advances of today. The major aspects of culture—including language, norms, sanctions, and values—will be defined and explored. We will see how cultures develop a dominant ideology, and how functionalist and conflict theorists view culture. The discussion will focus both on general cultural practices found in all societies and on the wide variations that can distinguish one society from another. The social policy section will look at the conflicts in cultural values that underlie current debates over bilingualism. ■

Culture and Society

Culture is the totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects, and behavior. It includes the ideas, values, customs, and artifacts (for example, CDs, comic books, and birth control devices) of groups of people. Patriotic attachment to the flag of the United States is an aspect of culture, as is a national passion for the tango in Argentina.

Sometimes people refer to a particular person as “very cultured” or to a city as having “lots of culture.” That use of the term *culture* is different from our use in this textbook. In sociological terms, *culture* does not refer solely to the fine arts and refined intellectual taste. It consists of *all* objects and ideas within a society, including ice cream cones, rock music, and slang words. Sociologists consider both a portrait by Rembrandt and a portrait by a billboard painter to be aspects of a culture. A tribe that cultivates soil by hand has just as much of a culture as a people that relies on computer-operated machinery. Each people has a distinctive

culture with its own characteristic ways of gathering and preparing food, constructing homes, structuring the family, and promoting standards of right and wrong.

The fact that you share a similar culture with others helps to define the group or society to which you belong. A fairly large number of people are said to constitute a **society** when they live in the same territory, are relatively independent of people outside their area, and participate in a common culture. The city of Los Angeles is more populous than many nations of the world, yet sociologists do not consider it a society in its own right. Rather, it is seen as part of—and dependent on—the larger society of the United States.

A society is the largest form of human group. It consists of people who share a common heritage and culture. Members of the society learn this culture and transmit it from one generation to the next. They even preserve their distinctive culture through literature, art, video recordings, and other means of expression. If it were not for the social transmission of culture, each generation would have to reinvent television, not to mention the wheel.

Let’s Discuss How might we “update” the customs of the Nacirema?

Global View The culture unit will introduce material about many different cultures, starting with eating disorders among the Fiji islanders.

Student Alert Note that the use of the term *culture* is much broader in everyday speech than in sociology.

Classroom Tip See “Culture and Its Pervasiveness” (Class Discussion Topics, 3-2).

Let’s Discuss Who teaches a society’s culture? Parents, teachers, the media, religious and government leaders, peers, others?

Having a common culture also simplifies many day-to-day interactions. For example, when you buy an airline ticket, you know you don't have to bring along hundreds of dollars in cash. You can pay with a credit card. When you are part of a society, there are many small (as well as more important) cultural patterns that you take for granted. You assume that theaters will provide seats for the audience, that physicians will not disclose confidential information, and that parents will be careful when crossing the street with young children. All these assumptions reflect basic values, beliefs, and customs of the culture of the United States.

Language is a critical element of culture that sets humans apart from other species. Members of a society generally share a common language, which facilitates day-to-day exchanges with others. When you ask a hardware store clerk for a flashlight, you don't need to draw a picture of the instrument. You share the same cultural term for a small, battery-operated, portable light. However, if you were in England and needed this item, you would have to ask for an "electric torch." Of course, even within the same society, a term can have a number of different meanings. In the United States, *grass* signifies both a plant eaten by grazing animals and an intoxicating drug.

Development of Culture around the World

We've come a long way from our prehistoric heritage. As we begin a new millennium, we can transmit an entire book around the world via the Internet, we can clone cells, and we can prolong lives through organ transplants. The human species has produced such achievements as the ragtime compositions of Scott Joplin, the poetry of Emily Dickinson, the paintings of Vincent Van Gogh, the novels of Jane Austen, and the films of Akira Kurosawa. We can peer into the outermost reaches of the universe, and we can analyze our innermost feelings. In all these ways, we are remarkably different from other species of the animal kingdom.

Human culture has been evolving for thousands of years. The first archeological evidence of humanlike primates places our ancestors back many millions of years. About 700,000 years ago, people built hearths to harness fire. Archeologists have uncovered tools that date back about 100,000 years. From 35,000 years ago we have evidence of paintings, jewelry, and statues. By that time, elaborate ceremonies were marking marriages, births, and deaths (Harris 1997; Haviland 1999).

Tracing the development of culture is not easy. Archeologists cannot "dig up" weddings, laws, or government, but they are able to locate items that point to the emergence of cultural traditions. Our early ancestors were primates that had characteristics of human beings. These

curious and communicative creatures made important advances in the use of tools. Recent studies of chimpanzees in the wild have revealed that they frequently use sticks and other natural objects in ways learned from other members of the group. However, unlike chimpanzees, our ancestors gradually made tools from increasingly durable materials. As a result, the items could be reused and refined into more effective implements.

Cultural Universals

Despite their differences, all societies have developed certain common practices and beliefs, known as **cultural universals**. Many cultural universals are, in fact, adaptations to meet essential human needs, such as people's need for food, shelter, and clothing. Anthropologist George Murdock (1945:124) compiled a list of cultural universals. Some of these include athletic sports, cooking, funeral ceremonies, medicine, and sexual restrictions.

The cultural practices listed by Murdock may be universal, but the manner in which they are expressed varies



Cooking is a cultural universal. Both the Cambodian woman and the Moroccan women in these photos show a preference for food grilled on skewers.

from culture to culture. For example, one society may let its members choose their own marriage partners. Another may encourage marriages arranged by the parents.

Not only does the expression of cultural universals vary from one society to another, it also may change dramatically over time within a society. Each generation, and each year for that matter, most human cultures change and expand through the processes of innovation and diffusion.

Innovation

The process of introducing a new idea or object to a culture is known as *innovation*. Innovation interests sociologists because of the social consequences that introducing something new can have in any society. There are two forms of innovation: discovery and invention. A *discovery* involves making known or sharing the existence of an aspect of reality. The finding of the DNA molecule and the identification of a new moon of Saturn are both acts of discovery. A significant factor in the process of discovery is the sharing of newfound knowledge with others. By contrast, an *invention* results when existing cultural items are combined into a form that did not exist before. The bow and arrow, the automobile, and the television are all examples of inventions, as are Protestantism and democracy.

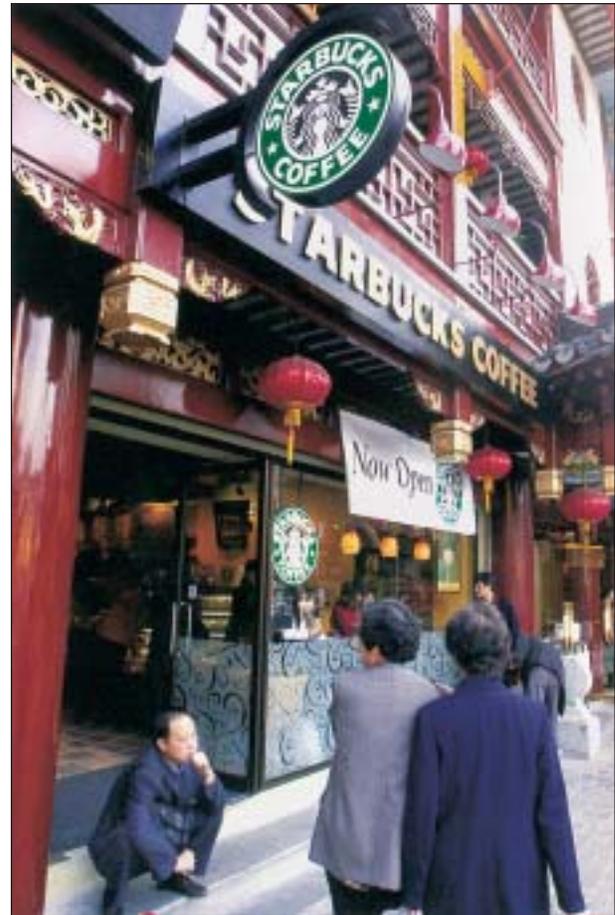
Globalization, Diffusion, and Technology

The familiar green Starbucks logo leads you into a comfortable coffee shop where you can order decaf latte and a cinnamon ring. What's unusual about that? This Starbucks happens to be located in the heart of Beijing's Forbidden City, just outside the Palace of Heavenly Purity, former residence of Chinese emperors. And it is one of 25 Starbucks stores in China opened in the year 2000 alone. The success of Starbucks in a country in which both coffee drinking and capitalism are novelties has been striking (C. Smith 2000).

The emergence of Starbucks in China represents the rapidly escalating *globalization* of culture today. More and more cultural expressions and practices are crossing national borders and having an effect on the traditions and customs of the societies exposed to them.

Sociologists use the term *diffusion* to refer to the process by which a cultural item spreads from group to group or society to society. Diffusion can occur through a variety of means, among them exploration, military conquest, missionary work, the influence of the mass media, tourism, and the Internet.

