



3

CULTURE AND MASS MEDIA

Learning Objectives

- 3.1 Define the component parts of culture, including values, norms, and taboos.
- 3.2 Recognize the significance of language in representing culture.
- 3.3 Discuss the relationship between culture and mass media and the debate over mass culture and violence.
- 3.4 Explain how sociologists theorize the relationship between culture and social class.
- 3.5 Apply functionalist and conflict perspectives to the phenomenon of global culture.

What Do You Think?

1. What is the relationship between popular culture and public attitudes about social issues such as same-sex marriage? Do changes in popular culture help drive changes in public attitudes, or are shifting societal attitudes reflected in popular culture?
2. Do graphic representations of violence in films, television, music, and video games have an effect on the attitudes and behaviors of children? What about adults?
3. Does a shared global culture exist? What are its key characteristics?

SUPERHEROES AND SOCIOLOGY

The debut of the 2018 feature film *Black Panther* was a signal moment in U.S. film history. The movie earned over \$250 million in revenue in its opening weekend and reached over \$1 billion dollars less than one month



The stars of the film Black Panther are a testament to the cultural shift toward greater representation of minorities in film.

after hitting theatres. However, *Black Panther* was remarkable for more than just its financial success. The cultural footprint that *Black Panther* left in Hollywood—and the U.S.—was significant.

The original Black Panther was a Marvel Comics' hero named T'Challa who made his first appearance in 1966. He was the heir to the throne in a fictional African country called Wakanda, which was the sole possessor of a magical element called vibranium. Wakanda, according to the story, evolved technologically and culturally in isolation from the world. When Wakanda's secrets were discovered, the country became vulnerable to the kind of resource exploitation suffered by other African states. The Black Panther, cloaked in a vibranium suit, emerged as a superhero tasked with defending Wakanda, its people, and its future.

Prior to the release of *Black Panther*, few films had featured black superheroes in leading roles. Although Falcon and Warmachine of the *Avengers* series and Cyborg of the *Justice League* film are Black superheroes in popular recent films, their characters are one of a team of fighters for right. Notably as well, a hero's blackness has often been largely incidental (Wallace, 2018). *Black Panther* deviated from that script. In the words of a recent *New York Times* article on the film, it was

steeped very specifically and purposefully in its blackness. "It's the first time in a very long time that we're seeing a film with centered black people, where we have a lot of agency," says Jamie

Broadnax, the founder of Black Girl Nerds, a pop-culture site focused on sci-fi and comic-book fandoms. These characters, she notes, "are rulers of a kingdom, inventors and creators of advanced technology. We're not dealing with black pain, and black suffering, and black poverty"—the usual topics of acclaimed movies about the black experience (Wallace, 2018, para. 8).

The article points out that with the film's emergence into the public eye (but even before its release), "The black internet was, to put it mildly, exploding. Twitter reported that 'Black Panther' was one of the most tweeted-about films of 2017, despite not even opening that year. There were plans for viewing parties, a fund-raiser to arrange a private screening for the Boys & Girls Club of Harlem, hashtags like #BlackPantherSoLit and #WelcomeToWakanda with many declaring that Feb. 16, 2018, will be 'the Blackest Day in History'" (Wallace, 2018, para. 6).

Black Panther has arrived at a time when the entertainment industry is wrestling with underrepresentation of women and people of color in films and film awards. Jordan Peele, Black director of *Get Out*, recently said about his 2019 hit *Us* that, "I don't see myself casting a white dude as the lead in my movies. . . . not that I don't like white dudes, but I've seen that movie" (Ernst, 2019, para. 5). Peele's comment points to the perception that powerful and central roles in major films have long been populated nearly exclusively by White actors. The *New York Times* relates the following story, which highlights the effects of *Black Panther*'s cultural visibility:

In a video posted to Twitter in December, which has since gone viral, three young men are seen fawning over the "Black Panther" poster at a movie theater. One jokingly embraces the poster while another asks, rhetorically: "This is what white people get to feel all the time?" (Wallace, 2018, para. 9)

In a widely watched TED talk, Nigerian feminist and author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie spoke about “the danger of a single story” (Adichie, 2009). There is power in representation, particularly in stories of intellectual and physical strength and courage. Despite the fact that superhero movies are fictional stories, they play a role in public perceptions, culture, and society. *Black Panther*, in this sense, has staked its claim to a significant new representation of a superhero.

