

# 2 Culture

## Learning Objectives



**Remember** the definitions of the key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout this chapter.



**Understand** the historical process through which human beings came to live within a symbolic world we call “culture.”



**Apply** sociology’s macro-level theoretical approaches to culture in order to better understand our way of life.



**Analyze** popular television programming and films to see how they reflect the key values of U.S. culture.



**Evaluate** cultural differences, informed by an understanding of two important sociological concepts: ethnocentrism and cultural relativism.



**Create** a broader vision of U.S. culture by studying cultural diversity, including popular culture as well as subcultural and countercultural patterns.







## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter focuses on the concept of “culture,” which refers to a society’s entire way of life. The root of the word “culture” is the same as that of the word “cultivate,” a link that suggests people living together actually “grow” their way of life over time. ■



It's late on a Tuesday night, but Fang Lin gazes intently at her computer screen. Dong Wang, who is married to Fang, walks up behind the chair.

"I'm trying to finish organizing our investments," Fang explains, speaking in Chinese.

"I didn't realize that we could do all this online in our own language," Dong says, reading the screen. "That's great. I like that a lot."

Fang and Dong are not alone in feeling this way. Back in 1990, executives of Charles Schwab & Co., a large investment brokerage corporation, gathered at the company's headquarters in San Francisco to discuss ways to expand their business. They came up with the idea that the company would profit by giving greater attention to

the increasing cultural diversity of the United States. Why? Pointing to data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau, they saw that the number of Asian Americans was rising rapidly, not just in San Francisco but all over the country. The data also showed that Asian Americans, on average, were doing pretty well financially. That's still true, with more than half of today's Asian American families earning more than \$75,000 a year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Based on such data, Schwab launched a diversity initiative, assigning executives to work on building awareness of the company among Asian Americans. Since then, the scope of the program has grown so that Schwab now employs more than 300 people who speak Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, or some other Asian language. Having account executives who speak languages other than English is smart because research shows that most immigrants who come to the United States prefer to communicate in their first language, especially when dealing with important matters like investing their money. In addition, the company has launched Web sites using Korean, Chinese, and other Asian languages. Fang Lin and Dong Wang are just two of the millions of people who have opened accounts with companies that reach out to them in a familiar language other than English.

This initiative has been extremely successful for Schwab, which now manages a much larger share of investments made by Asian Americans. Asian Americans spent \$290 billion in 2010, so any company would do well to follow the lead Schwab has taken. Other racial and ethnic categories that represent even larger markets in the United States are Hispanic Americans and African Americans (each spending more than \$500 billion in 2010) (Fattah, 2002; Karrfalt, 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

Businesses like Schwab have learned that the United States is the most *multicultural* of all the world's nations. This cultural diversity reflects our long history of receiving immigrants from all over the world. The ways of life found around the world differ not only in terms of languages and forms of dress but also in preferred foods, musical tastes, family patterns, and beliefs about right and wrong. Some of the world's people have many children, while others have few; some honor the elderly, while others seem to glorify youth. Some societies are peaceful and others warlike, and they embrace thousands of different religious beliefs and ideas about what is polite and rude, beautiful and ugly, pleasant and

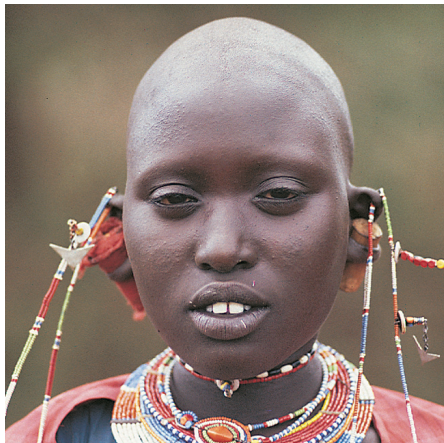
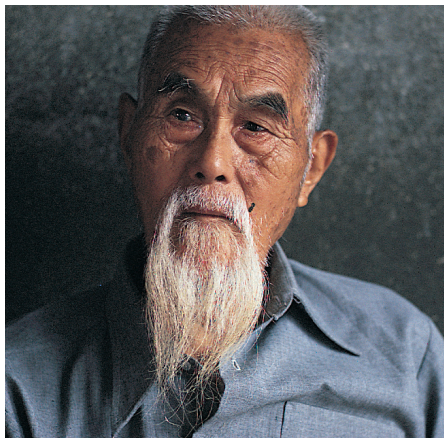
repulsive. This amazing human capacity for so many different ways of life is a matter of human culture.

## What Is Culture?

### Understand

**Culture** is the ways of thinking, ways of acting, and material objects that together form a people's way of life. When studying culture, sociologists consider both thoughts and things. **Nonmaterial culture** consists of the ideas created by members of a society, ranging from





Human beings around the globe create diverse ways of life. Such differences begin with outward appearance: Contrast the women shown here from Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Thailand, South Yemen, and the United States and the men from Taiwan (Republic of China), Ecuador, and Papua New Guinea. Less obvious but of even greater importance are internal differences, since culture also shapes our goals in life, our sense of justice, and even our innermost personal feelings.

art to Zen. By contrast, **material culture** refers to *the physical things created by members of a society*, everything from armchairs to zippers.

The terms “culture” and “society” obviously go hand in hand, but their precise meanings differ. Culture is a shared way of life or social heritage; **society** refers to *people who interact in a defined territory and share a culture*. Neither society nor culture could exist without the other.

Culture shapes not only what we do but also what we think and how we feel—elements of what we commonly, but wrongly, describe as “human nature.” The warlike Yanomamö of the Brazilian rain forest think aggression is natural, but halfway around the world, the Semai of Malaysia live quite peacefully. The cultures of the United States and Japan both stress achievement and hard work, but members of our society



## Sociology in Focus



## Confronting the Yanomamö: The Experience of Culture Shock

A small aluminum motorboat chugged steadily along the muddy Orinoco River, deep within South America's vast tropical rain forest. The anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon was nearing the end of a three-day journey to the home territory of the Yanomamö, one of the most technologically simple societies on Earth.

Some 12,000 Yanomamö live in villages scattered along the border of Venezuela and Brazil. Their way of life could not be more different from our own. The Yanomamö wear little clothing and live without electricity, cars, or other conveniences most people in the United States take for granted. They use bows and arrows for hunting and warfare, as they have for centuries. Many of the Yanomamö have had little contact with the outside world, so Chagnon would be as strange to them as they would be to him.

By 2:00 in the afternoon, Chagnon had almost reached his destination. The hot sun and humid air were becoming unbearable. Chagnon's clothes were soaked with sweat, and his face and hands were swollen from the bites of gnats swarming around him. But he scarcely noticed, so focused was he that in just a few moments, he would be face to face with people unlike any he had ever known.

Chagnon's heart pounded as the boat slid onto the riverbank. He and his guide climbed from the boat and walked toward the Yanomamö village, stooping as they pushed their way through the dense undergrowth. Chagnon describes what happened next:

I looked up and gasped when I saw a dozen burly, naked, sweaty, hideous men staring at us down the shafts of their drawn arrows! Immense wads of green tobacco were stuck between their lower teeth and lips, making them look even more hideous, and strands of dark green slime dripped or hung from their nostrils—strands so long that they clung to their [ chests ] or drizzled down their chins.



My next discovery was that there were a dozen or so vicious, underfed dogs snapping at my legs, circling me as if I were to be their next meal. I just stood there holding my notebook, helpless and pathetic. Then the stench of the decaying vegetation and filth hit me and I almost got sick. I was horrified. What kind of welcome was this for the person who came here to live with you and learn your way of life, to become friends with you? (1992:11–12)

Fortunately for Chagnon, the Yanomamö villagers recognized his guide and lowered their weapons. Reassured that he would survive the afternoon, Chagnon still was shaken by his inability to make any sense of these people. And this was going to be his home for the next year and a half! He wondered why he had given up physics to study human culture in the first place.

### Join the Blog!

Can you think of an experience of your own similar to the one described here? Do you think you may ever have *caused* culture shock in others? Go to MySocLab and join the Sociology in Focus blog to share your experiences and opinions and to see what others think.

value individualism more than the Japanese, who value collective harmony.

Given the extent of cultural differences in the world and people's tendency to view their own way of life as "natural," it is no wonder that we often feel **culture shock**, *personal disorientation when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life*. People can experience culture shock right here in the United States when, say, African Americans shop in an Iranian neighborhood in Los Angeles, college students visit the Amish countryside in Ohio, or New Yorkers travel through small towns in the Deep South. But culture shock can be intense when we travel abroad: The Sociology

in Focus box tells the story of a U.S. researcher making his first visit to the home of the Yanomamö living in the Amazon region of South America.

**January 2, high in the Andes Mountains of Peru.** In the rural highlands, people are poor and depend on one another. The culture is built on cooperation among families and neighbors who have lived nearby for many generations. Today, we spend an hour watching a new house being built. A young couple invited their families and friends, who arrived about 6:30 in the morning, and right away everyone began building. By midafternoon, most of the work had been done, and the couple then provided a large meal, drinks, and music that continued for the rest of the day.

No particular way of life is "natural" to humans, even though most people around the world view their own behavior that way. The cooperation that comes naturally in small communities high in the Andes Mountains of Peru is very different from the competitive lifestyle that is natural to so many people living in, say, Chicago or New York. Such variations come from the fact that we are creatures of culture who join

**culture** the ways of thinking, the ways of acting, and the material objects that together from a people's way of life

**nonmaterial culture** the ideas created by members of a society

**material culture** the physical things created by members of a society

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together to create our own way of life. Every other animal, from ants to zebras, behaves very much the same all around the world because behavior is guided by instincts, biological programming over which the species has no control. A few animals—notably chimpanzees and related primates—have some capacity for culture, as researchers have learned by observing them using tools and teaching simple skills to their offspring. But the creative power of humans is far greater than that of any other form of life. In short, *only humans rely on culture rather than instinct to create a way of life and ensure our survival* (Harris, 1987; Morell, 2008). To understand how human culture came to be, we need to look back at the history of our species.

## Culture and Human Intelligence

Scientists tell us that our planet is 4.5 billion years old (see the timeline inside the back cover of this text). Life appeared about 1 billion years later. Fast-forward another 2 to 3 billion years, and we find dinosaurs ruling Earth. It was only after these giant creatures disappeared—some 65 million years ago—that our history took a crucial turn with the appearance of the animals we call primates.

The importance of primates is that they have the largest brains relative to body size of all living creatures. About 12 million years ago, primates began to evolve along two different lines, leading humans away from the great apes, our closest relatives. Some 5 million years ago, our distant human ancestors climbed down from the trees of Northeast Africa to move around in the tall grasses. There, walking upright, they learned the advantages of hunting in groups and made use of fire, tools, and weapons; built simple shelters; and fashioned basic clothing. These Stone Age achievements mark the point at which our ancestors embarked on a distinct evolutionary course, making culture their primary strategy for survival. By about 250,000 years ago, our own species, *Homo sapiens*—Latin for “intelligent person”—had emerged. Humans continued to evolve so that by about 40,000 years ago, people who looked more or less like us roamed the planet. With larger brains, these “modern” *Homo sapiens* developed culture rapidly, as the wide range of tools and cave art that have survived from this period suggests.

By 12,000 years ago, the founding of permanent settlements and the creation of specialized occupations in the Middle East (in portions of modern-day Iraq and Egypt) marked a turning point. About this time, the biological forces we call instincts had almost disappeared, replaced by a more efficient survival scheme: *fashioning the natural environment to our purposes*. Ever since, humans have made and remade their world in countless ways, resulting in today’s fascinating cultural diversity.

## How Many Cultures?

How many cultures are there in the United States? One indicator of culture is language; the Census Bureau lists more than 300 languages spoken in this country, most of which were brought by immigrants from nations around the world (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).



All societies contain cultural differences that can provoke a mild case of culture shock. This woman traveling on a British subway is not sure what to make of the woman sitting next to her, who is wearing the Muslim full-face veil known as the *niqab*.