Sociologist George Ritzer (2000) coined the term “McDonaldization of society” to describe how the principles of fast-food restaurants developed in the United States have come to dominate more and more sectors of societies throughout the world. For example, hair salons and medical



When Shanghai residents meet at Starbucks for coffee, it is in a traditional-style building, but the coffee is the same you can order in Seattle. The spread of Starbucks to China is an example of cultural diffusion.

clinics now take walk-in appointments. In Hong Kong, sex selection clinics offer a menu of items—from fertility enhancement to methods of increasing the likelihood of producing a child of the desired sex. Religious groups—from evangelical preachers on local stations or websites to priests at the Vatican Television Center—use marketing techniques similar to those that sell “happy meals.”

McDonaldization is associated with the melding of cultures, so that we see more and more similarities in cultural expression. In Japan, for example, African entrepreneurs have found a thriving market for hip-hop fashions popularized by teens in the United States. In Austria, the McDonald's organization itself has drawn on the Austrians' love of coffee, cake, and conversation to create the McCafe as part of its fast-food chain. Many critical observers believe that McDonaldization and globalization serve to dilute the distinctive aspects of a society's culture (Alfino et al. 1998; Clark 1994; Rocks 1999).

Some societies try to protect themselves from the invasion of too much culture from other countries, especially the economically dominant United States. The Canadian government, for example, requires that 35 percent of a station's daytime radio programming consist of Canadian songs or artists. In Brazil, a toy manufacturer has eclipsed Barbie's popularity by designing a doll named Susi that looks more like Brazilian girls. Susi has a slightly smaller chest, much wider thighs, and darker skin than Barbie. Her wardrobe includes the skimpy bikinis favored on Brazilian beaches as well as a soccer shirt honoring the Brazilian team. According to the toy company's marketing director, "We wanted Susi to be more Latin, more voluptuous. We Latins appreciate those attributes." Brazilians seem to agree: Five Susi dolls are sold for every two Barbies (DePalma 1999; Downie 2000).

Technology in its many forms has now increased the speed of cultural diffusion and has broadened the distribution of cultural elements. Sociologist Gerhard Lenski has defined *technology* as "information about how to use the material resources of the environment to satisfy human needs and desires" (Nolan and Lenski 1999:41). Today's technological developments no longer have to await publication in journals with limited circulation. Press conferences, often simultaneously carried on the Internet, now trumpet new developments.

Technology not only accelerates the diffusion of scientific innovations but also transmits culture. Later, in Chapter 23, we will discuss the concern in many parts of the world that the English language and North American culture dominate the Internet and World Wide Web. Control, or at least dominance, of technology influences the direction of diffusion of culture. Websites abound with the most superficial aspects of U.S. culture but little information about the pressing issues faced by citizens of other nations. People all over the world find it easier to visit electronic chat rooms about daytime television soaps like *All My Children* than to learn about their own government's policies on day care or infant nutrition programs.

Sociologist William F. Ogburn (1922) made a useful distinction between the elements of material and nonmaterial culture. *Material culture* refers to the physical or technological aspects of our daily lives, including food items, houses, factories, and raw materials. *Nonmaterial culture* refers to ways of using material objects and to customs, beliefs, philosophies, governments, and patterns of communication. Generally, the nonmaterial culture is more resistant to change than the material culture. Consequently, Ogburn introduced the term *culture lag* to refer to the period of maladjustment when the nonmaterial culture is still struggling to adapt to new material conditions. For example, the ethics of using the Internet, particularly privacy and censorship issues, have not yet caught up with the explosion in Internet use and technology (see the social policy section in Chapter 23).

Imagine



If you grew up in your parents' generation—without computers, e-mail, the Internet, pagers, and cell phones—how would your daily life differ from the one you lead today?

Elements of Culture

Each culture considers its own distinctive ways of handling basic societal tasks as "natural." But, in fact, methods of education, marital ceremonies, religious doctrines, and other aspects of culture are learned and transmitted through human interactions within specific societies. Parents in India are accustomed to arranging marriages for their children, whereas parents in the United States leave marital decisions up to their offspring. Lifelong residents of Naples consider it natural to speak Italian, whereas lifelong residents of Buenos Aires feel the same way about Spanish. We'll now take a look at the major aspects of culture that shape the way the members of a society live—language, norms, sanctions, and values.

Language

The English language makes extensive use of words dealing with war. We speak of "conquering" space, "fighting" the "battle" of the budget, "waging a war" on drugs, making a "killing" on the stock market, and "bombing" an examination; something monumental or great is "the bomb." An observer from an entirely different and warless culture could gauge the importance that war and the military have had on our lives simply by recognizing the prominence that militaristic terms have in our language. In the Old West, words such as *gelding*, *stallion*, *mare*, *piebald*, and *sorrel* were all used to describe one animal—the horse. Even if we knew little of this period of history, we could conclude from the list of terms how important horses were in this culture. The Slave Indians of northern Canada, who live in a frigid climate, have 14 terms to describe ice, including 8 for different kinds of "solid ice" and others for "seamed ice," "cracked ice," and "floating ice." Clearly, language reflects the priorities of a culture (Basso 1972; Haviland 1999).

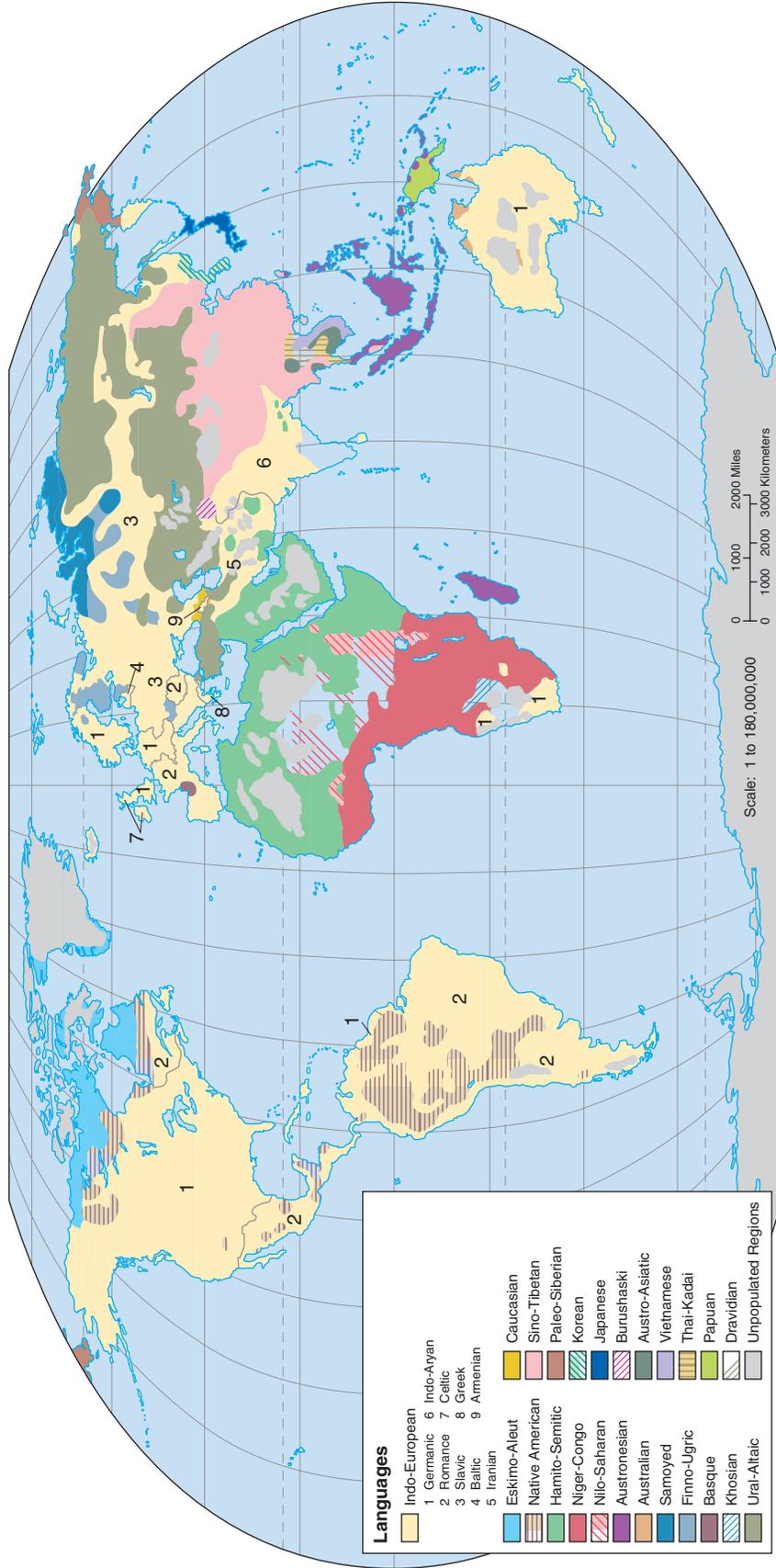
Language is, in fact, the foundation of every culture. *Language* is an abstract system of word meanings and symbols for all aspects of culture. It includes speech, written characters, numerals, symbols, and gestures and expressions of nonverbal communication. Figure 3-1 shows where the major languages of the world are spoken.

While language is a cultural universal, striking differences in the use of language are evident around the world. This is the case even when two countries use the same spoken language. For example, an English-speaking

Figure 3-1

Languages of the World

Mapping Life Worldwide to come



Source: Allen 2001.