In this chapter, we will consider the multitude of functions of culture and media (which is a key vehicle of culture), and we will seek to understand how culture both constructs and reflects society in the United States and around the globe. We begin our discussion with an examination of the basic concept of *culture*, taking a look at material and nonmaterial culture as well as ideal and real culture in the United States. We then explore contemporary issues of language and its social functions in a changing world. The chapter also addresses issues of culture and media, asking how media messages may reflect and affect behaviors and attitudes. We then turn to the topic of culture and class and the sociological question of whether culture and taste are linked to class identity and social reproduction. Finally, we examine the evolving relationship between global and local cultures, in particular, the influence of U.S. mass media on the world.

CULTURE: CONCEPTS AND APPLICATIONS

3.1 Define the component parts of culture, including values, norms, and taboos.

What is culture? The word *culture* might evoke images of song, dance, and literature—the beat of Latin salsa, Polish folk dances performed by girls with red ribbons braided into their hair, or the latest in a popular series of fantasy novels. It might remind you of a dish from the

Culture The beliefs, norms, behaviors, and products common to the members of a particular group.

Material culture The physical objects that are created, embraced, or consumed by society that help shape people's lives.

Old Country made by a beloved grandparent or a spicy Indian meal you ate with friends from New Delhi.

Culture, from a sociological perspective, comprises *the beliefs, norms, behaviors, and products common to the members of a particular group*. Culture is integral to our social experience of the world. It offers diversion and entertainment, but it also helps form our identities and gives meaning to the artifacts and experiences of our lives. Culture shapes and permeates material objects, such as folk costumes; rituals, such as nuptial and burial ceremonies; and language, as expressed in conversation, poetry, stories, and music. As social beings, we make culture, but culture also makes us in ways that are both apparent and subtle.

MATERIAL AND NONMATERIAL CULTURE

Every culture has both material and nonmaterial aspects. We can broadly define **material culture** as *the physical objects that are created, embraced, or consumed by society that help shape people's lives*. Material culture includes television programs, computer games, software, and other artifacts of human creation. It also emerges from the physical environment inhabited by the community. For example, in the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea, including Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania, amber (a substance created when the resin of fallen seaside pines is hardened and smoothed by decades or centuries in the salty waters) is an important part of local cultures. It is valued both for its decorative properties in jewelry and for its therapeutic properties; it is said to relieve pain. Amber has become a part of the material culture in these countries rather than elsewhere because it is a product of the physical environment in which these communities dwell.

Material culture also includes the types of shelters that characterize a community. For instance, in seaside communities, homes are often built on stilts to protect against flooding. The materials used to construct homes have historically been those available in the immediate environment—wood, thatch, or mud, for instance—although the global trade in timber, marble, granite, and other components of modern housing has transformed the relationship between place and shelter in many countries.

Nonmaterial culture is composed of *the abstract creations of human cultures, including ideas about behavior, language, and social practices*. Nonmaterial culture encompasses aspects of the social experience, such as behavioral norms, values, language, family forms, and institutions. It also reflects the natural environment in which a culture has evolved.

Although material culture is concrete and nonmaterial culture is abstract, the two are intertwined: Nonmaterial culture may attach particular meanings to the objects of material culture. For example, people will go to great lengths to protect an object of material culture, such as a national flag, not because of what it is—imprinted cloth—but because of the nonmaterial culture it represents, including ideals about freedom and patriotic pride. To grasp the full extent of nonmaterial culture, you must first understand three of the sociological concepts that shape it: *beliefs, norms, and values* (Table 3.1).

BELIEFS We broadly define **beliefs** as *particular ideas that people accept as true*. We can believe based on faith, superstition, science, tradition, or experience. To paraphrase the words of sociologists W. I. Thomas and D. S.



Many people find flag burning offensive because *the flag, an object of material culture, is a symbol of the country and its ideals*. The Supreme Court, however, has held in a series of cases that *symbolic expression is protected by the First Amendment, which explicitly protects free speech*.