Globally, experts document almost 7,000 languages, suggesting the existence of as many distinct cultures. Yet the number of languages spoken around the world is declining, and more than half are now spoken by fewer than 10,000 people (Lewis, 2009). Experts expect that the coming decades may see the disappearance of hundreds of these languages, and perhaps half the world’s languages may even disappear before the end of this century (Crystal, 2010). Languages on the endangered list include Gullah, Pennsylvania German, and Pawnee (all spoken in the United States), Han (northwestern Canada), Oro in the Amazon region (Brazil), Sardinian (Sardinia, Italy), Aramaic (the language of Jesus of Nazareth in the Middle East), Nu Shu (a language of southern China that is the only one known to be spoken exclusively by women), and Wakka Wakka and several other Aboriginal tongues spoken in Australia. What accounts for the decline? Likely reasons include high-technology communication, increasing international migration, and an expanding global economy, all of which are reducing global cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2001; Barovick, 2002; Hayden, 2003; Lewis, 2009).

## The Elements of Culture

### Understand

Although cultures vary greatly, they all have common elements, including symbols, language, values, and norms. We begin our discussion with the one that is the basis for all the others: symbols.

### Symbols

Like all creatures, human beings sense the surrounding world, but unlike others, we also give the world *meaning*. Humans transform



## Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life



## New Symbols in the World of Instant Messaging

**Molly:** gr8 to c u!

**Greg:** u 2

**Molly:** jw about next time

**Greg:** idk, lotta work!

**Molly:** no prb, xoxoxo

**Greg:** thanx, bcnu

The world of symbols changes all the time. One reason that people create new symbols is that we develop new ways to communicate. Today, 83 percent of adults in the United States own cell phones and three-quarters of them—especially those who are young—use mobile text-messaging on a regular basis. Researchers report that cell phone owners between 18 and 24 years of age typically send or receive about 100 text messages a day (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Here are some of the most common text-messaging symbols:

b be  
bc because  
b4 before  
b4n 'bye for now  
bbl be back later  
bcnu be seeing you  
brb be right back  
cu see you  
def definitely  
g2g got to go  
gal get a life  
gmta great minds think alike

gr8 great  
hagn have a good night  
h&k hugs and kisses  
idc I don't care  
idt I don't think  
idk I don't know  
imbl it must be love  
jk just kidding  
jw just wondering  
j4f just for fun  
kc keep cool  
l8r later  
lmao laugh my ass off  
ltnc long time no see  
myob mind your own business  
no prb no problem  
omg oh my gosh  
pcm please call me

plz please  
prbly probably  
qpsa ¿Que pasa?  
rt right  
thanx thanks  
u you  
ur you are  
w/ with  
w/e whatever  
w/o without  
wan2 want to  
wtf what the freak  
y why  
2l8 too late  
? question  
2 to, two  
4 for, four



### What Do You Think?

1. What does the creation of symbols such as these suggest about culture?
2. Do you think that using such symbols is a good way to communicate? Does it lead to confusion or misunderstanding? Why or why not?
3. What other kinds of symbols can you think of that are new to your generation?

Sources: J. Rubin (2003), Berteau (2005), Bacher (2009), and Lenhart (2010).

the elements of the world into *symbols*. A **symbol** is *anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share a culture*. A word, a whistle, a wall of graffiti, a flashing red light, a raised fist—all serve as symbols. The human capacity to create and manipulate symbols is almost limitless—think of the variety of meanings associated with the simple act of winking an eye, which can convey such messages as interest, understanding, or insult.

Societies create new symbols all the time. The Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box describes some of the “cyber-symbols” that have developed along with our increasing use of computers for communication.

We are so dependent on our culture’s symbols that we often take them for granted. We become keenly aware of the importance of a symbol, however, when it is used in an unconventional way, as when someone burns a U.S. flag during a political demonstration. Entering an unfamiliar culture also reminds us of the power of symbols; culture shock is really the inability to “read” meaning in

unfamiliar surroundings. Not understanding the symbols of a culture leaves a person feeling lost and isolated, unsure of how to act, and sometimes frightened.

Culture shock is a two-way process. On one hand, the traveler *experiences* culture shock when meeting people whose way of life is dramatically different. For example, North Americans who consider dogs beloved household pets might be put off by the Masai of eastern Africa, who ignore dogs and never feed them. The same travelers might be horrified to find that in parts of Indonesia and the People’s Republic of China, people roast dogs for dinner.

On the other hand, a traveler can *inflict* culture shock on others by acting in ways that offend them. The North American who asks for a steak in an Indian restaurant is likely to offend Hindus working there because they consider cows sacred and never to be eaten. Global travel provides endless opportunities for misunderstanding.

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Symbolic meanings also vary within a single society. In the debate about flying the Confederate flag over the South Carolina statehouse a few years ago, some people saw the flag as a symbol of regional pride, while others saw it as a symbol of racial oppression.

Language

The heart of a symbolic system is **language**, a system of symbols that allows people to communicate with one another. Humans have created many alphabets to express the hundreds of languages we speak. Several examples are shown in Figure 2–1. Even rules for writing differ: Most people in Western societies write from left to right, people in northern Africa and western Asia write from right to left, and people in eastern Asia write from top to bottom. Global Map 2–1 on page 2-10 shows where in the world we find the three most widely spoken languages: English, Chinese, and Spanish.

Language allows much more than communication; it is the key to **cultural transmission**, the process by which one generation passes culture to the next. Just as our bodies contain the genes of our ancestors, our cultural heritage contains countless symbols created by those who came before us. Language is the key that unlocks centuries of accumulated wisdom.

Language skills may link us to the past, but they also spark the human imagination to connect symbols in new ways, creating an almost limitless range of future possibilities. Language sets humans apart as the only creatures who are self-conscious, aware of our limitations and ultimate mortality, yet are able to dream and hope for a future better than the present.

Does Language Shape Reality?

Does someone who speaks Cherokee, an American Indian language, experience the world differently from other North Americans who think in English or Spanish? Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf claimed that the answer is yes, because each language has its own distinctive symbols that serve as the building blocks of reality (Sapir, 1929, 1949; Whorf, 1956, orig. 1941). Further, they noted that each symbolic system has words or expressions not found in any other symbolic system. Finally, all languages connect symbols with distinctive emotions, so as multilingual people know, a single idea may “feel” different when spoken in Spanish rather than in English or Chinese.

Formally, the **Sapir-Whorf thesis** holds that people see and understand the world through the cultural lens of language. In the decades since Sapir and Whorf

People throughout the world communicate not just with spoken words but also with bodily gestures. Because gestures vary from culture to culture, they can occasionally be the cause of misunderstandings. For instance, the commonplace “thumbs up” gesture we use to express “Good job!” can get a person from the United States into trouble in Greece, Iran, and a number of other countries, where people take it to mean “Up yours!”



اِقْرَأْ	Read	독서
Arabic	English	Korean
Կարդա	διαβάζω	بخوانید.
Armenian	Greek	Farsi
អាន	אָקײַט	читать
Cambodian	Hebrew	Russian
閱讀	पढ़ना	¡Ven a leer!
Chinese	Hindi	Spanish

FIGURE 2–1 Human Languages: A Variety of Symbols  
Here the English word “read” is written in twelve of the hundreds of languages humans use to communicate with one another.

published their work, however, scholars have taken issue with this proposition. The widespread belief that, for example, Eskimos experience “snow” differently because they have many words for it is not true; Inuit speakers have about the same number of words for snow as English speakers do.

So how does language affect our reality? Current thinking is that although we do fashion reality out of our symbols, evidence supports the claim that language does not *determine* reality in the way Sapir and Whorf claimed. For example, we know that children understand the idea of “family” long before they learn that word; similarly, adults can imagine new ideas or things before devising a name for them (Kay & Kempton, 1984; Pinker, 1994).

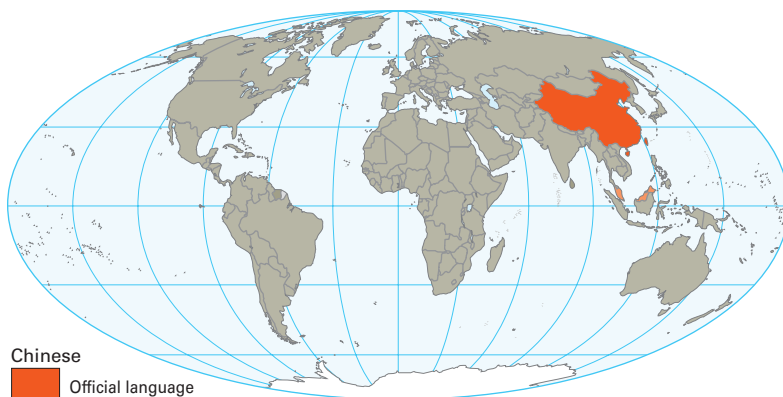
Values and Beliefs

What accounts for the popularity of movie characters such as James Bond, Neo, Erin Brockovich, “Dirty Harry,” Lara Croft, and Rocky Balboa? Each is ruggedly individualistic, going it alone and relying on personal skill and savvy to challenge “the system.” In admir-

ing such characters, we are supporting certain **values**, culturally defined standards that people use to decide what is desirable, good, and beautiful and that serve as broad guidelines for social living. Values are what people who share a culture use to make choices about how to live.

Values are broad principles that underlie **beliefs**, specific ideas that people hold to be true. In other words, values are abstract standards of goodness, and beliefs are particular matters that people accept as true or false. For example, because most U.S. adults share



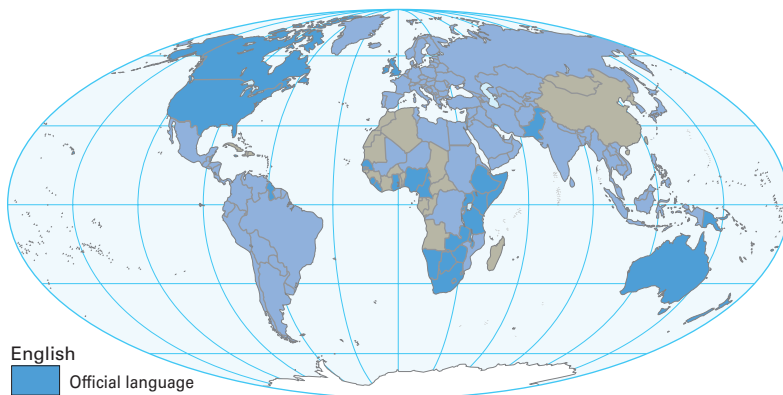


**Chinese**  
 Official language  
 Widely spoken second language

## Window on the World

### GLOBAL MAP 2-1 Language in Global Perspective

Chinese (including Mandarin, Cantonese, and dozens of other dialects) is the native tongue of one-fifth of the world's people, almost all of whom live in Asia. Although all Chinese people read and write with the same characters, they use several dozen dialects. The "official" dialect, taught in schools throughout the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Taiwan, is Mandarin (the dialect of Beijing, China's capital). Cantonese, the language of Canton, is the second most common Chinese dialect; it differs in sound from Mandarin roughly the way French differs from Spanish.



**English**  
 Official language  
 Widely spoken second language

English is the native tongue or official language in several world regions (spoken by 5 percent of humanity) and has become the preferred second language in most of the world.



**Spanish**  
 Official language  
 Widely spoken second language

The largest concentration of Spanish speakers is in Latin America and, of course, Spain. Spanish is also the second most widely spoken language in the United States.

Sources: Lewis (2009), and World Factbook (2009).

the value of providing equal opportunity for all, they believe that a qualified woman could serve as president of the United States, as the 2008 presidential campaign of Hillary Rodham Clinton demonstrated (NORC, 2011:393).