Think About It

Why do you think people in the United States are much less likely to master more than one language than peoples in other parts of the world?

person from the United States who is visiting London may be puzzled the first time an English friend says “I’ll ring you up.” The friend means “I’ll call you on the telephone.” Similarly, the meanings of nonverbal gestures vary from one culture to another. The positive “thumbs up” gesture used in the United States has only vulgar connotations in Greece (Ekman et al. 1984).

Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis

Language does more than simply describe reality; it also serves to *shape* the reality of a culture. For example, most people in the United States cannot easily make the verbal distinctions about ice that are possible in the Slave Indian culture. As a result, they are less likely to notice such differences.

The *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*, named for two linguists, describes the role of language in interpreting our world. According to Sapir and Whorf, since people can conceptualize the world only through language, language *precedes* thought. Thus, the word symbols and grammar of a language organize the world for us. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis also holds that language is not a “given.” Rather, it is culturally determined and leads to different interpretations of reality by focusing our attention on certain phenomena.

In a literal sense, language may color how we see the world. Berlin and Kay (1991) have noted that humans possess the physical ability to make millions of color distinctions, yet languages differ in the number of colors that are recognized. The English language distinguishes between yellow and orange, but some other languages do not. In the Dugum Dani language of New Guinea’s West Highlands, there are only two basic color terms—*modla* for “white” and *mili* for “black.” By contrast, there are 11 basic terms in English. Russian and Hungarian, though, have 12 color terms. Russians have terms for light blue and dark blue, while Hungarians have terms for two different shades of red.

The feminist perspective has noted that gender-related language can reflect—although in itself it will not determine—the traditional acceptance of men and women in certain occupations. Each time we use a term such as *mailman*, *policeman*, or *fireman*, we are implying (especially to young children) that these occupations can be filled only by males. Yet many women work as *letter carriers*, *police officers*, and *firefighters*—a fact that is being increasingly recognized and legitimized through the use of such nonsexist language.

Language can also transmit stereotypes related to race. Look up the meanings of the adjective *black* in dictionaries published in the United States. You will find *dismal*, *gloomy* or *forbidding*, *destitute of moral light* or *goodness*, *atrocious*, *evil*, *threatening*, *clouded with anger*. By contrast, dictionaries list *pure* and *innocent* among the meanings of the adject-

ive *white*. Through such patterns of language, our culture reinforces positive associations with the term (and skin color) *white* and a negative association with *black*. Is it surprising, then, that a list preventing people from working in a profession is called a *blacklist*, while a lie that we think of as somewhat acceptable is called a *white lie*?

Language can shape how we see, taste, smell, feel, and hear. It also influences the way we think about the people, ideas, and objects around us. Language communicates a culture’s most important norms, values, and sanctions to people. That’s why the introduction of a new language into a society is such a sensitive issue in many parts of the world (see the social policy section of this chapter).

Nonverbal Communication

If you are in the midst of a friendly meeting and one member suddenly sits back, folds his arms, and turns down the corners of his mouth, you know at once that trouble has arrived. When you see a friend in tears, you may give a quick hug. After winning a big game you probably high-five your teammates. These are all examples of *nonverbal communication*, the use of gestures, facial expressions, and other visual images to communicate.

We are not born with these expressions. We learn them, just as we learn other forms of language, from people who share our same culture. This is as true for the basic expressions of happiness and sadness as it is for more complex emotions such as shame or distress (Fridlund et al. 1987).



Nonverbal communication can take many forms. A particularly striking example arose out of the horrors of slavery in the United States. People sympathetic to the plight of escaping slaves would hang quilts with patterns similar to this one to indicate a “safe house” or to “point” in the right direction. In this example, the pattern emphasizes the triangles in the upper left corner, pointing in a westerly direction.

Like other forms of language, nonverbal communication is not the same in all cultures. For example, sociological research at the microlevel documents that people from various cultures differ in the degree to which they touch others during the course of normal social interaction.

Norms

“Wash your hands before dinner.” “Thou shalt not kill.” “Respect your elders.” All societies have ways of encouraging and enforcing what they view as appropriate behavior while discouraging and punishing what they consider to be improper behavior. **Norms** are established standards of behavior maintained by a society.

In order for a norm to become significant, it must be widely shared and understood. For example, in movie theaters in the United States, we typically expect that people will be quiet while the film is shown. Of course, the application of this norm can vary, depending on the particular film and type of audience. People viewing a serious artistic film will be more likely to insist on the norm of silence than those watching a slapstick comedy or horror movie.

Types of Norms

Sociologists distinguish between norms in two ways. First, norms are classified as either formal or informal. **Formal norms** generally have been written down and specify strict punishments of violators. In the United States, we often formalize norms into laws, which must be very precise in defining proper and improper behavior. Sociologist Donald Black (1995) has termed **law** to be “governmental social control,” establishing laws as formal norms enforced by the state. Laws are just one example of formal norms. The requirements for a college major and the rules of a card game are also considered formal norms.

By contrast, **informal norms** are generally understood but they are not precisely recorded. Standards of proper dress are a common example of informal norms. Our society has no specific punishment or sanction for a person who comes to school, say, wearing a monkey suit. Making fun of the nonconforming student is usually the most likely response.

Norms are also classified by their relative importance to society. When classified in this way, they are known as **mores** and **folkways**.

Mores (pronounced “MOR-ays”) are norms deemed highly necessary to the welfare of a society, often because they embody the most cherished principles of a people. Each society demands obedience to its mores; violation can lead to severe penalties. Thus, the United States has strong mores against murder, treason, and child abuse, which have been institutionalized into formal norms.

Folkways are norms governing everyday behavior. Folkways play an important role in shaping the daily behavior of members of a culture. Consider, for example, something as simple as footwear. In Japan it is a folkway for youngsters to wear flip-flop sandals while learning to walk. A study of Japanese adults has found that, even barefoot, they walk as if wearing flip-flops—braking their thigh muscles and leaning forward as they step. This folkway may even explain why Japan produces so few competitive runners (Stedman 1998).

Society is less likely to formalize folkways than mores, and their violation raises comparatively little concern. For example, walking up a “down” escalator in a department store challenges our standards of appropriate behavior, but it will not result in a fine or a jail sentence.

In many societies around the world, folkways exist to reinforce patterns of male dominance. Various folkways reveal men’s hierarchical position above women within the traditional Buddhist areas of southeast Asia. In the sleeping cars of trains, women do not sleep in upper berths above men. Hospitals that house men on the first floor do not place women patients on the second floor. Even on clotheslines, folkways dictate male dominance: women’s attire is hung lower than that of men (Bulle 1987).

Imagine

You are a high school principal. What norms would you want to govern the students’ behavior? How might these norms differ from those appropriate for college students?

Acceptance of Norms

People do not follow norms, whether mores or folkways, in all situations. In some cases, they can evade a norm because they know it is weakly enforced. It is illegal for U.S. teenagers to drink alcoholic beverages, yet drinking by minors is common throughout the nation. (In fact, teenage alcoholism is a serious social problem.)

In some instances, behavior that appears to violate society’s norms may actually represent adherence to the norms of a particular group. Teenage drinkers conform to the standards of a peer group. Conformity to group norms also governed the behavior of the members of a religious cult associated with the Branch Davidians. In 1993, after a deadly gun battle with federal officials, nearly 100 members of the cult defied government orders to abandon their compound near Waco, Texas. After a 51-day standoff, the Department of Justice ordered an assault on the compound and 86 cult members died.

Norms are violated in some instances because one norm conflicts with another. For example, suppose that you live in an apartment building and one night hear the



Cockfighting anyone? It's legal in New Mexico, Louisiana, and Oklahoma (shown here) and practiced behind closed doors throughout the nation. What does this situation tell us about social norms?

screams of the woman next door, who is being beaten by her husband. If you decide to intervene by ringing their doorbell or calling the police, you are violating the norm of “minding your own business” while, at the same time, following the norm of assisting a victim of violence.

Even when norms do not conflict, there are always exceptions to any norm. The same action, under different circumstances, can cause one to be viewed either as a hero or as a villain. Secretly taping telephone conversations is normally considered illegal and abhorrent. However, it can be done with a court order to obtain valid evidence for a criminal trial. We would heap praise on a government agent who uses such methods to convict an organized crime figure. In our culture, we tolerate killing another human being if it is in self-defense, and we actually reward killing in warfare.

Acceptance of norms is subject to change as the political, economic, and social conditions of a culture are transformed. For example, traditional norms in the United States called for a woman to marry, rear children, and remain at home if her husband could support the family without her assistance. However, these norms have been changing in recent decades, in part as a result of the contemporary feminist movement (see Chapter 12). As support for traditional norms weakens, people feel free to violate them more frequently and openly and are less likely to be punished for doing so.

Sanctions

Suppose that a football coach sends a 12th player onto the field. Or imagine a college graduate showing up in shorts for a job interview at a large bank. Or consider a driver who neglects to put any money into a parking meter. These people have violated widely shared and understood norms. So what happens? In each of these situations, the person will receive sanctions if his or her behavior is detected.

