Chapter 3

CULTURE

Chapter Outline

• Culture and Society in a Changing World
• Components of Culture
• Technology, Cultural Change, and Diversity
• A Global Popular Culture?
• Sociological Analysis of Culture
Culture

- The knowledge, language, values, customs, and material objects that are passed from person to person and from one generation to the next in a human group or society
- Essential for:
- Learned through:
- Fundamental for:
Material Culture

- **Physical creations that members of a society make, use, and share**
  - Items of material culture begin as:
  - Are transformed through technology
  - Sociologists define technology as knowledge, techniques, and tools that make it possible for people to transform resources into usable forms, and the skills required to use them after they are developed. Examples: computers, IPhones, clothing

Nonmaterial Culture

- **Abstract or intangible human creations of society that influence people’s behavior**
  - Includes language, beliefs, values, rules of behavior, family patterns, and political systems; examples:

  A central component of nonmaterial culture is **belief**:
Cultural Universals

Cultural universals are customs and practices that occur across all societies

Examples:

- Appearance
- Activities
- Social institutions
- Practices

Components of Culture: Symbols

A symbol is anything that meaningfully represents something else

- Culture could not exist without symbols because:
- Includes:
- Examples: the peace sign; the word chair; a cross on a church
Components of Culture: Language

- **Language** involves symbols that express ideas and enable people to communicate
- Can be verbal or nonverbal
- Allows us to:

Values

- **Values** are collective ideas about what is right or wrong, good or bad, desirable or undesirable
- They provide us with the criteria:
Ten Core American Values

1. Individualism
2. Achievement and Success
3. Activity and Work
4. Science and Technology
5. Progress and Material Comfort
6. Efficiency and Practicality
7. Equality
8. Morality and Humanitarianism
9. Freedom and Liberty
10. Racism and Group Superiority
Values

- **Value contradictions** are values that conflict with one another or are mutually exclusive.

- **Ideal culture** refers to:

- **Real culture** refers to:
Norms are established rules of behavior or standards of conduct.

*Prescriptive norms* state what behavior is appropriate or acceptable.

*Proscriptive norms* state what behavior is inappropriate or unacceptable.

*Formal norms* are:

- Laws are the most common type of formal norms. Example: killing someone—punishable by jail if convicted
  - *Civil law* deals with disputes among persons or groups
  - *Criminal law* deals with public safety and well-being

*Informal norms* are:

- When individuals violate informal norms, people may apply informal sanctions. Example: someone cuts in line
Folkways

- Everyday customs that may be violated without serious consequences within a particular culture
- In the U.S., folkways include:

Mores

- Strongly held norms with moral and ethical connotations that may not be violated without serious consequences
- **Taboos** are:
  - The **incest taboo**, which prohibits sexual relations between certain kin, is an example of a nearly universal taboo
Technology and Cultural Change

- Changes in technology continue to shape the material culture of society
  - Examples: printing press, computers
- **Cultural lag** is:
  - Reproductive technology is available but there are still moral questions about how to use it
Subcultures

- **Subculture**: a category of people who share distinguishing attributes, beliefs, values, and/or norms that set them apart in some significant manner from the dominant culture

Subcultures can be based on:

Countercultures

- **Counterculture**: a group that strongly rejects dominant societal values and norms and seeks alternative lifestyles

Examples

- Beatniks of the 1950’s
- Flower Children of the 1960’s
- Drug Enthusiasts of the 1970’s
Culture Shock, Ethnocentrism, and Cultural Relativism

- **Culture shock** refers to the anxiety people experience when they encounter cultures radically different from their own.
- **Ethnocentrism** is the assumption that one’s own culture is superior to others.
- **Cultural relativism** views and analyzes another culture in terms of that culture’s own values and standards.
High Culture and Popular Culture

- **High culture** consists of activities:
  - Examples: Classical music, opera, ballet, live theater

- **Popular culture** consists of activities
  - Examples: Rock concerts, spectator sports, movies, soap operas, situation comedies
    - **Fads**: A temporary but widely copied activity followed enthusiastically by large numbers of people
    - **Fashions**: A style of behavior, thinking, or appearance that is longer lasting and more widespread than a fad
Sociological Analysis of Culture

- The **functionalist perspective** suggests that culture helps people meet biological, instrumental, and expressive needs.

- Societies in which people share a common language and core values is more likely to have harmony. Popular culture can be seen as the glue that holds a society together. However, popular culture can also be a negative influence on individuals such as violent video games.
• The **conflict perspective** states that ideas can be used by the ruling class to affect members of other classes.

Cultural norms and values help to perpetuate social inequalities—Keeping up with the Joneses. What is important or has “value” is decided by those in power.
Sociological Analysis of Culture

- The **symbolic interactionist** perspective focuses on how people create, maintain, and modify culture during their everyday activities.
  - We negotiate social realities. Money has taken on a “value” of its own. We give qualities to those who have money not based on their own intrinsic qualities (football players, TV/Movie stars).
The postmodern perspective says that culture is based on the simulation of reality rather than reality itself

- Culture is what we see on TV
- Looks at Cultures rather than just “one” culture
Various Wedding Dress