### Key Values of U.S. Culture

In a classic study of U.S. culture, sociologist Robin Williams Jr. (1970) identified ten values as central to our way of life:

- 1. Equal opportunity.** People in the United States believe that everyone should have a chance to get ahead based on talent and

**language** a system of symbols that allows people to communicate with one another

**cultural transmission** the process by which one generation passes culture to the next

**Sapir-Whorf thesis** the idea that people see and understand the world through the cultural lens of language

**values** culturally defined standards that people use to decide what is desirable, good, and beautiful and that serve as broad guidelines for social living

**beliefs** specific ideas that people hold to be true

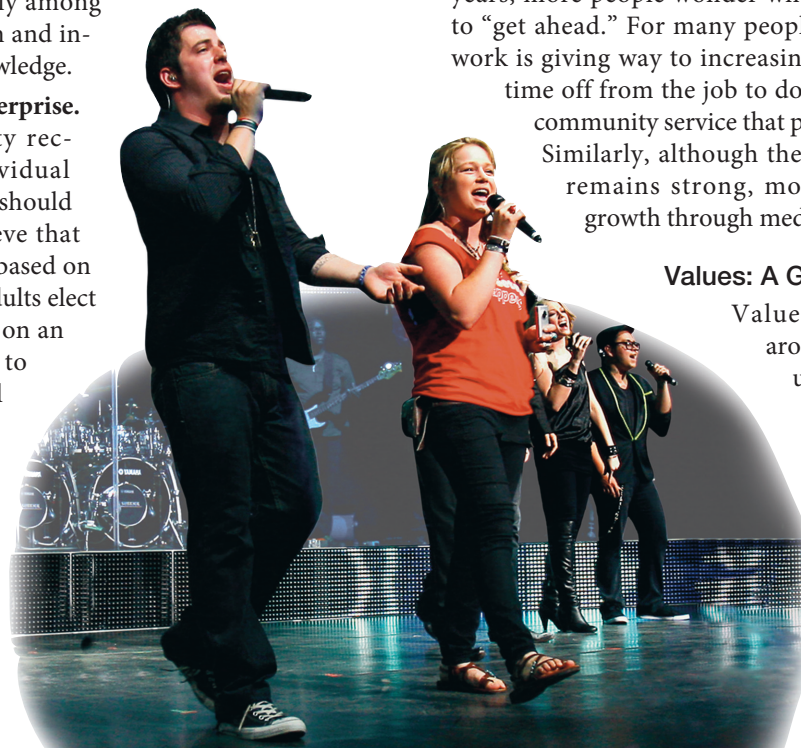
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effort. Our society does not endorse *equality of condition* in which everyone is exactly the same social standing but *equality of opportunity* in which social standing reflects people's abilities and how hard they try to get ahead. This means that society should provide the opportunity for schooling and work so people can earn social standing that reflects individual talent and effort.

2. **Individual achievement and personal success.** Our way of life encourages competition as the means for people to show what they can do. We tend to believe that the rewards people receive should more or less reflect their personal merit. A successful person is given the respect due a "winner."
3. **Material comfort.** Success in the United States generally means making money and enjoying what it will buy. Although people sometimes remark that "money won't buy happiness," most of us would love to "hit it big" all the same.
4. **Activity and work.** Our heroes, from Olympic gold medalists to the winners of television's *American Idol*, are "doers" who get the job done. Our culture values action over reflection and taking control of events over passively accepting fate.
5. **Practicality and efficiency.** We value the practical over the theoretical, what will "get us somewhere" over what is interesting "for its own sake." Many young people hear their parent give the advice: "It's good to enjoy what you study, but major in something that will help you get a job!"
6. **Progress.** We are an optimistic people who, despite waves of nostalgia, believe that the present is better than the past. We celebrate progress, viewing the "very latest" as the "very best."
7. **Science.** We expect scientists to solve problems and to improve our lives. We believe that we are rational people, and our focus on science probably explains our cultural tendency (especially among men) to devalue emotion and intuition as sources of knowledge.
8. **Democracy and free enterprise.** Members of our society recognize numerous individual rights that governments should not take away. We believe that a just political system is based on free elections in which adults elect government leaders and on an economy that responds to the choices of individual consumers.
9. **Freedom.** We favor individual initiative over collective conformity.

How does the popularity of the television show *American Idol* illustrate many of the key values of U.S. culture listed here?



While we accept the idea that everyone has at least some responsibilities to others, we believe that people should look out for themselves and be free to pursue their personal goals.

10. **Racism and group superiority.** Despite strong ideas about individualism and freedom, most people in the United States still judge individuals according to gender, race, ethnicity, and social class. In general, U.S. culture values males over females, whites over people of color, people with northwestern European backgrounds over those whose ancestors came from other parts of the world, and rich over poor. Although we describe ourselves as a nation of equals, there is little doubt that some of us are "more equal" than others.

### Values: Often in Harmony, Sometimes in Conflict

In many ways, cultural values go together. Williams's list includes examples of *value clusters* in our way of life. For instance, our way of life values activity and hard work because members of our society expect effort to lead to achievement and success and result in material comfort.

Sometimes, however, one core cultural value contradicts another. Take the first and last items on Williams's list, for example: Members of our society say they believe in equality of opportunity, yet many also look down on others because of their sex or race. Value conflict causes strain and often leads to awkward balancing acts in our beliefs. Sometimes we decide that one value is more important than another by, for example, supporting equal opportunity while opposing same-sex marriage. In these cases, we simply learn to live with the contradictions.

### Values: Change Over Time

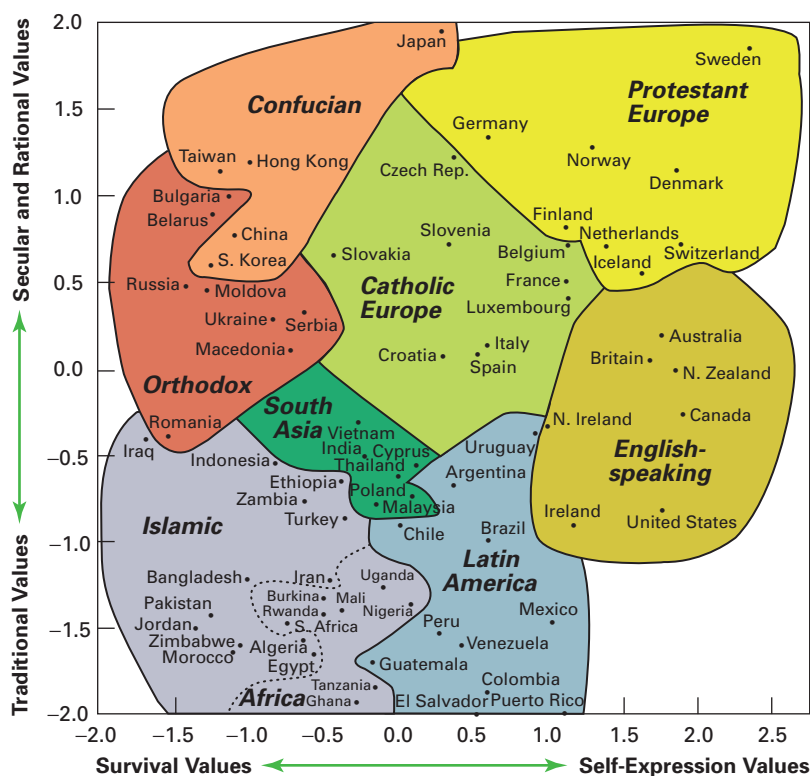
Like all elements of culture, values change over time. People in the United States have always valued hard work. But, in recent years, more people wonder whether hard work is really enough to "get ahead." For many people, too, a single-minded focus on work is giving way to increasing importance on leisure—having time off from the job to do things such as reading, travel, or community service that provide enjoyment and satisfaction. Similarly, although the importance of material comfort remains strong, more people are seeking personal growth through meditation and other spiritual activity.

### Values: A Global Perspective

Values vary from culture to culture around the world. In general, the values that are important in higher-income countries differ somewhat from those common in lower-income countries.

People in lower-income nations develop cultures that value survival. This means that people place a great deal of importance on physical safety and economic security. They worry about having enough to eat and a safe





## Global Snapshot

FIGURE 2-2 Cultural Values of Selected Countries

A general global pattern is that higher-income countries tend to be secular and rational and favor self-expression. By contrast, the cultures of lower-income countries tend to be more traditional and concerned with economic survival. Each region of the world has distinctive cultural patterns, including religious traditions, that affect values. Looking at the figure, what patterns can you see?

Sources: Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel (2010).

place to sleep at night. In addition, lower-income nations tend to be traditional, with values that celebrate the past and emphasize the importance of family and religious beliefs. These nations, in which men have most of the power, typically discourage or forbid practices such as divorce and abortion.

People in higher-income countries develop cultures that value individualism and self-expression. These countries are rich enough that most of the people take survival for granted, focusing their attention instead on which “lifestyle” they prefer and how to achieve the greatest personal happiness. In addition, these countries tend to be secular and rational, placing less emphasis on family ties and religious beliefs and more on people thinking for themselves and being tolerant of others who differ from them. In higher-income countries, women have social standing more equal to men, and there is widespread support for practices such as divorce and abortion

(World Values Survey, 2011). Figure 2-2 shows how selected countries of the world compare in terms of cultural values.

## Norms

Most people in the United States are eager to gossip about “who’s hot” and “who’s not.” Members of American Indian societies, however, typically condemn such behavior as rude and divisive. Both patterns illustrate the operation of **norms**, *rules and expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members*. In everyday life, people respond to each other with *sanctions*, rewards or punishments that encourage conformity to cultural norms.

## Mores and Folkways

William Graham Sumner (1959, orig. 1906), an early U.S. sociologist, coined the term **mores** (pronounced “MORE-ayz”) to refer to *norms that are widely observed and have great moral significance*. Certain mores include *taboos*, such as our society’s insistence that adults not engage in sexual relations with children.

People pay less attention to **folkways**, *norms for routine or casual interaction*. Examples include ideas about appropriate greetings and proper dress. A man who does not wear a tie to a formal dinner party may raise an eyebrow for violating folkways or “etiquette.” If he were to arrive at the party wearing *only* a tie, however, he would violate cultural mores and invite a more serious response.

As we learn cultural norms, we gain the capacity to evaluate our own behavior. Doing wrong (say, downloading a term paper from the Internet) can cause both *shame*—the painful sense that others disapprove of our actions—and also *guilt*—a negative judgment we make of ourselves. Only cultural creatures can experience shame and guilt. This is what the writer Mark Twain had in mind when he remarked that people are the only animals that blush—or need to.

## Ideal and Real Culture

Values and norms do not describe actual behavior so much as they suggest how we *should* behave. We must remember that *ideal* culture always differs from *real* culture, which is what actually occurs in everyday life. For example, most women and men agree on the importance of sexual faithfulness in marriage. Even so, in one study, 17 percent of married people reported having been sexually unfaithful to their spouse at some point in the marriage (NORC, 2011:2666). But a culture’s moral standards are important all the same, calling to mind the old saying “Do as I say, not as I do.”

**Watch** the video “Individual Rights vs. the Common Good” on [mysoclab.com](http://mysoclab.com)

**norms** rules and expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members

**mores** norms that are widely observed and have great moral significance

**folkways** norms for routine or casual interaction



## Technology and Culture

### Analyze

In addition to symbolic elements such as values and norms, every culture includes a wide range of physical human creations called *artifacts*. The Chinese eat with chopsticks rather than forks, the Japanese place mats rather than rugs on the floor, and many men and women in India prefer flowing robes to the close-fitting clothing common in the United States. The material culture of a people can seem as strange to outsiders as their language, values, and norms.

A society's artifacts partly reflect underlying cultural values. The warlike Yanomamö carefully craft their weapons and prize the poison tips on their arrows. By contrast, our society's emphasis on individualism and independence helps explain our high regard for the automobile: We own more than 250 million motor vehicles—more than one for every licensed driver. In recent years as gas prices have climbed, more of these cars are fuel-efficient models. Still, large heavy pickup trucks and SUVs continue to sell well, a trend no doubt encouraged by our cultural emphasis on rugged individualism.

In addition to expressing values, material culture also reflects a society's level of **technology**, *knowledge that people use to make a way of life in their surroundings*. The more complex a society's technology, the easier it is for members of that society to shape the world for themselves.

Gerhard Lenski argued that a society's level of technology is crucial in determining what cultural ideas and artifacts emerge or are even possible (Nolan & Lenski, 2010). He pointed to the importance of *sociocultural evolution*—the historical changes in culture brought about by new technology—which unfolds in terms of four major levels of development: hunting and gathering, horticulture and pastoralism, agriculture, and industry.

## Hunting and Gathering

The oldest and most basic way of living is **hunting and gathering**, *the use of simple tools to hunt animals and gather vegetation for food*. From the time of our earliest ancestors 3 million years ago until about 1800, most people in the world lived as hunters and gatherers. Today, however, this technology supports only a few societies, including the Kaska Indians of northwestern Canada, the Pygmies of Central Africa, the Khoisan of southwestern Africa, the Aborigines of Australia, and the Semai of Malaysia. Typically, hunters and gatherers spend most of their time searching for game and edible plants. Their societies are small, generally with several dozen people living in a nomadic, familylike group, moving on as they use up an area's vegetation or follow migratory animals.

Everyone helps search for food, with the very young and the very old doing what they can. Women usually gather vegetation—the primary food source for these peoples—while men do most of the hunting. Because the tasks they perform are of equal value, the



Standards of beauty—including the color and design of everyday surroundings—vary significantly from one culture to another. This Ndebele couple in South Africa dresses in the same bright colors with which they decorate their home. Members of North American and European societies, by contrast, make far less use of bright colors and intricate detail, so their housing appears much more subdued.

two sexes are regarded as having about the same social importance (Leacock, 1978).