Sanctions are penalties and rewards for conduct concerning a social norm. Note that the concept of *reward* is included in this definition. Conformity to a norm can lead to positive sanctions such as a pay raise, a medal, a word of gratitude, or a pat on the back. Negative sanctions include fines, threats, imprisonment, and stares of contempt.

Table 3-1 summarizes the relationship between norms and sanctions. As you can see, the sanctions that are associated with formal norms (those written down and codified) tend to be formalized as well. If a coach sends too many players onto the field, the team will be penalized 15 yards. The driver who fails to put money in the parking meter will be given a ticket and expected to pay a fine. But sanctions for violations of informal norms

Table 3-1 Norms and Sanctions

Norms	Sanctions	
	Positive	Negative
<i>Formal</i>	Salary bonus	Demotion
	Testimonial dinner	Firing from a job
	Medal	Jail sentence
	Diploma	Expulsion
<i>Informal</i>	Smile	Frown
	Compliment	Humiliation
	Cheers	Belittling

can vary. The college graduate who comes to the bank interview in shorts will probably lose any chance of getting the job; on the other hand, he or she might be so brilliant the bank officials will overlook the unconventional attire.

The entire fabric of norms and sanctions in a culture reflects that culture's values and priorities. The most cherished values will be most heavily sanctioned; matters regarded as less critical, on the other hand, will carry light and informal sanctions.

Values

We each have our own personal set of standards—which may include such things as caring or fitness or success in business—but we also share a general set of objectives as members of a society. Cultural *values* are these collective conceptions of what is considered good, desirable, and proper—or bad, undesirable, and improper—in a culture. They indicate what people in a given culture prefer as well as what they find important and morally right (or wrong). Values may be specific, such as honoring one's parents and owning a home, or they may be more general, such as health, love, and democracy. Of course, the members of a society do not uniformly share its values. Angry political debates and billboards promoting conflicting causes tell us that much.

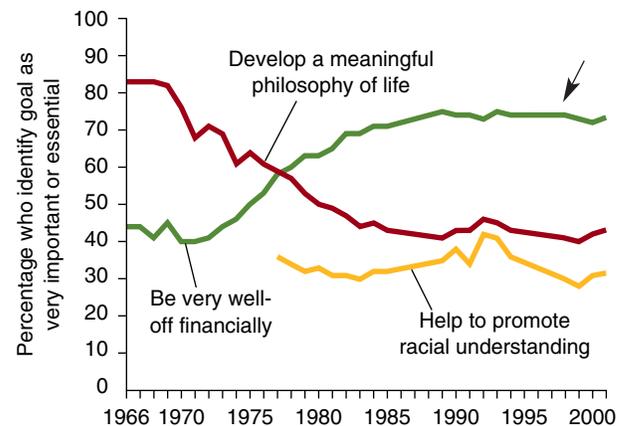
Values influence people's behavior and serve as criteria for evaluating the actions of others. There is often a direct relationship among the values, norms, and sanctions of a culture. For example, if a culture highly values the institution of marriage, it may have norms (and strict sanctions) that prohibit the act of adultery. If a culture views private property as a basic value, it will probably have stiff laws against theft and vandalism.

The values of a culture may change, but most remain relatively stable during any one person's lifetime. Socially shared, intensely felt values are a fundamental part of our lives in the United States. Sociologist Robin Williams (1970) has offered a list of basic values. His list includes achievement, efficiency, material comfort, nationalism, equality, and the supremacy of science and reason over faith. Obviously, not all 290 million people in this country agree on all these values, and we should not look on such a list as anything more than a starting point in defining the national character. Nevertheless, a review of 27 different attempts to describe the “American value system,” including the works of anthropologist Margaret Mead and sociologist Talcott Parsons, revealed an overall similarity to the values identified by Williams (Devine 1972).

Each year more than 270,000 entering college students at 430 two-year and four-year colleges fill out a questionnaire surveying their attitudes. Because this survey

Figure 3-2

Life Goals of First-year College Students in the United States, 1966–2000



Sources: UCLA Higher Research Institute, as reported in Astin et al. 1994; Sax et al. 2000.

Think About It

Why do you think these values have shifted among college students in the last few decades? Which of these values is important to you? Have your values changed since September 11, 2001?

focuses on an array of issues, beliefs, and life goals, it is commonly cited as a barometer of the values of the United States. The respondents are asked what various values are personally important to them. Over the last 33 years, the value of “being very well-off financially” has shown the strongest gain in popularity; the proportion of first-year college students who endorse this value as “essential” or “very important” rose from 44 percent in 1967 to 73 percent in 2000 (see Figure 3-2). By contrast, the value that has shown the most striking decline in endorsement by students is “developing a meaningful philosophy of life.” While this value was the most popular in the 1967 survey, endorsed by more than 80 percent of the respondents, it had fallen to sixth place on the list by 2000 and was endorsed by only 42 percent of students entering college.

During the 1980s and 1990s, there was growing support for values having to do with money, power, and status. At the same time, there was a decline in support for certain values having to do with social awareness and altruism, such as “helping others.” According to the 2000 nationwide survey, only 38 percent of first-year college students stated that “influencing social values” was an “essential” or a “very important” goal. The proportion of students for whom “helping to promote racial understanding”

was an essential or very important goal reached a record high of 42 percent in 1992 but fell to 31 percent in 2000. Like other aspects of culture, such as language and norms, a nation's values are not necessarily fixed.

Culture and the Dominant Ideology

Both functionalist and conflict theorists agree that culture and society are in harmony with each other, but for different reasons. Functionalists maintain that stability requires a consensus and the support of society's members; consequently, there are strong central values and common norms. This view of culture became popular in sociology beginning in the 1950s. It was borrowed from British anthropologists who saw cultural traits as all working toward stabilizing a culture. From a functionalist perspective, a cultural trait or practice will persist if it performs functions that society seems to need or contributes to overall social stability and consensus. This view helps explain why widely condemned social practices such as prostitution continue to survive.

Conflict theorists agree that a common culture may exist, but they argue that it serves to maintain the privileges of certain groups. Moreover, while protecting their own self-interests, powerful groups may keep others in a subservient position. The term *dominant ideology* describes the set of cultural beliefs and practices that help to maintain powerful social, economic, and political interests. This concept was first used by Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukacs (1923) and Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1929), but it did not gain an audience in the United States until the early 1970s. In Karl Marx's view, a capitalist society has a dominant ideology that serves the interests of the ruling class.

From a conflict perspective, the dominant ideology has major social significance. Not only do a society's most powerful groups and institutions control wealth and property; even more important, they control the means of producing beliefs about reality through religion, education, and the media. The feminist perspective would also argue that if all of a society's most important institutions tell women that they should be subservient to men, this

dominant ideology will help to control women and keep them in a subordinate position (Abercrombie et al. 1980, 1990; R. Robertson 1988).

A growing number of social scientists believe it is not easy to identify a "core culture" in the United States. For support, they point to the lack of consensus on national values, the diffusion of cultural traits, the diversity within our culture, and the changing views of young people (look again at Figure 3-2). Yet there is no way of denying that certain expressions of values have greater influence than others, even in so complex a society as the United States (Abercrombie et al. 1980, 1990; Archer 1988; Wuthnow and Witten 1988). Box 3-1 illustrates that there is a dominant ideology about poverty that derives its strength from the more powerful segments of society and reinforces social inequality.

Cultural Variation

Each culture has a unique character. Inuit tribes in northern Canada—wrapped in furs and dieting on whale blubber—have little in common with farmers in Southeast Asia, who dress for the heat and subsist mainly on the rice they grow in their paddies. Cultures adapt to meet specific sets of circumstances, such as climate, level of technology, population, and geography. This adaptation to different conditions shows up in differences in all elements of culture,



Cultures vary in their taste for films. Europeans and North Americans enjoyed the exotic aspects of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (shown here), but it was not well received in China. Audiences there found it slow-paced, and they were especially annoyed by the clumsy Mandarin spoken by actors more used to Cantonese-speaking roles.



Social Inequality

3-1 Dominant Ideology and Poverty



What causes people to be poor? *Individualistic* explanations emphasize personal responsibility: Poor people lack the proper work ethic, lack ability, or are unsuited to the workplace because of problems like drinking or drug abuse. *Structural* explanations, on the other hand, lay the blame for poverty on such external factors as inferior educational opportunities, prejudice, and low wages in some industries. Past research documents that people in the United States generally go along with the individualistic explanation. In short, the dominant ideology holds that people are poor largely because of their own shortcomings.

How pervasive is this view, however? Do the poor and rich alike subscribe to it? In seeking answers, sociologists have conducted studies of how various groups of people view poverty. The research has shown that people with lower incomes are more likely than the wealthy to see the larger socioeconomic system as the cause of poverty. In part this structural view, focusing on the larger job market, relieves them of some personal responsibility for their plight, but it also reflects the social reality that they are close to. On the other

hand, the wealthy tend to embrace the dominant individualistic view because continuation of the socioeconomic status quo is in their best interests. They also prefer to regard their own success as the result of their own accomplishments, with little or no help from external factors.

Sociologist John Morland (1996) surveyed 2,628 people in metropolitan Los Angeles representing a mix of Whites, African Americans, and Latinos. As ex-

... the dominant ideology holds that people are poor largely because of their own shortcomings.

pected, he found that members of racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to support structural explanations of poverty than are Whites. He found this is true even among those Blacks and Latinos who are better off economically. Apparently, they are familiar with the historical reality of race-based discrimination, and they can identify with the struggles of fellow group members.