Thomas (1928), beliefs may be understood as real when they are real in their consequences. They need not be objectively true. For example, during the witch hunts in early colonial America, rituals of accusation, persecution, and execution could be sustained in communities such as Salem, Massachusetts, because there was a shared belief in the existence of witches and diabolical power. From 1692 through 1693, more than 200 people were accused of practicing witchcraft; of these, 20 were executed, 19 by hanging and one by being pressed to death between heavy stones. Beliefs, similar to other aspects of culture, are dynamic rather than static: When belief in the existence of witchcraft waned, so did the witch hunts. In 1711, a bill was passed that restored “the rights and good names” of those who had been accused, and in 1957, the state of Massachusetts issued a formal apology for the events of the past (Blumberg, 2007).

NORMS In any culture, a set of ideas exists about what is right, just, and good as well as about what is wrong and unjust. Norms, as we noted in Chapter 1, are *accepted social behaviors and beliefs*, the common rules of a culture that

TABLE 3.1
Cultural Concepts and Characteristics

CONCEPT	CHARACTERISTICS
Values	General ideas about what is good, right, or just in a culture
Norms	Culturally shared rules governing social behavior (oughts and shoulds)
Folkways	Conventions (or weak norms), the violation of which is not very serious
Mores	Strongly held norms, the violation of which is very offensive
Taboos	Very strongly held norms, the violation of which is highly offensive and even unthinkable
Laws	Norms that have been codified
Beliefs	Particular ideas that people accept as true

Nonmaterial culture The abstract creations of human cultures, including ideas about behavior, language, and social practices.

Beliefs Particular ideas that people accept as true.

govern the behavior of people belonging to that culture.

Sociologist Robert Nisbet (1970) writes, “The moral order of society is a kind of tissue of ‘oughts’: negative ones which forbid certain actions and positive ones which [require certain] actions” (p. 226). We can think of norms as representing a set of *oughts* and *ought nots* that guide behavioral choices such as where to stand relative to others in an elevator, how long to hold someone’s gaze in conversation, how to conduct the rites of passage that mark different stages of life, and how to resolve disagreements or conflicts. Some norms are enshrined in legal statutes; others are inscribed in our psyches and consciences. Weddings bring together elements of both.

The wedding ceremony is a central ritual of adult life with powerful social, legal, and cultural implications. It is also significant economically: The term *wedding industrial complex* (Ingraham, 1999) has been used to describe a massive industry that generates over \$72 billion in revenue and employs over a million people (Schmidt, 2017). This comes as little surprise when we consider that in 2016, the estimated average amount spent on a wedding was just over \$35,000 (Vasel, 2017). The wedding as a key cultural image and icon is cultivated in families, religions, and the media. Wedding images are used to sell products ranging from cosmetics to furniture, and weddings constitute an important theme in popular movies, including *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding 2* (2016), *Wedding Crashers* (2005), *Bridesmaids* (2011), and *Mike and Dave Need Wedding Dates* (2016). Popular television series such as *The Office*, *Sex and the City*, and *Nashville* have used weddings as narratives for highly anticipated season finales or premieres. The reality program *Say Yes to the Dress* entralls viewers with the drama of choosing a wedding gown, and *Four Weddings* pits four brides against one another to pull off the “perfect wedding,” while *90 Day Fiancé* follows long-distance couples who must decide whether or not to wed before



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The marriage of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in May of 2018 captured worldwide attention. Celebrity weddings—as well as royal weddings—are often an object of intense public interest.



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*In the years before the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, public attitudes about marriage were shifting. According to one poll, watching television programs such as *Modern Family*, which prominently features a same-sex couple, made some viewers more likely to support same-sex marriage (Appelo, 2012).*

the foreign partner's visa expires. The wedding ritual is a powerful artifact of our culture. In light of this, a sociologist might ask, "What are the cultural components of the ritual of entering matrimony, the wedding ceremony?"

Sociologist William Graham Sumner (1906–1959) distinguished among several different kinds of norms, each of which can be applied to weddings. **Folkways** are *fairly weak norms that are passed down from the past, the violation of which is generally not considered serious within a particular culture*. A folkway that has been part of many U.S. wedding rituals is the "giving away" of the bride: The father of the bride symbolically "gives" his daughter to the groom, signaling a change in the woman's identity from daughter to wife. Some couples today reject this ritual as patriarchal because it recalls earlier historical periods when a woman was treated as chattel given—literally—to her new husband by her previous keeper, her father.

Some modern couples are choosing to walk down the aisle together to signal an equality of roles and positions. Although the sight of a couple going to the altar together might raise a few eyebrows among more traditional guests, this violation of the "normal" way of doing things does not constitute a serious cultural transgression and, because culture is dynamic, may in time become a folkway itself.