Hunters and gatherers do not have formal leaders. They may look to one person as a *shaman*, or priest, but holding such a position does not excuse the person from the daily work of finding food. Overall, hunting and gathering is a simple and egalitarian way of life.

Limited technology leaves hunters and gatherers vulnerable to the forces of nature. Storms and droughts can easily destroy their food supply, and they have few effective ways to respond to accidents or disease. Looking back at these societies, we see that many children died in childhood, and only half lived to the age of twenty.

As people with powerful technology steadily close in on them, hunting and gathering societies are vanishing. Fortunately, studying their way of life has provided us with valuable information about our sociocultural history and our fundamental ties to the natural environment.

## Horticulture and Pastoralism

**Horticulture**, *the use of hand tools to raise crops*, appeared around 10,000 years ago. The hoe and the digging stick (used to punch holes in the ground for planting seeds) first turned up in fertile regions of the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and by 6,000 years ago, these tools were in use from Western Europe to China. Central and South Americans also learned to cultivate plants, but rocky soil and mountainous land forced members of many societies to continue to hunt and gather even as they adopted this new technology (Fisher, 1979; Chagnon, 1992).





What would it be like to live in a society with simple technology? That’s the premise of the television show *Survivor*. What advantages do societies with simple technology afford their members? What disadvantages do you see?

In especially dry regions, societies turned not to raising crops but to **pastoralism**, the domestication of animals. Throughout the Americas, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, many societies combine horticulture and pastoralism.

Growing plants and raising animals allows societies to feed hundreds of members. Pastoral peoples remain nomadic, but horticulturalists make permanent settlements. In a horticultural society, a material surplus means that not everyone has to produce food; some people are free to make crafts, become traders, or serve as full-time priests. Compared with hunters and gatherers, pastoral and horticultural societies are more unequal, with some families operating as a ruling elite.

Because hunters and gatherers have little control over nature, they generally believe that the world is inhabited by spirits. As they gain the power to raise plants and animals, however, people come to believe in one God as the creator of the world. The pastoral roots of Judaism and Christianity are evident in the term “pastor” and the common view of God as a “shepherd” who stands watch over all.

### Agriculture

Around 5,000 years ago, technological advances led to **agriculture**, large-scale cultivation using plows harnessed to animals or more

powerful energy sources. Agrarian technology first appeared in the Middle East and gradually spread throughout the world. The invention of the animal-drawn plow, the wheel, writing, numbers, and new metals changed societies so much that historians call this era the “dawn of civilization.”

By turning the soil, plows allow land to be farmed for centuries, so agrarian people can live in permanent settlements. With large food surpluses that can be transported by animal-powered wagons, populations grow into the millions. As members of agrarian societies become more and more specialized in their work, money is used as a form of common exchange, replacing the earlier system of barter. Although the development of agrarian technology expands human choices and fuels urban growth, it also makes social life more individualistic and impersonal.

Agriculture also brings about a dramatic increase in social inequality. Most people live as serfs or slaves, but a few elites are freed from labor to cultivate a “refined” way of life based on the study of philosophy, art, and literature. At all levels, men gain

pronounced power over women.

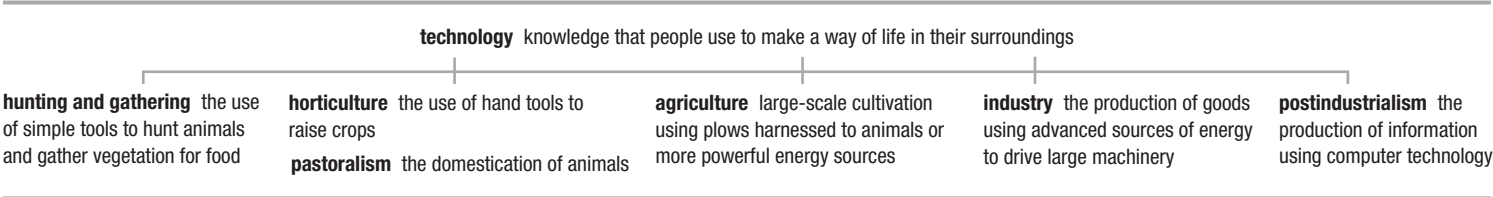
People with only simple technology live much the same the world over, with minor differences caused by regional variations in climate. But agrarian technology gives people enough control over the world that cultural diversity dramatically increases (Nolan & Lenski, 2007).

### Industry

Industrialization occurred as societies replaced the muscles of animals and humans with new forms of power. Formally, **industry** is the production of goods using advanced sources of energy to drive large machinery. The introduction of steam power, starting in England about 1775, greatly boosted productivity and transformed culture in the process.

Agrarian people work in or near their homes, but most people in industrial societies work in large factories under the supervision of strangers. In this way, industrialization pushes aside the traditional cultural values that guided family-centered agrarian life for centuries.

Industry also made the world seem smaller. In the nineteenth century, railroads and steamships carried people across land and sea faster and farther than ever before. In the twentieth century, this process continued with the invention of the automobile, the airplane, radio, television, and computers.





Industrial technology also raises living standards and extends the human life span. Schooling becomes the rule because industrial jobs demand more and more skills. In addition, industrial societies reduce economic inequality and steadily extend political rights.

It is easy to see industrial societies as “more advanced” than those relying on simpler technology. After all, industry raises living standards and stretches life expectancy to the seventies and beyond—about twice that of the Yānomamö. But as industry intensifies individualism and expands personal freedom, it weakens human community. Also, industry has led people to abuse the natural environment, which threatens us all. And although advanced technology gives us laborsaving machines and miraculous forms of medical treatment, it also contributes to unhealthy levels of stress and has created weapons capable of destroying in a flash everything that our species has achieved.

## Postindustrial Information Technology


Going beyond the four categories discussed by Lenski, we see that many industrial societies, including the United States, have now entered a postindustrial era in which more and more economic production makes use of *new information technology*. **Postindustrialism** refers to *the production of information using computer technology*. Production in industrial societies centers on factories that make things, but postindustrial production centers on computers and other electronic devices that create, process, store, and apply *ideas and information*.

The emergence of an information economy changes the skills that define a way of life. No longer are mechanical abilities the only key to success. People find that they must learn to work with symbols by speaking, writing, computing, and creating images and sounds. One result of this change is that our society now has the capacity to create symbolic culture on an unprecedented scale as people work with computers to generate new words, music, and images.

## Cultural Diversity

### Analyze

In the United States, we are aware of our cultural diversity when we hear several different languages being spoken while riding a subway in New York, Washington, D.C., or Los Angeles. Compared to a country like Japan, whose historic isolation makes it the

 **Explore** the difference industrialization makes in your local community and in counties across the United States on [mysoclab.com](http://mysoclab.com)



Sometimes the distinction between high culture and popular is not so clear. Bonham's Auction House in England recently featured spray-painted works by the graffiti artist Banksy. This particular one was expected to sell for more than \$250,000.

most *monocultural* of all high-income nations, centuries of immigration have made the United States the most *multicultural* of all high-income countries.

Between 1820 (when the government began keeping track of immigration) and 2011, almost 80 million people came to our shores from other nations. This cultural mix continues as more than 1.25 million additional people arrive each year. A century ago, almost all immigrants came from Europe; today, almost 80 percent of newcomers arrive from Latin America and Asia. To understand the reality of life in the United States, we must move beyond shared cultural patterns to consider cultural diversity.

## High Culture and Popular Culture

Cultural diversity can involve social class. In fact, in everyday talk, we usually use the term “culture” to mean art forms such as classical literature, music, dance, and painting. We describe people who attend the opera or the theater as “cultured,” thinking that they appreciate the “finer things in life.”

We speak less kindly of ordinary people, assuming that everyday culture is somehow less worthy. We are tempted to judge the music of Haydn as “more cultured” than hip-hop, couscous as better than cornbread, and polo as more polished than Ping-Pong.

**high culture** cultural patterns that distinguish a society's elite

**popular culture** cultural patterns that are widespread among a society's population

These differences arise because many cultural patterns are readily available to only some members of a society. Sociologists use the term **high culture** to refer to *cultural patterns that distinguish a society's elite* and **popular culture** to designate *cultural patterns that are widespread among a society's population*.

Common sense may suggest that high culture is superior to popular culture, but sociologists are uneasy with such judgments, for two reasons. First, neither elites nor ordinary people share all the same tastes and interests; people in both categories differ in numerous ways. Second, do we praise high culture because it is really better than popular culture or simply because its supporters are more privileged in terms of money, power, and prestige? For example, there is no difference between a violin and a fiddle; however, we name the instrument one way when it is used to produce a type of music typically enjoyed by a person of higher social position and the other when it produces music appreciated by people with lower social standing.

Subculture

The term **subculture** refers to *cultural patterns that set apart some segment of a society's population*. People who ride “chopper” motorcycles, traditional Korean Americans, New England “Yankees,” Ohio State football fans, the southern California “beach crowd,” Elvis impersonators, and wilderness campers all display subcultural patterns.

It is easy but often inaccurate to put people in subcultural categories because almost everyone participates in many subcultures without having much commitment to any one of them. In some cases, ethnicity and religion can be strong enough to set people apart from one another, with tragic results. Consider the former nation of Yugoslavia in southeastern Europe. The 1990s’ civil war there was fueled by extreme cultural diversity. This *one* small country with a population about equal to the Los Angeles metropolitan area made use of *two* alphabets, embraced *three* major religions, spoke *four* major languages, was home to *five* major nationalities, was divided into *six* separate republics, and absorbed the cultural influences of *seven* surrounding countries. The cultural conflict that plunged this nation into civil war shows that subcultures are a source not only of pleasing variety but also of tension and even violence.

Many people view the United States as a melting pot where many nationalities blend into a single “American” culture (Gardyn, 2002). But given so much cultural diversity, how accurate is the melting pot image? For one thing, subcultures involve not just *difference* but also *hierarchy*. Too often what we view as dominant or “mainstream” culture are patterns favored by powerful segments of the population, and we view the lives of disadvantaged people as “subculture.” But are the cultural patterns of rich skiers on the slopes of Aspen, Colorado, any less a subculture than the cultural patterns of skateboarders on the streets of Los Angeles? Some sociologists therefore prefer to level the playing field of society by emphasizing multiculturalism.

**subculture** cultural patterns that set apart some segment of a society's population

Multiculturalism

**Multiculturalism** is a *perspective recognizing the cultural diversity of the United States and promoting equal standing for all cultural traditions*. Multiculturalism represents a sharp change from the past, when U.S. society downplayed cultural diversity, defining itself in terms of European and especially English immigrants. Today there is a spirited debate about whether we should continue to focus on historical traditions or highlight contemporary diversity.

*E pluribus unum*, the Latin phrase that appears on each U.S. coin, means “out of many, one.” This motto symbolizes not only our national political union but also the idea that the varied experiences of immigrants from around the world come together to form a new way of life.

But from the outset, the many cultures did not melt together so much as harden into a hierarchy. At the top were the English, who formed a majority and established English as the nation’s dominant language. Further down, people of other backgrounds were advised to model themselves after “their betters” so that the “melting” was really a process of Anglicization—adoption of English ways. As multiculturalists see it, early in its history, U.S. society set up the English way of life as an ideal that everyone else should imitate and by which everyone should be judged.

Since then, historians have reported events from the point of view of the English and others of European ancestry, paying little attention to the perspectives and accomplishments of Native Americans and people of African and Asian descent. Multiculturalists criticize this as **Eurocentrism**, *the dominance of European (especially English) cultural patterns*. Molefi Kete Asante, a supporter of multiculturalism, argues that “like the fifteenth-century Europeans who could not cease believing that the Earth was the center of the universe, many [people] today find it difficult to cease viewing European culture as the center of the social universe” (1988:7).

One controversial issue involves language. Some people believe that English should be the official language of the United States; by 2011, legislatures in thirty-one states had enacted laws making it the official language (ProEnglish, 2011). But almost 60 million men and women—one in five—speak a language other than English at home. Spanish is the second most commonly spoken language in the United States, and several hundred other tongues are heard across the country, including Italian, German, French, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Russian, and a host of Native American languages. National Map 2–1 on page 2-19 shows where in the United States large numbers of people speak a language other than English at home.