Interestingly, while racial and ethnic minorities tend to support structural explanations more than Whites, they do not reject the individualistic view. This “dual consciousness” among minorities suggests that structural and individualistic explanations need not be considered mutually exclusive.

Is the dominant ideology on poverty widespread? Yes, but it appears that the individualist ideology is dominant in U.S. society not because of a lack of alternatives, but because those who see things differently lack the political influence and status needed to get the ear of the mainstream culture.

Let's Discuss

1. Does support for the dominant ideology about poverty divide along income lines among racial and ethnic minorities? Why or why not?
2. Does your college administration have a “dominant ideology”? How is it manifested? Are there any groups that challenge it? On what basis?

Source: Bobo 1991; Morland 1996.

including norms, sanctions, values, and language. Thus, despite the presence of cultural universals such as courtship and religion, there is still great diversity among the world's many cultures. Moreover, even *within* a single nation, certain segments of the populace develop cultural patterns that differ from the patterns of the dominant society.

Aspects of Cultural Variation

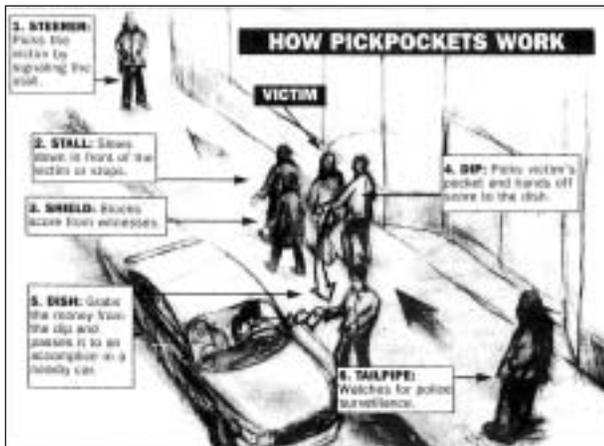
Subcultures

Rodeo cowboys, residents of a retirement community, workers on an offshore oil rig, street gangs—all are examples of what sociologists refer to as *subcultures*. A *subculture* is a segment of society that shares a distinctive pattern of mores, folkways, and values that differs from the pattern of the larger society. In a sense, a subculture can

be thought of as a culture existing within a larger, dominant culture. The existence of many subcultures is characteristic of complex societies such as the United States.

You can get an idea of the impact of subcultures within the United States by considering the variety of seasonal traditions in December. The religious and commercial celebration of the Christmas holiday is an event well-entrenched in the dominant culture of our society. However, the Jewish subculture observes Hanukkah, African Americans have begun to observe the relatively new holiday of Kwanzaa, and some people join in rituals celebrating the winter solstice.

Members of a subculture participate in the dominant culture, while at the same time engaging in unique and distinctive forms of behavior. Frequently, a subculture will develop an *argot*, or specialized language, that distinguishes it

Figure 3-3**The Argot of Pickpockets**

Source: Gearty 1996.

from the wider society. For example, if you were to join a band of pickpockets you would need to learn what the dip, dish, and tailpipe are expected to do (see Figure 3-3).

Argot allows “insiders,” the members of the subculture, to understand words with special meanings. It also establishes patterns of communication that “outsiders” can’t understand. Sociologists associated with the interactionist perspective emphasize that language and symbols offer a powerful way for a subculture to feel cohesive and maintain its identity.

Subcultures develop in a number of ways. Often a subculture emerges because a segment of society faces problems or even privileges unique to its position. Subcultures may be based on common age (teenagers or old people), region (Appalachians), ethnic heritage (Cuban Americans), occupation (firefighters), or beliefs (deaf activists working to preserve deaf culture). Certain subcultures, such as computer hackers, develop because of a shared interest or hobby. In still other subcultures, such as that of prison inmates, members have been excluded from conventional society and are forced to develop alternative ways of living.

Functionalist and conflict theorists agree that variation exists within a culture. Functionalists view subcultures as variations of particular social environments and as evidence that differences can exist within a common culture. However, conflict theorists suggest that variation often reflects the inequality of social arrangements within a society. A conflict perspective would view the challenge to dominant social norms by African American activists, the feminist movement, and the disability rights movement as a reflection of inequity based on race, gender, and disability status. Conflict theorists also argue that subcul-

tures sometimes emerge when the dominant society unsuccessfully tries to suppress a practice, such as the use of illegal drugs.

Countercultures

By the end of the 1960s, an extensive subculture had emerged in the United States composed of young people turned off by a society they believed was too materialistic and technological. This group primarily included political radicals and “hippies” who had “dropped out” of mainstream social institutions. These young men and women rejected the pressure to accumulate more and more cars, larger and larger homes, and an endless array of material goods. Instead, they expressed a desire to live in a culture based on more humanistic values, such as sharing, love, and coexistence with the environment. As a political force, this subculture opposed the United States’ involvement in the war in Vietnam and encouraged draft resistance (Flacks 1971; Roszak 1969).

When a subculture conspicuously and deliberately opposes certain aspects of the larger culture, it is known as a *counterculture*. Countercultures typically thrive among the young, who have the least investment in the existing culture. In most cases, a 20-year-old can adjust to new cultural standards more easily than someone who has spent 60 years following the patterns of the dominant culture (Zellner 1995).

In the wake of the World Trade Center attack of September 11, 2001, people around the United States learned



“IT’S ENDLESS. WE JOIN A COUNTER-CULTURE; IT BECOMES THE CULTURE. WE JOIN ANOTHER COUNTER-CULTURE; IT BECOMES THE CULTURE...”

Cultures change. Aspects we once regarded as unacceptable—such as men wearing earrings and people wearing jeans in the workplace—and associated with fringe groups such as men and women with tattoos are now widely accepted. Countercultural practices are sometimes absorbed by the mainstream culture.

of the existence of terrorist groups operating as a counterculture within their country. This was a situation that generations have lived with in Northern Ireland, Israel, the Palestinian territory, and many other parts of the world. Terrorist cells worldwide are not necessarily fueled only by outsiders. Frequently people become disenchanted with the policies of their own country, and a few take very violent steps.

Culture Shock

Anyone who feels disoriented, uncertain, out of place, even fearful, when immersed in an unfamiliar culture may be experiencing **culture shock**. For example, a resident of the United States who visits certain areas in China and wants local meat for dinner may be stunned to learn that the specialty is dog meat. Similarly, someone from a strict Islamic culture may be shocked upon first seeing the comparatively provocative dress styles and open displays of affection that are common in the United States and various European cultures.

All of us, to some extent, take for granted the cultural practices of our society. As a result, it can be surprising and even disturbing to realize that other cultures do not follow our “way of life.” The fact is that customs that seem strange to us are considered normal and proper in other cultures, which may see *our* mores and folkways as odd.

Imagine

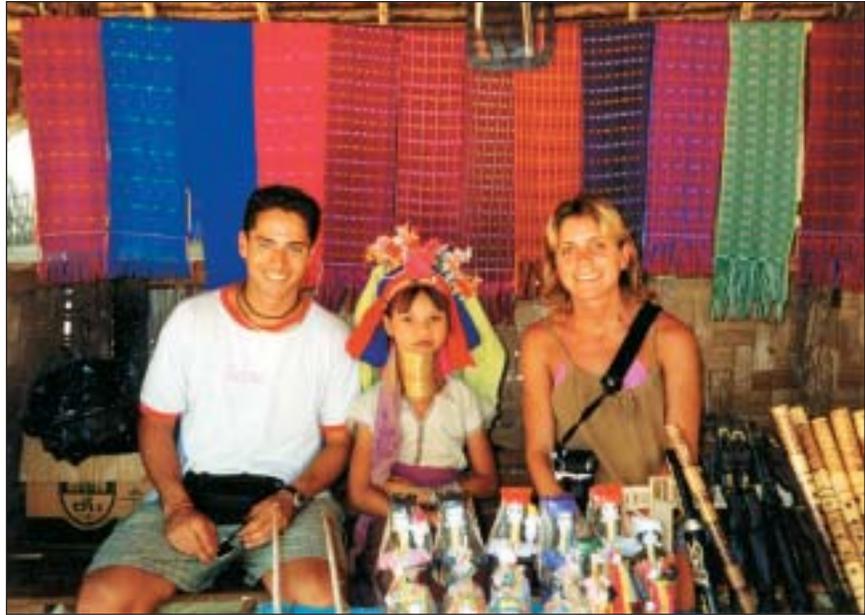
You arrive in a developing African country as a Peace Corps volunteer. What aspects of a very different culture do you think would be the hardest to adjust to? What might the citizens of that country find shocking about your culture?

Attitudes toward Cultural Variation

Ethnocentrism

Many everyday statements reflect our attitude that our culture is best. We use terms such as *underdeveloped*, *backward*, and *primitive* to refer to other societies. What “we” believe is a religion; what “they” believe is superstition and mythology (Spradley and McCurdy 1980).