**multiculturalism** a perspective recognizing the cultural diversity of the United States and promoting equal standing for all cultural traditions

**Eurocentrism** the dominance of European (especially English) cultural patterns

**Afrocentrism** emphasizing and promoting African cultural patterns



Supporters of multiculturalism say it is a way of coming to terms with our country's increasing social diversity. With the Asian American and Hispanic American populations increasing rapidly, almost half of the country's children under the age of five represent some minority category. Analysts predict that today's young people will live to see people of African, Asian, and Hispanic ancestry become the *majority* of this country's entire population.

Supporters also claim that multiculturalism is a good way to strengthen the academic achievement of African American children. To counter Eurocentrism, some multicultural educators call for **Afrocentrism**, *emphasizing and promoting African cultural patterns*, which they see as a strategy for correcting centuries of ignoring the cultural achievements of African societies and African Americans.

Although multiculturalism has found favor in recent years, it has drawn criticism as well. Opponents say it encourages divisiveness rather than unity because it urges people to identify with only their own category rather than with the nation as a whole. In addition, critics say, multiculturalism actually harms minorities themselves. Multicultural policies (from African American studies departments to all-black dorms) seem to support the same racial segregation that our nation has struggled so long to overcome. Furthermore, in the early grades, an Afrocentric curriculum may deny children important knowledge and skills by forcing them to study only certain topics from a single point of view.

Finally, the global war on terrorism has drawn the issue of multiculturalism into the spotlight. In 2005, British Prime Minister Tony Blair responded to a terrorist attack in London, stating, "It is important that the terrorists realize [that] our determination to defend our values and our way of life is greater than their determination to ... impose their extremism on the world." He went on to warn that the British government would expel Muslim clerics who encouraged hatred and terrorism (Barone, 2005; Carle, 2008). Of course, there are also many people in other parts of the world who believe that Britain and the United States have imposed their way of life on others. In a world of cultural difference and conflict, we have much to learn about tolerance and peacemaking.

## Counterculture

Cultural diversity also includes outright rejection of conventional ideas or behavior. **Counterculture** refers to *cultural patterns that strongly oppose those widely accepted within a society*.

Although we can see general patterns of "U.S. culture," this country is actually a mosaic of diverse cultural patterns shaped by factors including social class, ethnicity, age, and geographical region. What general U.S. cultural patterns do you see in a television show such as *Jersey Shore*? Is this an example of high culture or popular culture? What subcultural patterns do you see in the show?

**counterculture** cultural patterns that strongly oppose those widely accepted within a society

During the 1960s, for example, a youth-oriented counterculture rejected mainstream culture as too competitive, self-centered, and materialistic. Instead, hippies and other counterculturalists favored a collective and cooperative lifestyle in which "being" was more important than "doing" and the capacity for personal growth—or "expanded consciousness"—was prized more highly than material possessions like fancy homes and cars. Such differences led some people to "drop out" of the larger society.

Countercultures continue to flourish. At the extreme, small militaristic communities (made up of people born and bred in this country) or bands of religious militants (from other countries) exist in the United States, some of them engaging in violence intended to threaten our way of life.

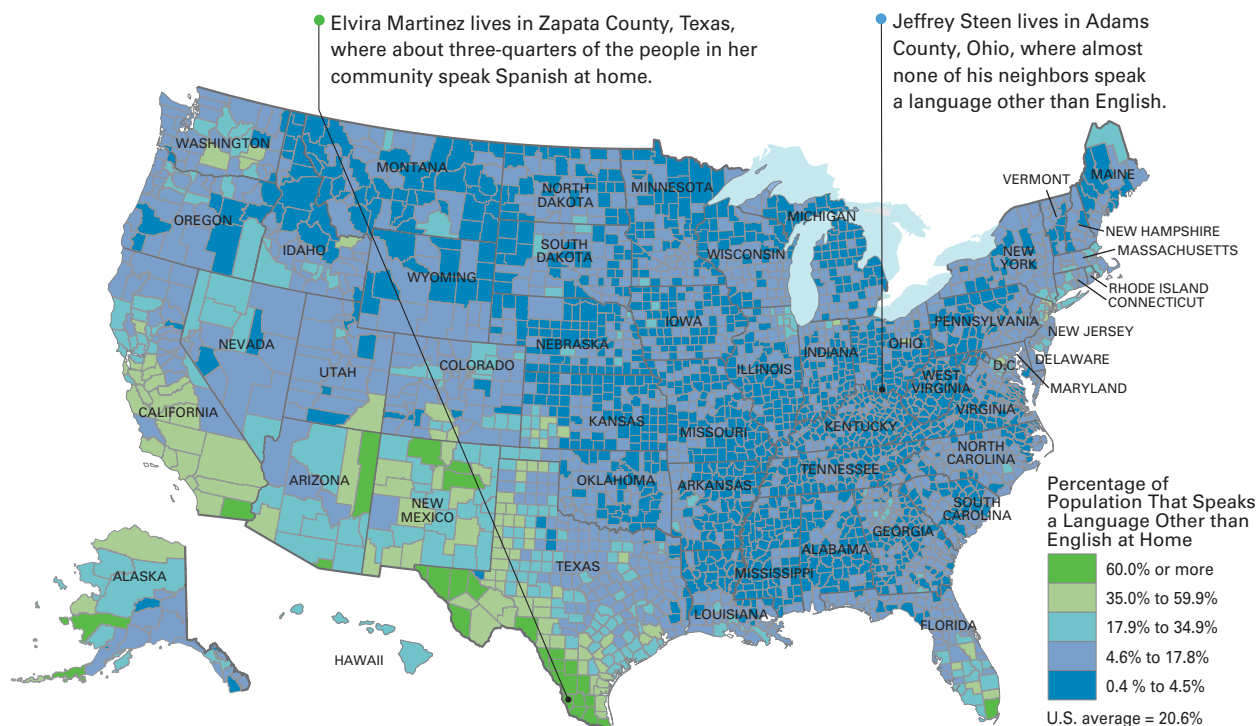
## Cultural Change

Perhaps the most basic human truth is that "all things shall pass." Even the dinosaurs, which thrived on this planet for 160 million years, exist today only as fossils. Will humanity survive for millions of years to come? All we can say with certainty is that given our reliance on culture, the human record will show continuous change.

Figure 2-3 on page 2-19 shows changes in attitudes among first-year college students between 1969 (the height of the 1960s' counterculture) and 2010. Some attitudes have changed only slightly: Today, as a generation ago, most men and women look forward to raising a family. But today's students are much less concerned with developing a philosophy of life and are much more interested in making money.

Change in one dimension of a cultural system usually sparks changes in others. For example, today's college women are far more interested in making money because women are much more likely to be in the labor force than their mothers or grandmothers were. Working for income may not change their interest in having a family, but it does increase their age at first marriage and the divorce rate. Such connections






## Seeing Ourselves

### NATIONAL MAP 2-1 Language Diversity across the United States

Of more than 289 million people age five or older in the United States, the Census Bureau reports that nearly 60 million (20.6 percent) speak a language other than English at home. Of these, 62 percent speak Spanish and 15.7 percent use an Asian language (the Census Bureau lists thirty-nine languages and language categories, each of which is favored by more than 100,000 people). The map shows that non-English speakers are concentrated in certain regions of the country. Which ones? What do you think accounts for this pattern?

 **Explore** the percentage of foreign-born people in your local community and in counties across the United States on [mysoclab.com](http://mysoclab.com)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2010).

illustrate the principle of **cultural integration**, the close relationships among various elements of a cultural system.

### Cultural Lag

Some parts of a cultural system change faster than others. William Ogburn (1964) observed that technology moves quickly, generating new elements of material culture (such as test-tube babies) faster than nonmaterial culture (such as ideas about parenthood) can keep up with them. Ogburn called this inconsistency **cultural lag**, the fact that some cultural elements change more quickly than others, disrupting a cultural system. In a world in which a woman can give birth to a child by using another woman's egg, which has been

fertilized in a laboratory with the sperm of a total stranger, how are we to apply traditional ideas about motherhood and fatherhood?


### Causes of Cultural Change

Cultural changes are set in motion in three ways. The first is *invention*, the process of creating new cultural elements. Invention has given us the telephone (1876), the airplane (1903), and the computer (late 1940s), each of which changed our way of life. The process of invention goes on all the time, as indicated by the thousands of applications submitted every year to the U.S. Patent Office. The timeline inside the back cover of this book shows other inventions that have helped change our culture.

*Discovery*, a second cause of change, involves recognizing and understanding more fully something already in existence, from a distant star or the foods of another culture to women's athletic

**cultural integration** the close relationships among various elements of a cultural system

**cultural lag** the fact that some cultural elements change more quickly than others, disrupting a cultural system

 **Read** "Gangstas, Thugs, and Hustlas: The Code of the Street in Rap Music" by Charis Kubrin on [mysoclab.com](http://mysoclab.com)



ability. Many discoveries result from painstaking scientific research, and others happen by a stroke of luck, as in 1898, when Marie Curie unintentionally left a rock on a piece of photographic paper, noticed that emissions from the rock had exposed the paper, and thus discovered radium.

The third cause of cultural change is *diffusion*, the spread of objects or traits from one society to another. Because new technology sends information around the globe in seconds, cultural diffusion has never been greater than it is today.

Our own way of life has contributed many significant cultural elements to the world, ranging from computers to jazz music. Of course, diffusion works the other way, too, so that much of what we assume is “American” actually comes from elsewhere. Most of the clothing we wear and the furniture we use, as well as the watch we carry and the money we spend, all had their origins in other cultures (Linton, 1937a).

It is certainly correct to talk about “American culture,” especially when we are comparing our way of life to the culture of some other society. But this discussion of cultural change shows us that culture is always complex and always changing. The Thinking About Diversity box on page 2-20 offers a good example of the diverse and dynamic character of culture with a brief look at the history of rock-and-roll music.

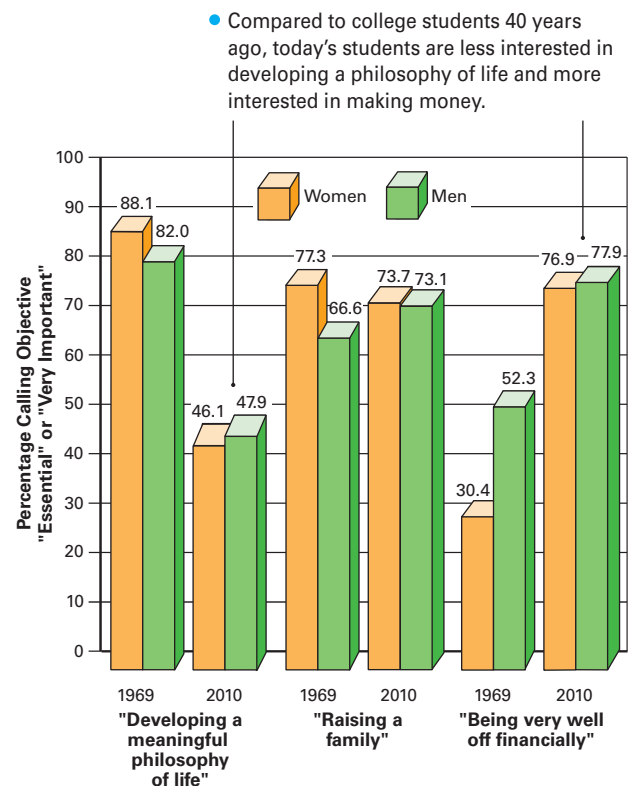
## Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

**December 10, a small village in Morocco.** Watching many of our fellow travelers browsing through a tiny ceramics factory, we have little doubt that North Americans are among the world's greatest shoppers. We delight in surveying hand-woven carpets in China or India, inspecting finely crafted metals in Turkey, or collecting the beautifully colored porcelain tiles we find here in Morocco. Of course, all these items are wonderful bargains. But one major reason for the low prices is unsettling to people living in rich countries: Many products from the world's low- and middle-income countries are produced by children—some as young as five or six—who work long days for pennies per hour.

We think of childhood as a time of innocence and freedom from adult burdens such as work. In poor countries throughout the world, however, families depend on income earned by their children. So what people in one society think of as right and natural, people elsewhere find puzzling and even immoral. Perhaps the Chinese philosopher Confucius had it right when he noted that “all people are the same; it's only their habits that are different.”