It is tempting to evaluate the practices of other cultures on the basis of our own perspectives. Sociologist



Sometimes culture shock entices tourists. The “long-necked” women of the Kayan tribe have traditionally worn coils of brass weighing up to 12 pounds as a mark of beauty and tribal identity. This costly practice is dying out in their native Myanmar, but as refugees in Northern Thailand, the women find that their long necks attract much-needed income from tourists.

William Graham Sumner (1906) coined the term **ethnocentrism** to refer to the tendency to assume that one’s culture and way of life constitute the norm or are superior to all others. The ethnocentric person sees his or her own group as the center or defining point of culture and views all other cultures as deviations from what is “normal.”

Westerners who think cattle are to be used for food might look down on India’s Hindu religion and culture, which views the cow as sacred. Or, people in one culture may dismiss as unthinkable the mate selection or child-rearing practices of another culture. You might have been tempted to view the Nacirema culture from an ethnocentric point of view—until you learned it is your own culture that Miner describes (see the chapter opening essay).

Conflict theorists point out that ethnocentric value judgments serve to devalue groups and to deny equal opportunities. Psychologist Walter Stephan notes a typical example of ethnocentrism in New Mexico’s schools. Both Hispanic and Native American cultures teach children to look down when they are being criticized by adults, yet many “Anglo” (non-Hispanic White) teachers believe that you should look someone in the eye when you are being criticized. “Anglo teachers can feel that these students are being disrespectful,” notes Stephan. “That’s the kind of misunderstanding that can evolve into stereotype and prejudice” (Goleman 1991:C8).



The emergency room doctor at a California hospital became concerned when he discovered crimson slashes on a child's back. He summoned police officers to arrest the parents and arranged for a social worker to take the boy. The parents, Chinese immigrants, claimed they were caring for their child with a Chinese folk remedy called coining. It involves treating a fever by lightly running hot coins over the child's body. Chinese-speaking detectives were called in, and they were able to corroborate the parents' story and avert an arrest.

In New York City, a Danish visitor left her child in a stroller outside a café while she had lunch. Concerned diners called the police, who jailed the mother and father for two nights on charges of endangering a child. The child was placed in foster care for four days before being returned to her mother. This incident caused an uproar in Denmark, where it is customary to leave children unattended in strollers outside cafés.

Sikh children in California were removed from their elementary school for wearing daggers. But their religion requires wearing these sacred symbols at all times. They were allowed back to school when they agreed to dull the blade, sew it into its sheath, and secure it in a pouch.

Today 1 out of 10 people in the United States was born abroad, and sometimes the different cultural practices confound law enforcement officers. What can be done to increase cultural sensitivity? California has mandated 24 hours of cultural diversity and discrimination training at all police academies. But many California communities are finding that this is not enough. The Los Angeles Police Department now offers

Today 1 out of 10 people in the United States was born abroad, and sometimes the different cultural practices confound law enforcement officers.

almost 100 hours of diversity training, and Long Beach requires a three-day course. Los Angeles also established a special Asian Crime Investigation section staffed by officers who are well versed in different Asian cultures.

Training sessions need to be geared toward their audience—police officers. The police department in Phoenix, Arizona, avoids using “touchy-feely” sessions that make veteran officers uncomfortable.

Instead, it focuses on practical issues: how the sensitivity training will help in interviewing suspects, victims, and witnesses; how it will help defuse tense situations; and how it will make the officers themselves feel safer on the streets.

One important result of using sensitivity on the beat is that many would-be arrests can be averted. Once a case enters the legal system, it can be difficult to remove. According to Alison Renteln, an expert in cultural diversity and the law, the police can serve an important role as gatekeepers: “If the police have an understanding of different cultures, they can save everyone—from the defendants to the judges—a lot of problems” (p. A12).

Let's Discuss

1. Do you know anyone who was arrested for doing something that was actually an ethnic custom? How did the case proceed? Were the police trained in cultural diversity?
2. At what point does a cultural practice cross over into a crime? Should coining be considered child abuse, for example? What about female circumcision?

Source: Corwin 2000.

Functionalists, on the other hand, point out that ethnocentrism serves to maintain a sense of solidarity by promoting group pride. Denigrating other nations and cultures can enhance our own patriotic feelings and belief that our way of life is superior. Yet this type of social stability is established at the expense of other peoples. Of course, ethnocentrism is hardly limited to citizens of the United States. Visitors from many African cultures are surprised at the disrespect that children in the United States show their parents. People from India may be repelled by our practice of living in the same household with dogs and cats. Many Islamic fundamentalists in the Arab world and Asia view the United States as corrupt, decadent, and doomed to destruction. All these people may feel comforted by membership in cultures that, in their view, are superior to ours.

Cultural Relativism

While ethnocentrism evaluates foreign cultures using the familiar culture of the observer as a standard of correct behavior, **cultural relativism** views people's behavior from the perspective of their own culture. It places a priority on understanding other cultures, rather than dismissing them as “strange” or “exotic.” Unlike ethnocentrism, cultural relativism employs the kind of value neutrality in scientific study that Max Weber saw as so important. Box 3-2 illustrates how police and prosecutors need to be sensitive to different cultural practices in administering criminal justice.

Cultural relativism stresses that different social contexts give rise to different norms and values. Thus, we must examine practices such as polygamy, bullfighting, and monarchy within the particular contexts of the cultures

in which they are found. While cultural relativism does not suggest that we must unquestionably *accept* every cultural variation, it does require a serious and unbiased effort to evaluate norms, values, and customs in light of their distinctive culture.

There is an interesting extension of cultural relativism, referred to as *xenocentrism*. **Xenocentrism** is the belief that the products, styles, or ideas of one's society are *inferior* to those that originate elsewhere (Wilson et al. 1976). In a sense, it is a reverse ethnocentrism. For example, people in the United States often assume that French fashions or Japanese electronic devices are superior to our own. Are they? Or are people unduly charmed by the lure of goods from exotic places? Such fascination with overseas products can be damaging to competitors in the

United States. Some U.S. companies have responded by creating products that *sound* European, such as Häagen-Dazs ice cream (made in Teaneck, New Jersey). Conflict theorists are most likely to consider the economic impact of xenocentrism in the developing world. Consumers in developing nations frequently turn their backs on locally produced goods and instead purchase items imported from Europe or North America.

How one views a culture—whether from an ethnocentric point of view or through the lens of cultural relativism—has important consequences in the area of social policy. A hot issue today is the extent to which a nation should accommodate nonnative language speakers by sponsoring bilingual programs. We'll take a close look at this issue in the next section.

SOCIAL POLICY AND CULTURE

Bilingualism



The Issue

In Sri Lanka, Tamils seek to break away from the Sinhalese-speaking majority. Romanian radio announces that in areas where 20 percent of the people speak Hungarian, bilingual road and government signs will be used. In schools from Miami to Boston to Chicago, school administrators strive to deliver education to their Creole-speaking Haitian students. All over the world, nations are having to face the problem of how to deal with residential minorities who speak a language different from that of the mainstream culture.

Bilingualism refers to the use of two or more languages in a particular setting, such as the workplace or schoolroom, treating each language as equally legitimate. Thus, a program of bilingual education may instruct children in their native language while gradually introducing them to the language of the host society. If the curriculum is also bicultural, it will teach children about the mores and folkways of both the dominant culture and the subculture. To what degree should schools in the United States present the curriculum in a language other than English? This issue has prompted a great deal of debate among educators and policymakers.

The Setting

Languages know no political boundaries. Despite the portrayal of dominant languages in Figure 3-1 (page 00),

minority languages are common in many nations. For example, while Hindi is the most widely spoken language in India and English is widely used for official purposes, there are still 18 other languages officially recognized in this nation of about one billion people. According to the Census 2000, 45 million residents of the United States over the age of 5—that's about 18 percent of the population—speak a language other than English as their primary language. Indeed, 50 different languages are each spoken by at least 200,000 residents of this country (Bureau of the Census 2001f).

Schools throughout the world must deal with incoming students speaking many languages. Do bilingual programs in the United States help these children to learn English? It is difficult to reach firm conclusions because bilingual programs in general vary so widely in their approach. They differ in the length of the transition to English and how long they allow students to remain in bilingual classrooms. Moreover, results have been mixed. In the years since California effectively dismantled its bilingual education program, reading and math scores of students with limited English proficiency rose dramatically, especially in the lower grades. Yet a major overview of 11 different studies on bilingual education found that children with limited English who are taught using at least some of their native language perform significantly better on standardized tests than similar children who are taught only in English (J. Steinberg 2000; Greene 1998; see also Pyle 1998).

Sociological Insights

For a long time, people in the United States demanded conformity to a single language. This demand coincides with the functionalist view that language serves to unify members of a society. Immigrant children from Europe and Asia—including young Italians, Jews, Poles, Chinese, and Japanese—were expected to learn English once they entered school. In some cases, immigrant children were actually forbidden to speak their native languages on school grounds. There was little respect granted to immigrants' cultural traditions; a young person would often be teased about his or her “funny” name, accent, or style of dress.