Just about every imaginable idea or behavior is commonplace somewhere in the world, and this cultural variation causes travelers both excitement and distress. North Americans turn on a light by flipping a light switch up, but Australians flip the light switch down. North Americans name city streets, but the Japanese name city blocks. North Americans are used to maintaining several feet of “personal space,” but Egyptians in conversation stand very close to each other. For this reason, members of our society can find much that confuses or even offends us when we travel to other societies. In rural Morocco, for example, bathrooms typically lack toilet paper, a fact that causes considerable discomfort for North Americans, who recoil at the thought of using the left hand for bathroom hygiene, as the locals do.

Given that a particular culture is the basis for everyday experience, it is no wonder that people everywhere exhibit **ethnocentrism**,



## Student Snapshot

FIGURE 2-3 Life Objectives of First-Year College Students, 1969 and 2010

Researchers have surveyed first-year college students every year since 1969. While attitudes about some things such as the importance of family have stayed about the same, attitudes about other life goals have changed dramatically.

Sources: Astin et al. (2002) and Pryor et al. (2011).

*the practice of judging another culture by the standards of one's own culture.* Some small degree of ethnocentrism is necessary for people to be emotionally attached to their way of life. But ethnocentrism also generates misunderstanding and sometimes conflict.

Members of every cultural system tend to prefer what they know and are wary about what is different. The ancient Romans took this view of difference to an extreme, using the same word for both “stranger” and “enemy.” Even language is culturally biased. Years ago, people in North America or Europe referred to China as the “Far East.” But this term, unknown to the Chinese, is an ethnocentric term for a region that is far to the east of *us*. The Chinese name for their country translates as “Central Kingdom,” suggesting that they, like us, see their society as the center of the world.

The alternative to ethnocentrism is **cultural relativism**, *the practice of judging a culture by its own standards*. Cultural relativism can be difficult for travelers to adopt: It requires not only openness to unfamiliar values and norms but also the ability to put aside cultural standards we have known all our lives. Even so, as people of the world increasingly come into contact with one another, the importance of understanding other cultures will become ever greater.

## Thinking About Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender



## Early Rock-and-Roll: Race, Class, and Cultural Change

Early in the 1950s, mainstream “pop” music was largely aimed at white adults. In the 1950s, rock-and-roll emerged as a major part of U.S. popular culture. Rock soon grew to become a cultural tide that swept away musical tastes and traditions and changed the country in ways we still experience today. Songs were written by professional composers, recorded by long-established record labels, and performed by well-known artists including Perry Como, Eddie Fisher, Doris Day, and Patti Page. Just about every big-name performer was white.

At that time, the country was rigidly segregated racially, which created differences in the cultures of white people and black people. In the subcultural world of African Americans, music had different sounds and rhythms, reflecting jazz, gospel singing, and rhythm and blues. These musical styles were created by African American composers and performers working with black-owned record companies and broadcast on radio stations to an almost entirely black audience.

Class, too, divided the musical world of the 1950s, even among whites. A second musical subculture was country and western, a musical style popular among poorer whites, especially people living in the South. Like rhythm and blues, country and western music had its own composers and performers, its own record labels, and its own radio stations.

“Crossover” music was rare, meaning that very few performers or songs moved from one musical world to gain popularity in another. But this musical segregation began to break down about 1955 with the birth of rock-and-roll. Rock was a new mix of other musical patterns, drawing on mainstream pop but including country and western and, especially, rhythm and blues.

The new rock-and-roll music drew together musical traditions, but it soon divided society in a new way—by age. Rock-and-roll was the first music clearly linked to the emergence of a youth

culture—rock was all the rage among teenagers but was little appreciated or even understood by their parents. The new rock-and-roll performers were men (and a few women) who looked young and took a rebellious stand against “adult” culture. The typical rocker looked like what parents might have called a “juvenile delinquent” and who claimed to be “cool,” an idea that most parents did not even understand.

The first band to make it big in rock-and-roll was Bill Haley and the Comets. Emerging from the country and western tradition, Haley’s first big hits in 1954—“Shake, Rattle, and Roll” and “Rock around the Clock”—were “covers” of earlier rhythm and blues songs.

Very quickly, however, young people began to lose interest in older performers such as Bill Haley in favor of younger performers sporting sideburns, turned-up collars, and black leather jackets. By 1956, the undisputed star of rock-and-roll was a poor white southern boy from Tupelo, Mississippi, named Elvis Aron Presley. With rural roots, Elvis Presley knew country and western music, and after he moved to Memphis, Tennessee, he learned black gospel and rhythm and blues.

Presley became the first superstar of rock-and-roll not just because he had talent but also because he had great crossover power. With early hits including “Hound Dog” (a rhythm and blues song originally recorded by Big Mama Thornton) and “Blue Suede Shoes” (written by country and western star Carl Perkins), Presley broke down many of the walls based on race and class.

By the end of the 1950s, popular musical styles developed in many new directions, creating soft rock (Ricky Nelson, Pat Boone), rockabilly (Johnny Cash), and dozens of doo-wop groups, both black and white (often named for birds—the Falcons, the Penguins, the Flamingos—or cars—the Imperials, the Impalas, the Fleetwoods). In the 1960s, rock expanded further, including folk music

(the Kingston Trio; Peter, Paul, and Mary; Bob Dylan), surf music (the Beach Boys, Jan and Dean), and the “British invasion” led by the Beatles.

Starting on the clean-cut, pop side of rock, the Beatles soon shared the spotlight with another British band proud of its “delinquent” clothing and street-fighter looks—the Rolling Stones. During the 1960s, the hard rock of the Beatles and Stones was joined by softer “folk rock” performed by the Byrds, the Mamas and the Papas, Simon and Garfunkel, and Crosby, Stills, and Nash. In addition, “Motown” (named after the “motor city,” Detroit) and “soul” music, launched the careers of dozens of African American stars, including James Brown, Aretha Franklin, the Four Tops, the Temptations, and Diana Ross and the Supremes.

On the West Coast, San Francisco developed a more political rock music performed by Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, and Janis Joplin. West Coast spin-off styles included “acid rock,” influenced by drug use, performed by The Doors and Jimi Hendrix. The jazz influence also returned to the world of rock, creating such “jazz rock” groups as Chicago and Blood, Sweat, and Tears.

This brief look at the early decades of rock-and-roll shows the power of race and class to shape subcultural patterns. It also shows that the production of culture—music as well as movies and music videos—became a megabusiness. Most of all, it shows us that culture does not stand still but is a living process, changing, adapting, and reinventing itself over time.

### What Do You Think?

1. Many dimensions of our way of life shaped rock-and-roll. In what ways do you think the emergence of rock-and-roll changed U.S. culture?
2. Throughout this period of musical change, most musical performers were men. What does this tell us about our way of life? Is today’s popular music still dominated by men?
3. Can you carry on the story of musical change in the United States to the present? (Think of disco, heavy metal, punk rock, rap, and hip-hop.)

Source: Based on Stuessy & Lipscomb (2008).



Elvis Presley (*center*) drew together the music of rhythm and blues singers, such as Big Mama Thornton (*left*), and country and western stars, including Carl Perkins (*right*). The development of rock-and-roll illustrates the ever-changing character of U.S. culture.



**ethnocentrism** the practice of judging another culture by the standards of one's own culture

**cultural relativism** the practice of judging a culture by its own standards

As the opening to this chapter explained, businesses in the United States are learning the value of marketing to a culturally diverse population. Similarly, businesses now know that success in the global economy depends on awareness of cultural patterns around the world. IBM, for example, now provides technical support for its products on Web sites in more than thirty languages (IBM, 2011).

This embrace of difference is a change from the past, when many companies used marketing strategies that lacked sensitivity to cultural diversity. The translation of Coors beer's phrase "Turn It Loose" startled Spanish-speaking customers by proclaiming that the beer would cause diarrhea. Braniff Airlines translated its slogan "Fly in Leather" into Spanish so carelessly that it read "Fly Naked"; similarly, Eastern Airlines' slogan "We Earn Our Wings Every Day" became "We Fly Daily to Heaven," which is hardly comforting to air travelers. Even the poultry giant Frank Perdue fell victim to poor marketing when his pitch "It Takes a Tough Man to Make a Tender Chicken" was transformed into the Spanish phrase "A Sexually Excited Man Will Make a Chicken Affectionate" (Helin, 1992).

But cultural relativism introduces problems of its own. If almost any kind of behavior is the norm *somewhere* in the world, does that mean everything is equally right? Does the fact that some Indian and Moroccan families benefit from having their children work long hours justify child labor? Because we are all members of a single human species, surely there must be some universal standards of proper conduct. But what are they? And in trying to develop them, how can we avoid imposing our own standards on others? There are no simple answers to these questions. But when confronting an unfamiliar cultural practice, it is best to resist making judgments before grasping what people in that culture understand the issue to be. Remember also to think about your own way of life as others might see it. After all, what we gain most from studying others is better insight into ourselves.

In the world's low-income countries, most children must work to provide their families with needed income. These young girls work long hours in a brick factory in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Is it ethnocentric for people living in high-income nations to condemn the practice of child labor because we think youngsters belong in school? Why or why not?



## A Global Culture?

Today more than ever, we can observe many of the same cultural practices the world over. Walking the streets of Seoul, South Korea; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Chennai, India; Cairo, Egypt; or Casablanca, Morocco, we see people wearing jeans, hear familiar music, and read ads for many of the same products we use at home. Are we witnessing the birth of a single global culture?

Societies around the world now have more contact with one another than ever before, thanks to the flow of goods, information, and people:

1. **Global economy: The flow of goods.** International commerce is at an all-time high. The global economy has spread many consumer goods—from cars and TV shows to music and fashion—throughout the world.
2. **Global communications: The flow of information.** The Internet and satellite-assisted communications enable people to experience events taking place thousands of miles away, often as they happen. Access to the Internet is spreading—about 60 percent of global Internet users live outside of high-income countries—and online they encounter web pages typically written in English (ITU World Telecommunication, 2011). This fact helps explain why, as shown in Global Map 2-1 on page 2-10, English is rapidly emerging as the preferred second language around the world.
3. **Global migration: The flow of people.** Knowledge about the rest of the world motivates people to move to where they imagine life will be better, and modern transportation technology, especially air travel, makes relocating easier than ever before. As a result, in most countries, significant numbers of people were born elsewhere, including some 40 million people in the United States, 13 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

These global links help make the cultures of the world more similar. But there are three important limitations to the global culture thesis. First, the global flow of information, goods, and people is uneven in different parts of the world. Generally speaking, urban areas (centers of commerce, communication, and people) have stronger ties to one another, while rural villages remain isolated. In addition, the greater economic and military power of North America and Western Europe means that these regions influence the rest of the world more than the rest of the world influences them.

Second, the global culture thesis assumes that people everywhere are able to *afford* the new goods and services. As Chapter 9 ("Global Stratification") explains, desperate poverty in much of the world deprives people of even the basic necessities of a safe and secure life.

Third, although many cultural elements have spread throughout the world, people everywhere do not attach the same meanings to them. Do children in Tokyo draw the same lessons from reading the Harry Potter books as children in New York or London?

Similarly, we enjoy foods from around the world while knowing little about the lives of the people who created them. In short, people everywhere look at the world through the lens of their own culture.

## Theories of Culture

### Apply

Sociologists investigate how culture helps us make sense of ourselves and the surrounding world. Here we will examine several macro-level theoretical approaches to understanding culture. A micro-level approach to the personal experience of culture, which emphasizes how individuals not only conform to cultural patterns but also create new patterns in their everyday lives, is the focus of Chapter 4 (“Social Interaction in Everyday Life”).

### The Functions of Culture: Structural-Functional Theory

The structural-functional approach explains culture as a complex strategy for meeting human needs. Drawing from the philosophical doctrine of *idealism*, this approach considers values to be the core of a culture (Parsons, 1966; R. M. Williams, 1970). In other words, cultural values direct our lives, give meaning to what we do, and bind people together. Countless other cultural traits have various functions that support the operation of society.

Thinking functionally helps us understand unfamiliar ways of life. Consider the Amish farmer in central Ohio plowing hundreds of acres with a team of horses. His methods may violate the U.S. cultural value of efficiency, but from the Amish point of view, hard work functions to develop the discipline necessary for a devoutly religious way of life. Long days of working together not only make the Amish self-sufficient but also strengthen family ties and unify local communities.

Of course, Amish practices have dysfunctions as well. The hard work and strict religious discipline are too demanding for some, who end up leaving the community. Also, strong religious beliefs sometimes prevent compromise, and as a result, slight differences in religious practices have caused the Amish to divide into different communities (Kraybill, 1989; Kraybill & Olshan, 1994).

If cultures are strategies for meeting human needs, we would expect to find many common patterns around the world. **Cultural universals** are *traits that are part of every known culture*. Comparing hundreds of cultures, George Murdock (1945) identified dozens of cultural universals. One common element is the family, which functions everywhere to control sexual reproduction and to oversee the care of children. Funeral rites, too, are found everywhere, because all human communities cope with the reality of death. Jokes are another cultural universal, serving as a safe means of releasing social tensions.

**Evaluate** The strength of structural-functional analysis lies in showing how culture operates to meet human needs. Yet by emphasizing a society’s dominant cultural patterns, this approach largely ignores cultural diversity. Also, because this approach emphasizes cultural stability, it downplays the importance of change. In short, cultural systems are neither as stable nor as universal as structural-functional analysis leads us to believe. The Applying

Theory table summarizes this theoretical approach’s main lessons about culture and places it alongside two other approaches that we consider next.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** In the United States, what are some of the functions of sports, Fourth of July celebrations, and Black History Month?

### Inequality and Culture: Social-Conflict Theory

The social-conflict approach draws attention to the link between culture and inequality. From this point of view, any cultural trait benefits some members of society at the expense of others.

Why do certain values dominate a society in the first place? Many conflict theorists, especially Marxists, argue that culture is shaped by a society’s system of economic production. Social-conflict theory, then, is rooted in the philosophical doctrine of *materialism*, which holds that a society’s system of material production (such as our own capitalist economy) has a powerful effect on the rest of the culture. This materialist approach contrasts with the idealist leanings of structural functionalism.

Social-conflict analysis ties our society’s cultural values of competitiveness and material success to our country’s capitalist economy, which serves the interests of the nation’s wealthy elite. The culture of capitalism teaches us to think that rich and powerful people work harder or longer than others and that they therefore deserve their wealth and privileges. It also encourages us to view capitalism as somehow “natural,” discouraging us from trying to reduce economic inequality.

Eventually, however, the strains of inequality erupt into movements for social change. Two historical examples are the civil rights movement and the women’s movement. A more recent example is the Occupy Wall Street movement, which has focused on our society’s increasing economic inequality. All these movements seek greater equality, and all have encountered opposition from defenders of the status quo.

### Gender and Culture: Feminist Theory

As Marx saw it, culture is rooted in economic production. Therefore, our society’s culture largely reflects the capitalist economic system. Feminists agree with Marx’s claim that culture is an arena of conflict, but they see this conflict as being rooted in gender.

**Gender** refers to *the personal traits and social positions that members of a society attach to being female or male*. From a feminist point of view, gender is a crucial dimension of social inequality, a topic that Chapter 10, “Gender Stratification” examines in detail. As that chapter explains, men have greater access to the workforce than women do and so men earn more income. In addition, men have greater power, both in our national political system; for example, all of this country’s presidents have been men. In addition, on the level of everyday experience, men exercise the most power in the typical household.

Feminist theory claims that our culture is “gendered.” This means that our way of life reflects the ways in which our society defines what is male as more important than what is female. This inequality is evident right in the language we use. We tend to say “man and wife,”



APPLYING THEORY

Culture

	Structural-Functional Theory	Social-Conflict and Feminist Theories	Sociobiology Theory
What is the level of analysis?	Macro-level	Macro-level	Macro-level
What is culture?	Culture is a system of behavior by which members of societies cooperate to meet their needs.	Culture is a system that benefits some people and disadvantages others.	Culture is a system of behavior that is partly shaped by human biology.
What is the foundation of culture?	Cultural patterns are rooted in a society's core values and beliefs that tend to remain fairly stable over time.	Marx claimed that culture is rooted in a society's system of economic production; feminist theory sees cultural conflict as rooted in gender.	Cultural patterns, especially cultural universals, are rooted in humanity's biological evolution.
What core questions does the approach ask?	How does a cultural pattern help society operate? What cultural patterns are found in all societies?	How does a cultural pattern benefit some people and harm others? How does a cultural pattern support social inequality?	How does a cultural pattern help a species adapt to its environment?

a phrase used in traditional wedding vows; we almost never hear the phrase “woman and husband.” Similarly, the masculine word “king” conveys power and prestige, with a meaning that is almost entirely positive. The comparable feminine word “queen” has a range of meanings, some which are negative.

Not only does our culture define what is masculine as dominant in relation to what is feminine, but our way of life also defines this male domination as “natural.” Such a system of beliefs serves to justify gender inequality by claiming it cannot be changed. In short, cultural patterns reflect and support gender inequality. Cultural patterns also perpetuate this inequality to the extent that they carry it forward into the future.

**Evaluate** The social-conflict theory suggests that cultural systems do not address human needs equally, allowing some people to dominate others. Marx focused on economic inequality, and analyzed culture as an expression of capitalism. Feminists focus on gender and understand culture as a reflection of male domination. All these dimensions of inequality are “built into” our way of life. But, at the same time, such inequality also generates pressure toward change.

Yet by stressing the divisiveness of culture, all social conflict analysis understates the ways in which cultural patterns integrate members of society. Thus we should consider both social-conflict and structural-functional insights for a fuller understanding of culture.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** How might a social-conflict analysis of college fraternities and sororities differ from a structural-functional analysis?

Evolution and Culture: Sociobiology

We know that culture is a human creation, but does human biology influence how this process unfolds? A third way of

thinking, standing with one foot in biology and one in sociology, is **sociobiology**, a theoretical approach that explores ways in which human biology affects how we create culture.

Sociobiology rests on the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin in his book *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Darwin asserted that living organisms change over long periods of time as a result of *natural selection*, a matter of four simple principles. First, all living things live to reproduce themselves. Second, the blueprint for reproduction is in the genes, the basic units of life that carry traits of one generation into the next. Third, some random variation in genes allows a species to “try out” new life patterns in a particular environment. This variation enables some organisms to survive better than others and to pass on their advantageous genes to their offspring. Fourth and finally, over thousands of generations, the genes that promote reproduction survive and become dominant. In this way, as biologists say, a species *adapts* to its environment, and dominant traits emerge as the “nature” of the organism.

Sociobiologists claim that the large number of cultural universals reflects the fact that all humans are members of a single biological species. It is our common biology that underlies, for example, the apparently universal “double standard” of sexual behavior. As the sex researcher Alfred Kinsey put it, “Among all people everywhere in the world, the male is more likely than the female to desire sex with a variety of partners” (quoted in Barash, 1981:49). But why?

We all know that children result from joining a woman’s egg with a man’s sperm. But the biological importance of a single sperm is very different from that of a single egg. For healthy men, sperm is a “renewable resource” produced by the testes throughout most of the life course. A man releases hundreds of millions of sperm in a single ejaculation (Barash, 1981:47). A newborn female’s ovaries,



Using an evolutionary perspective, sociobiologists explain that different reproductive strategies give rise to a double standard: Men treat women as sexual objects more than women treat men that way. While this may be so, many sociologists counter that behavior—such as that shown here—is more correctly understood as resulting from a culture of male domination.

however, contain her entire lifetime supply of follicles, or immature eggs. A woman releases a single egg cell from the ovaries each month. So although men are biologically capable of fathering thousands of offspring, a woman is able to bear only a relatively small number of children.

Given this biological difference, men reproduce their genes most efficiently by being promiscuous—readily engaging in sex. But women look differently at reproduction. Each of a woman's relatively few pregnancies demands that she carry the child, give birth, and provide care for some time afterward. Efficient reproduction on the part of the woman depends on selecting a man whose qualities (beginning with the likelihood that he will simply stay around) will contribute to her child's survival and, later, successful reproduction.

The double standard certainly involves more than biology and is tangled up with the historical domination of women by men. But sociobiology suggests that this cultural pattern, like many others, has an underlying “bio-logic.” Simply put, the double standard exists around the world because women and men everywhere tend toward distinctive reproductive strategies.

**Evaluate** Sociobiology has generated intriguing insights into the biological roots of some cultural patterns. But the approach remains controversial for two main reasons.

First, some critics fear that sociobiology may revive the biological arguments of a century ago that claimed the superiority of one race or sex. But defenders counter that sociobiology rejects the past pseudoscience of racial and gender superiority. In fact, they

say, sociobiology unites all humanity because all people share a single evolutionary history. Sociobiology does assert that men and women differ biologically in some ways that culture cannot easily overcome. But far from claiming that males are somehow more important than females, sociobiology emphasizes that both sexes are vital to human reproduction and survival.

Second, say the critics, sociobiologists have little evidence to support their theories. Research to date suggests that biological forces do not *determine* human behavior in any rigid sense. Rather, humans *learn* behavior within a culture. The contribution of sociobiology, then, includes explaining why some cultural patterns are more common and seem easier to learn than others (Barash, 1981).

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** Using the sociobiology approach, explain why some cultural patterns, such as sibling rivalry (the fact that children in the same family often compete and even fight with one another), are widespread.

Because any analysis of culture requires a broad focus on the workings of society, the major theoretical approaches discussed in this chapter are macro-level in scope. The symbolic-interaction approach, with its micro-level focus on people's behavior in specific situations, will be explored in Chapter 4 (“Social Interaction in Everyday Life”).

## Culture and Human Freedom

### Evaluate

This chapter leads us to ask an important question: To what extent are human beings, as cultural creatures, free? Does culture bind us to each other and to the past? Or does it enhance our capacity for individual thought and independent choice?

### Culture as Constraint

As symbolic creatures, humans cannot live without culture. But the capacity for culture does have some drawbacks. We may be the only animals who name ourselves, but living in a symbolic world means that we are also the only creatures who experience alienation. In addition, culture is largely a matter of habit, which limits our choices and drives us to repeat troubling patterns, such as racial prejudice and gender discrimination, in each new generation.

Our society's emphasis on personal achievement urges us toward excellence, yet this same competitive behavior also isolates us from one another. Material things comfort us in some ways but divert us from the security and satisfaction that come from close relationships and spiritual strength.

### Culture as Freedom

For better or worse, human beings are cultural creatures, just as ants and bees are prisoners of their biology. But there is a crucial difference. Biological instincts create a ready-made world; culture forces us to choose as we make and remake a world for ourselves. No better evidence of this freedom exists than the cultural diversity





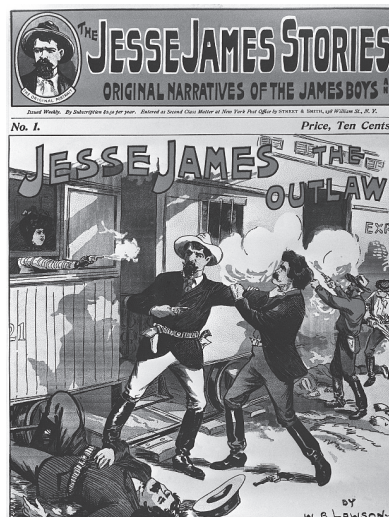
## The United States and Canada: Two National Cultures or One?

The United States and Canada are two of the largest high-income countries in the world, and they share a common border of about 4,000 miles. But do the United States and Canada share the same culture?

One important point to make right away is that both nations are *multicultural*. Not only do both countries have hundreds of Native American societies, but immigration has also brought people from all over the world to both the United States and Canada. In both countries, most early immigrants came from Europe, but in recent years most immigrants have come from nations in Asia and Latin America. The Canadian city of Vancouver, for example, has an Asian community that is almost the same size as the Latino community in Los Angeles.

Canada differs from the United States in one important respect—historically, Canada has had *two* dominant cultures: French (about 16 percent of the population) and British (roughly 36 percent). Almost one-third of people in the provinces of Quebec (where French is the official language) and New Brunswick (which is officially bilingual) claim some French ancestry.

Are the dominant values of Canada much the same as those we have described for the United States? Seymour Martin Lipset (1985) finds that they differ to some degree. The United States declared its independence from Great Britain in 1776; Canada did not formally separate from Great Britain until 1982, and the British monarch is still Canada's official head of state. Thus, Lipset continues, the dominant culture of Canada lies between the culture of the United States and that of Great Britain.