Recent decades have seen challenges to this pattern of forced obedience to our dominant ideology. Beginning in the 1960s, active movements for Black pride and ethnic pride insisted that people regard the traditions of *all* racial and ethnic subcultures as legitimate and important. Conflict theorists explain this development as a case of subordinated language minorities seeking opportunities of self-expression. Partly as a result of these challenges, people began to view bilingualism as an asset. It seemed to provide a sensitive way of assisting millions of non-English-speaking people in the United States to *learn* English in order to function more effectively within the society.

The perspective of conflict theory also helps us understand some of the attacks on bilingual programs. Many of them stem from an ethnocentric point of view, which holds that any deviation from the majority is bad. This attitude tends to be expressed by those who wish to stamp out foreign influence wherever it occurs, especially in our schools. This view does not take into account that success in bilingual education may actually have beneficial results, such as decreasing the number of high school dropouts and increasing the number of Hispanics in colleges and universities.

Policy Initiatives

Bilingualism has policy implications largely in two areas—efforts to maintain language purity and programs to enhance bilingual education. Nations vary dramatically in their tolerance for a vari-

ety of languages. China continues to tighten its cultural control over Tibet by extending instruction of Mandarin, a Chinese dialect, from high school into the elementary schools, which will now be bilingual along with Tibetan. Even more forceful is Indonesia, which has a large Chinese-speaking minority; public display of Chinese-language signs or books is totally banned. By contrast, nearby Singapore establishes English as the medium of instruction but allows students to take their mother tongue as a second language, be it Chinese, Malay, or Tamil (Farley 1998).

In many nations, language dominance is a regional issue—for example, in Miami or along the border of Texas, where Spanish speaking is prevalent. A particularly virulent bilingual hot spot is Quebec—the French-speaking province of Canada. The Québécois, as they are known, represent 83 percent of the province's population, but only 25 percent of Canada's total population. A law implemented in 1978 mandated education in French for all Quebec's children except those whose parents or siblings had learned English elsewhere in Canada. While special laws like this one have advanced French in the province, dissatisfied Québécois have moved for secession to form their own separate country. In 1995, the people of Quebec voted to remain united with Canada by only the narrowest of margins (50.5 percent). Language and related cultural areas both unify and divide this nation of 32 million people (Schaefer 2002).

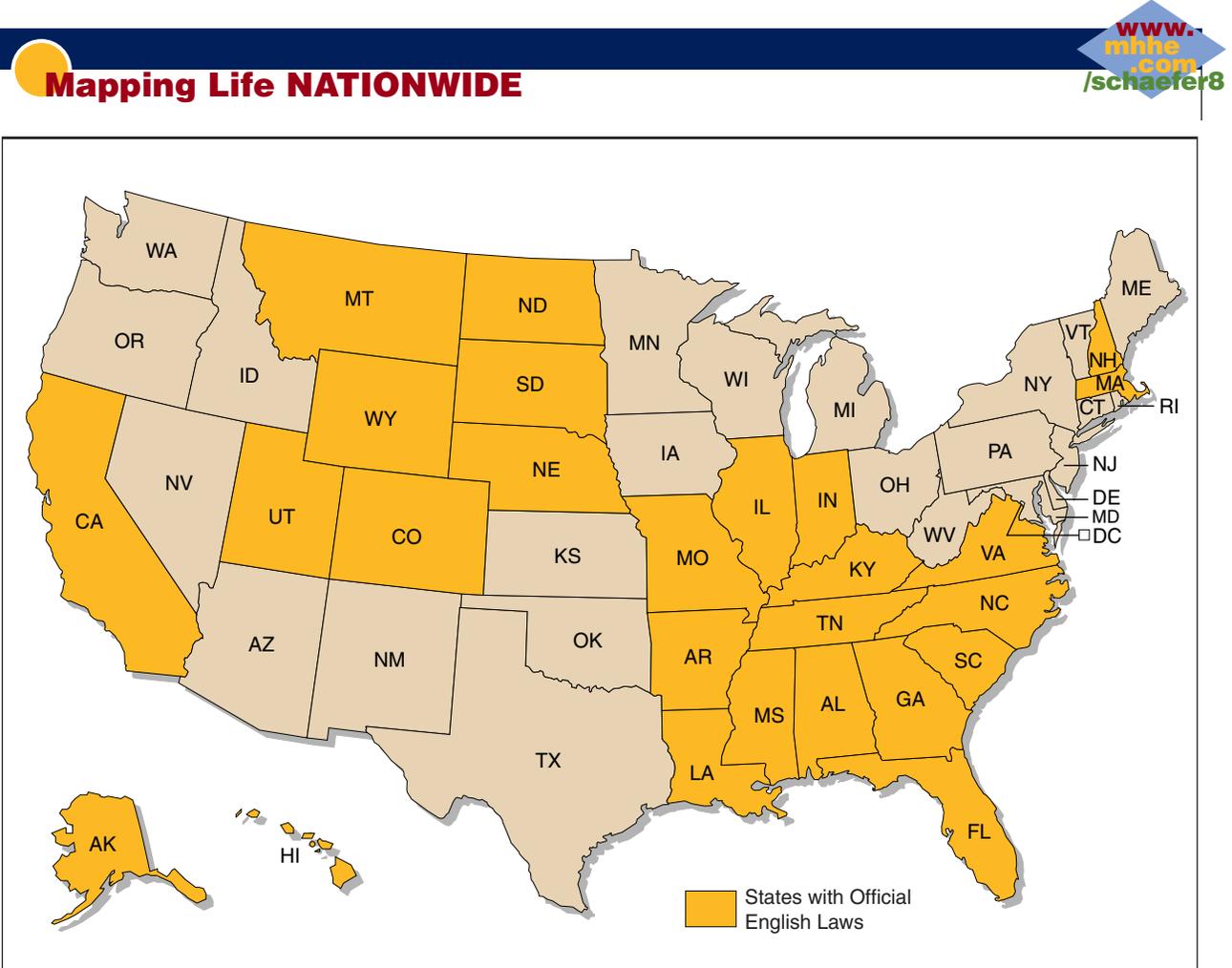
Policymakers in the United States have been somewhat ambivalent in dealing with the issue of bilingualism.



French speakers in Quebec are zealous about protecting the prevalence of their language in the Canadian province. The French Pokémon cards were a response to intense lobbying efforts.

Figure 3-4

States with Official English Laws



Source: U.S. English 2001.

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) provided for bilingual, bicultural education. In the 1970s, the federal government took an active role in establishing the proper form for bilingual programs. However, more recently, federal policy has been less supportive of bilingualism. Local school districts have been forced to provide an increased share of funding for their bilingual programs. Yet bilingual programs are an expense that many communities and states are unwilling to pay and are quick to cut back. In 1998, voters in California approved a proposition that all but eliminated bilingual education: it requires instruction in English for 1.4 million children who are not fluent in the language.

In the United States, there have been repeated efforts (most recently in 1997) to introduce a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of the nation. A major force behind the proposed amendment and other efforts to restrict bilingualism is U.S. English, a nationwide organization founded in 1983 that now claims to have one million members. Its adherents say they feel like strangers in their own neighborhoods, aliens in their own country. By contrast, Hispanic leaders see the U.S. English campaign as a veiled expression of racism.

Despite such challenges, U.S. English seems to be making headway in its efforts to oppose bilingualism. By 2001, 26 states had declared English to be their official language (see Figure 3-4). The actual impact of these measures, beyond their symbolism, is unclear.

Let's Discuss

1. How might someone with an ethnocentric point of view look at bilingualism?
2. Describe how conflict theorists would explain recent developments in bilingual programs in the United States.
3. Have you attended a school with a number of students for whom English is a second language? Did the school set up a special bilingual program? Was it effective? What is your opinion of such programs?

Chapter Resources**Summary**

Culture is the totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects, and behavior. This chapter examines the basic elements that make up a culture, social practices common to all cultures, and variations that distinguish one culture from another.

1. Sharing a similar culture helps to define the group or society to which we belong.
2. Anthropologist George Murdock has compiled a list of **cultural universals**, general practices found in every culture, including courtship, family, games, language, medicine, religion, and sexual restrictions.
3. Human culture is constantly expanding through **innovation**, including both **discovery** and **invention**.
4. **Diffusion**—the spread of cultural items from one place to another—also changes cultures. But societies resist ideas that seem too foreign as well as those perceived as threatening to their own values and beliefs.
5. **Language**, an important element of culture, includes speech, written characters, numerals, symbols, and gestures and other forms of nonverbal communication. Language both describes culture and shapes it for us.
6. Sociologists distinguish between **norms** in two ways. They are classified as either **formal** or **informal** norms and as **mores** or **folkways**.
7. The more cherished **values** of a culture will receive the heaviest **sanctions**; matters that are regarded as less critical, on the other hand, will carry light and informal sanctions.
8. The **dominant ideology** of a culture describes the set of cultural beliefs and practices that help to maintain powerful social, economic, and political interests.
9. In a sense, a **subculture** can be thought of as a culture existing within a larger, dominant culture. **Countercultures** are subcultures that deliberately oppose aspects of the larger culture.
10. People who measure other cultures by the standard of their own engage in **ethnocentrism**. Using **cultural relativism** allows us to view people from the perspective of their own culture.
11. The social policy of **bilingualism** calls for programs that use two or more languages, treating each as equally legitimate. It is supported by those who want to ease the transition of nonnative language speakers into a host society; it is opposed by those who adhere to a single cultural tradition in language.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Select three cultural universals from George Murdock's list (see p. 00) and analyze them from a functionalist perspective. Why are these practices found in every culture? What functions do they serve?
2. Drawing on the theories and concepts presented in the chapter, apply sociological analysis to one subculture with which you are familiar. Describe the norms, values, argot, and sanctions evident in that subculture.
3. In what ways is the dominant ideology of the United States evident in the nation's literature, music, movies, theater, television programs, and sporting events?