The culture of the United States is more individualistic, and Canada's is more collective. In the United States, individualism is seen in the historical importance of the cowboy, a self-sufficient loner, and even outlaws such as Jesse James and Billy the Kid are regarded as heroes because they challenged authority. In Canada, by contrast, it is the Mountie—Canada's well-known police officer on horseback—who is looked on with great respect. Canada's greater emphasis on collective life is also evident in stronger unions: Canadian workers are almost three times as likely to be members of a union as workers in the United States (Steyn, 2008; Statistics Canada, 2011; U.S. Department of Labor, 2011).

Politically, people in the United States tend to think that individuals ought to do things for themselves. In Canada, much as in Great Britain, there is a strong sense that government should look after the interests of everyone. The U.S. Constitution emphasizes the importance of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (words that place importance on the individual), while Canadian society is based on "peace, order, and good government" (words that place importance on the

government) (Steyn, 2008). One clear result of this difference today is that Canada has a much broader social welfare system (including universal health care) than the United States (the only high-income nation without such a program). It also helps explain the fact that about one-third of all households in the United States own one or more guns, and the idea that individuals are entitled to own a gun, although controversial, is widespread. In Canada, by contrast, few households have a gun, and the government restricts gun ownership, as in Great Britain.

### What Do You Think?

1. Why do you think some Canadians feel that their way of life is overshadowed by that of the United States?
2. Ask your friends to name the capital city of Canada. (The correct answer is Ottawa, in the province of Ontario.) Are you surprised by how few know the answer? Why or why not?
3. Why do many people in the United States not know very much about either Canada or Mexico, countries with which we share long borders?



The individuals that a society celebrates as heroic are a good indication of that society's cultural values. In the United States, outlaws such as Jesse James (and later, Bonnie and Clyde) were regarded as heroes because they represented the individual standing strong against authority. In Canada, by contrast, people have always looked up to the Mountie, who symbolizes society's authority over the individual.

of our own society and the even greater human diversity found around the world.

Learning more about this cultural diversity is one goal shared by sociologists. The Thinking Globally box offers some contrasts

between the cultures of the United States and Canada. Wherever we may live, the better we understand the workings of the surrounding culture, the better prepared we will be to use the freedom it offers us.

# Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

## CHAPTER 2 Culture

### What clues do we have to a society's cultural values?

The values of any society—that is, what that society thinks is important—are reflected in various aspects of everyday life, including the things people have and the ways they behave. An interesting way to “read” our own culture’s values is to look at the “superheroes” that we celebrate. Take a look at the characters in the three photos shown here and, in each case, describe what makes the character special and what each character represents in cultural terms.

**Hint** Superman (as well as all superheroes) defines our society as good; after all, Superman fights for “truth, justice, and the American way.” Many superheroes have stories that draw on great people in our cultural history, including religious figures such as Moses and Jesus: They have mysterious origins (we never really know their true families), they are “tested” through great moral challenges, and they finally succeed in overcoming all obstacles. (Today’s superheroes, however, are likely to win the day using force and often violence.) Having a “secret identity” means superheroes can lead ordinary lives (and means we ordinary people can imagine being superheroes). But to keep their focus on fighting evil, superheroes must place their work ahead of any romantic interests (“Work comes first!”). Sookie also illustrates the special challenge to “do it all” faced by women in our society: Besides using her special powers to fight evil, she still has to hold down a full-time job.

Superman first appeared in an *Action Comics* book in 1938, as the United States struggled to climb out of economic depression and faced the rising danger of war. Since then, Superman has been featured in a television show as well as in a string of Hollywood films. One trait of most superheroes is that they have a secret identity; in this case, Superman’s everyday identity is “mild-mannered news reporter” Clark Kent.

In the television drama, *True Blood*, Sookie Stackhouse (Anna Paquin), a waitress with telepathic abilities and other special powers, inhabits a world in which you never know if your customer is a vampire. Heroic humans with special abilities as portrayed in the mass media rarely include women.





Another longtime superhero important to our culture is Spider-Man. In the *Spider-Man* movies, Peter Parker (who transforms into Spider-Man when he confronts evil) is secretly in love with Mary Jane Watson. Again and again the male hero rescues the female from danger. But, in true superhero style, Spider-Man does not allow himself to follow his heart because with great power comes great responsibility, and that must come first.



## Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life

1. Members of every culture, as they decide how to live their lives, look to “heroes” for role models and inspiration. In modern societies, the mass media play a big part in creating heroes. What traits define popular culture heroes such as Clint Eastwood’s film character “Dirty Harry,” Sylvester Stallone’s film characters “Rocky” as well as “Rambo,” and Arnold Schwarzenegger’s character “the Terminator”?
2. Watch an animated Disney film such as *Finding Nemo*, *The Lion King*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*, or *Pocahontas*. One reason for the popularity of these films is that they all share many of the same distinctive cultural themes that appeal to members of our society. Using the list of key values of U.S. culture on pages 2-10 and 2-11 as a guide, identify the cultural values that make the film you selected especially “American.”
3. Do you know someone on your campus who has lived in another country or a cultural setting different from what is familiar to you? Try to engage in conversation with someone whose way of life is significantly different from your own. Try to discover something that you accept or take for granted in one way that the other person sees in a different way and try to understand why. Go to the “Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life” feature on mysoclab.com to learn more about cultural diversity and how we can all learn from experiencing cultural differences.

### What Is Culture?

Culture is a **way of life**.

- Culture is shared by members of a society. **p. 2-5**
- Culture shapes how we act, think, and feel. **p. 2-5**

Culture is a **human trait**.

- Although several species display a limited capacity for culture, only human beings rely on culture for survival. **p. 2-7**

Culture is a **product of evolution**.

- As the human brain evolved, culture replaced biological instincts as our species' primary strategy for survival. **p. 2-7**

We experience **culture shock** when we enter an unfamiliar culture and are not able to "read" meaning in our new surroundings. We create culture shock for others when we act in ways they do not understand. **pp. 2-7–2-8**



**culture** (p. 2-4) the ways of thinking, the ways of acting, and the material objects that together form a people's way of life

**nonmaterial culture**

(p. 2-4) the ideas created by members of a society

**material culture** (p. 2-5) the physical things created by members of a society

**society** (p. 2-5) people who interact in a defined territory and share a culture

**culture shock** (p. 2-6) personal disorientation when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life

### The Elements of Culture

Culture relies on **symbols** in the form of words, gestures, and actions to express meaning. **p. 2-7**

- The fact that different meanings can come to be associated with the same symbol (for example, a wink of an eye) shows the human capacity to create and manipulate symbols. **p. 2-8**
- Societies create new symbols all the time (for example, new computer technology has sparked the creation of new cyber-symbols). **p. 2-8**

**Language** is the symbolic system by which people in a culture communicate with one another. **p. 2-9**

- People use language—both spoken and written—to transmit culture from one generation to the next. **p. 2-9**
- Because every culture is different, each language has words or expressions not found in any other language. **p. 2-9**

**Values** are abstract standards of what *ought* to be (for example, equality of opportunity).

- Values can sometimes be in conflict with one another. **p. 2-11**
- Lower-income countries have cultures that value survival; higher-income countries have cultures that value individualism and self-expression. **p. 2-11**

**Beliefs** are specific statements that people who share a culture hold to be true (for example, "A qualified woman could be elected president"). **p. 2-9**

**Watch the Video on mysoclab.com**

**Norms**, which guide human behavior, are of two types:

- **mores** (for example, sexual taboos), which have great moral significance **p. 2-12**
- **folkways** (for example, greetings or dining etiquette), which are matters of everyday politeness **p. 2-12**

**symbol** (p. 2-8) anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share a culture

**language** (p. 2-9) a system of symbols that allows people to communicate with one another

**cultural transmission** (p. 2-9) the process by which one generation passes culture to the next

**Sapir-Whorf thesis** (p. 2-9) the idea that people see and understand the world through the cultural lens of language

**values** (p. 2-9) culturally defined standards that people use to decide what is desirable, good, and beautiful and that serve as broad guidelines for social living

**beliefs** (p. 2-9) specific ideas that people hold to be true

**norms** (p. 2-12) rules and expectations by which a society guides the behavior of its members

**mores** (p. 2-12) norms that are widely observed and have great moral significance

**folkways** (p. 2-12) norms for routine or casual interaction

### Technology and Culture

Culture is shaped by **technology**. We understand technological development in terms of stages of **sociocultural evolution**:

- hunting and gathering
- horticulture and pastoralism
- agriculture
- industry
- postindustrial information technology **pp. 2-13–2-14**

**technology** (p. 2-13) knowledge that people use to make a way of life in their surroundings

**hunting and gathering** (p. 2-13) the use of simple tools to hunt animals and gather vegetation for food

**horticulture** (p. 2-14) the use of hand tools to raise crops

**pastoralism** (p. 2-14) the domestication of animals

**agriculture** (p. 2-14) large-scale cultivation using plows harnessed to animals or more powerful energy sources

**industry** (p. 2-15) the production of goods using advanced sources of energy to drive large machinery

**postindustrialism** (p. 2-15) the production of information using computer technology



## Cultural Diversity

We live in a **culturally diverse society**.

- This diversity is due to our country's history of immigration. **p. 2-15**
- Diversity reflects regional differences. **p. 2-15**
- Diversity reflects differences in social class that set off **high culture** (available only to elites) from **popular culture** (available to average people). **pp. 2-15–2-16**

A number of values are central to our way of life. But **cultural patterns** are not the same throughout our society.

**Subculture** is based on differences in interests and life experiences.

- Hip-hop fans and jocks are two examples of youth subcultures in the United States. **p. 2-16**

**Multiculturalism** is an effort to enhance appreciation of cultural diversity.

- Multiculturalism developed as a reaction to the earlier “melting pot” idea, which was thought to result in minorities’ losing their identity as they adopted mainstream cultural patterns. **p. 2-16**

✱ **Explore the Map** on **mysoclab.com**

**Counterculture** is strongly at odds with conventional ways of life.

- Militant religious fundamentalist groups in the United States who plot to destroy Western society are examples of a counterculture. **p. 2-17**

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**Cultural change** results from

- **invention** (examples include the telephone and the computer) **p. 2-17**
- **discovery** (for example, the recognition that women are capable of political leadership) **p. 2-17**
- **diffusion** (for example, the growing popularity of various ethnic foods and musical styles). **p. 2-17**

**Cultural lag** results when some parts of a cultural system change faster than others. **p. 2-18**

How do we understand cultural differences?

- **Ethnocentrism** links people to their society but can cause misunderstanding and conflict between societies. **p. 2-19**
- **Cultural relativism** is increasingly important as people of the world come into more and more contact with each other. **pp. 2-19–2-20**

**high culture** (p. 2-16) cultural patterns that distinguish a society's elite

**popular culture** (p. 2-16) cultural patterns that are widespread among a society's population

**subculture** (p. 2-16) cultural patterns that set apart some segment of a society's population

**multiculturalism** (p. 2-16) a perspective recognizing the cultural diversity of the United States and promoting equal standing for all cultural traditions

**Eurocentrism** (p. 2-16) the dominance of European (especially English) cultural patterns

**Afrocentrism** (p. 2-17) emphasizing and promoting African cultural patterns

**counterculture** (p. 2-17) cultural patterns that strongly oppose those widely accepted within a society

**cultural integration** (p. 2-18) the close relationships among various elements of a cultural system

**cultural lag** (p. 2-18) the fact that some cultural elements change more quickly than others, disrupting a cultural system

**ethnocentrism** (p. 2-19) the practice of judging another culture by the standards of one's own culture

**cultural relativism** (p. 2-19) the practice of judging a culture by its own standards



## Theories of Culture

**Structural-functional theory** views culture as a relatively stable system built on core values. All cultural patterns play some part in the ongoing operation of society. **p. 2-22**

**Social conflict theory** sees culture as a dynamic arena of inequality and conflict. Cultural patterns benefit some categories of people more than others. Marx claimed that cultural patterns reflect the operation of a society's economic system. **p. 2-22**

**Feminist theory** is a type of social-conflict theory that sees culture as a system of inequality based on gender. **pp. 2-22–2-23**

**Sociobiology theory** explores how the long history of evolution has shaped patterns of culture in today's world. **pp. 2-23–2-24**

**cultural universals** (p. 2-22) traits that are part of every known culture

**gender** (p. 2-22) the personal traits and social positions that members of a society attaches to being female or male

**sociobiology** (p. 2-23) a theoretical approach that explores ways in which human biology affects how we create culture

## Culture and Human Freedom

- Culture can limit the choices we make.
- As cultural creatures, we have the capacity to shape and reshape our world to meet our needs and pursue our dreams. **pp. 2-24–2-25**