Key Terms

- Argot** Specialized language used by members of a group or subculture. (page 00)
- Bilingualism** The use of two or more languages in particular settings, such as workplaces or schoolrooms, treating each language as equally legitimate. (00)
- Counterculture** A subculture that deliberately opposes certain aspects of the larger culture. (00)
- Cultural relativism** The viewing of people's behavior from the perspective of their own culture. (00)
- Cultural universals** General practices found in every culture. (00)
- Culture** The totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects, and behavior. (00)
- Culture lag** A period of maladjustment during which the nonmaterial culture is still struggling to adapt to new material conditions. (00)
- Culture shock** The feeling of surprise and disorientation that is experienced when people encounter cultural practices different from their own. (00)
- Diffusion** The process by which a cultural item is spread from group to group or society to society. (00)
- Discovery** The process of making known or sharing the existence of an aspect of reality. (00)
- Dominant ideology** A set of cultural beliefs and practices that helps to maintain powerful social, economic, and political interests. (00)
- Ethnocentrism** The tendency to assume that one's own culture and way of life represent the norm or are superior to all others. (00)
- Folkways** Norms governing everyday social behavior whose violation raises comparatively little concern. (00)
- Formal norms** Norms that generally have been written down and that specify strict rules for punishment of violators. (00)
- Informal norms** Norms that generally are understood but are not precisely recorded. (00)
- Innovation** The process of introducing new elements into a culture through either discovery or invention. (00)
- Invention** The combination of existing cultural items into a form that did not previously exist. (00)
- Language** An abstract system of word meanings and symbols for all aspects of culture. It also includes gestures and other nonverbal communication. (00)
- Law** Governmental social control. (00)
- Material culture** The physical or technological aspects of our daily lives. (00)
- Mores** Norms deemed highly necessary to the welfare of a society. (00)
- Nonmaterial culture** Ways of using material objects as well as customs, beliefs, philosophies, governments, and patterns of communication. (00)
- Norms** Established standards of behavior maintained by a society. (00)
- Sanctions** Penalties and rewards for conduct concerning a social norm. (00)
- Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** A hypothesis concerning the role of language in shaping cultures. It holds that language is culturally determined and serves to influence our mode of thought. (00)
- Society** A fairly large number of people who live in the same territory, are relatively independent of people outside it, and participate in a common culture. (00)
- Subculture** A segment of society that shares a distinctive pattern of mores, folkways, and values that differs from the pattern of the larger society. (00)
- Technology** Information about how to use the material resources of the environment to satisfy human needs and desires. (00)
- Values** Collective conceptions of what is considered good, desirable, and proper—or bad, undesirable, and improper—in a culture. (00)
- Xenocentrism** The belief that the products, styles, or ideas of one's society are inferior to those that originate elsewhere. (00)

Additional Readings

BOOKS

- Best, Joel (ed.). 2001. *How Claims Spread: Cross-National Diffusion of Social Problems*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter. Diffusion of culture can also refer to images of social reality, as reflected in this volume.
- Cunningham, Michael, and Craig Marberry. 2000. *Crowns: Portraits of Black Women in Church Hats*. New York: Random House. This richly illustrated book makes clear that what we wear conveys the impression we wish to give others.
- DeVita, Philip B., and James D. Armstrong, eds. 1998. *Distant Mirrors: America as a Foreign: Culture*. 2d ed. Belmont, CA: West/Wadsworth. Nineteen essays by scholars from Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America who conduct observation research about U.S. society and culture from the outsider's perspective.

- Flores, William V., and Riva Benmayor (eds.). 1997. *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space and Rights*. Boston: Beacon Press. Looks at a variety of Latino communities to learn how Hispanics confront being both Latino and American.
- Kraybill, Donald B., and Steven M. Nott. 1995. *Amish Enterprises: From Plows to Profits*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. An examination of how the Amish have adapted to capitalism in the United States while maintaining their distinctive values and subculture.
- Lakoff, Robin Talmach. 2000. *Language War*. Berkeley: University of California Press. A linguist considers how language shapes a culture and the discussions within a society. Uses case studies of contemporary issues, such as the O. J. Simpson murder trial, the Ebonics controversy, and the Clinton sex scandal.
- Lutz, Catherine A., and Jane L. Collins. 1993. *Reading National Geographic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. *National Geographic* has been the window to the world, but how has it chosen to present that world? A sociologist and an anthropologist collaborate to answer that question.

Nelson, Alondra, and Thuy Linh N. Tu, with Alicia Headlam Hines (ed.). 2001. *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life*. New York: New York University Press. Analytical look at the intersection of today's technology with race, considering such topics as how ethnic groups are stereotyped about their use of the latest advances.

Zellner, William M. 1995. *Countercultures: A Sociological Analysis*. New York: St. Martin's. An overview of six countercultures found in the United States: the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, satanists, skinheads, survivalists, and the Ku Klux Klan.

JOURNALS

Among the journals that focus on issues of culture and language are *Academic Questions* (the journal of the National Association of Scholars, founded in 1988), *American Anthropologist* (1988), *Cross-Cultural Research* (1967), *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies* (2001), *Cultural Survival Quarterly* (1977), *Ethnology* (1962), *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* (1974), *MultiCultural Social Change* (1979), and *Theory, Culture, and Society* (1982).

Technology Resources



Internet Connection
 Note: While all the URLs listed were current as of the printing of this book, these sites often change. Please check our website (<http://www.mhhe.com/schaefer8>) for updates and hyperlinks to this exercise and additional exercises.

- Nonverbal communication is important element in all cultures. Through gestures and body language, we can express ideas and feelings. As with all elements of culture though, specific forms of nonverbal communication differ among different groups. Visit http://dir.yahoo.com/Arts/Performing_Arts/Dance/Folk_and_Traditional/ to sample the meanings and forms of dances in differing groups. Choose three of the groups listed on the homepage. Then link to websites dedicated to their folk or traditional forms of dance. For each, answer the following questions:
 - Does the name of the dance itself hold any special meaning?
 - What purposes/functions does the dance serve for members of the group?
 - What is the history or origin of the dance?

- Is the dance still performed today? Is it performed at a specific time of year or under certain conditions?
 - What symbolism and gestures do the dancers use? What ideas and feelings do they try to express?
 - What similarities and differences among the three groups and dances do you see?
 - Why would it be good for a social scientist studying dance forms in different cultures to keep in mind the concepts of cultural relativism, ethnocentrism, and culture shock?
- Future Culture (<http://www.wcpworld.com/future/culture.htm>) is a website that allows people to explore the concept of culture in more detail and to compare cultural information on a range of areas. Click on the quiz, take it, and answer the following questions:
 - Out of the first five questions, how many did you answer correctly?
 - How did you score overall?
 Click on your Back button and then click on links. (Note that some of these links cannot be accessed). Then click on "Oceania." Pick two of the countries.

- (c) Where is each country located?
 - (d) What is the religion for each country?
 - (e) What is the culture like for each country?
Click on your Back button and click on “Central America and the Caribbean.” Pick two of the countries listed.
 - (f) Where is each country located?
 - (g) Give a brief overview of the history of each country.
 - (h) What is the culture like for each country?
 - (i) How does the culture of these countries compare to the culture of the United States?
3. Museums Around the World ([http:// www.icom.org/vlmp/world.html](http://www.icom.org/vlmp/world.html)) has a list of countries and their museums. This site allows the public to access information about different countries through these museums. Click on “South Africa” and click on the “Robben Island Museum.” Explore the site

and be sure to check out the panoramic view of the island. Click on “Brief History.”

- (a) What was the primary use of Robben Island?
- (b) Who were some of the people imprisoned on the island?
- (c) What else was Robben Island used for?
Click on your Back button. Then click on “Bulgaria and the National Museum of History.” Click on “Virtual Tour” and then on “Hall 9.”
- (d) Who were the first settlers in Bulgaria?
Look at some of the artifacts in this hall.
- (e) Which ones did you find the most interesting? Why?
Click on “Hall 18.”
- (f) What did you learn about the First Bulgarian Kingdom?
Look at some of the artifacts in this hall.
- (g) Which ones did you like the most? Why?



Online Learning Center www.mhhe.com/schaefer8

In this chapter, you have learned that language is the foundation of every culture. For a long time, people in the United States demanded conformity to a single language. More recently, however, we have seen challenges to this forced obedience to our dominant ideology. One of the interac-

tive exercises in the student center of the Online Learning Center (www.mhhe.com/schaefer8) will only let you use a “foreign” language to do the activity. You will be taught a simple language called Pig Latin. Give it a try, and see whether or not you feel competent completing the exercise in this “foreign” language.