Mores (pronounced "MOR-ays") are *strongly held norms, the violation of which seriously offends the standards of acceptable conduct of most people within a particular culture*. In a typical American wedding, the person conducting the ceremony plays an important role in directing the events, and the parties enacting the ritual are expected to respond in conventional ways. For instance, when the officiant asks the guests whether anyone objects to the union, the convention is for no one to object. When an objector surfaces (more often in television programs and films than in real life), the response of the guests is shock and dismay: The ritual has been disrupted and the scene violated.

Taboos are *powerful mores, the violation of which is considered serious and even unthinkable within a particular culture*. The label of taboo is commonly reserved for behavior that is extremely offensive: Incest, for example, is a nearly universal taboo. There may not be any taboos associated with the wedding ritual itself in the United States, but there are some relating to marital

relationships. For instance, while in some U.S. states it is not illegal to marry a first cousin, in most modern communities, doing so violates a taboo against intermarriage in families.

Laws are *codified norms or rules of behavior*. Laws formalize and institutionalize society's norms. There are laws that govern marriage: For instance, until very recently, in many states, marriage was legally open only to heterosexual adults who are not already married to other people. In many respects, this was consistent with long-standing societal norms. Over time, however, the normative climate shifted, and a majority of Americans expressed support for same-sex marriage. In June 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that state-level bans on same-sex marriage are not constitutional. Today, marriage is legally open to both heterosexual and homosexual couples, although there have been instances of county clerks in some states refusing to grant marriage licenses to same-sex couples because they claim it violates their beliefs.

VALUES Similar to norms, values are components of nonmaterial culture in every society. **Values** are *the abstract and general standards in society that define ideal principles, such as those governing notions of right and wrong*. Sets of values attach to the institutions of society at multiple levels. You may have heard about national or patriotic values, community values, and family values. These can all coexist harmoniously within a single society. Because we use values to legitimate and justify our behavior as members of a country or community or as individuals, we tend to staunchly defend the values we embrace (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961).

Folkways Fairly weak norms that are passed down from the past, the violation of which is generally not considered serious within a particular culture.

Mores Strongly held norms, the violation of which seriously offends the standards of acceptable conduct of most people within a particular culture.

Taboos Powerful mores, the violation of which is considered serious and even unthinkable within a particular culture.

Laws Codified norms or rules of behavior.

Values The abstract and general standards in society that define ideal principles, such as those governing notions of right and wrong.

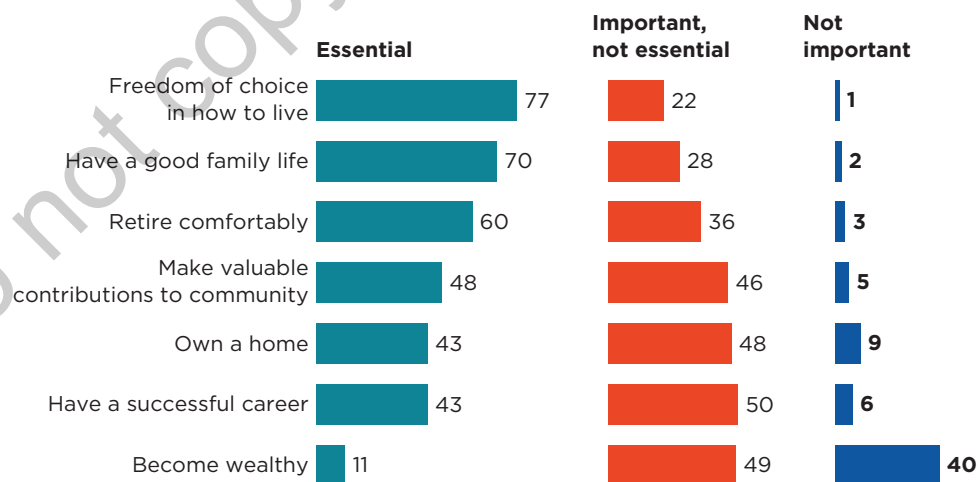
Is there a specific set of values we can define as *American*? According to a classic study by Robin M. Williams Jr. (1970), “American values” include personal achievement, hard work, material comfort, and individuality. U.S. adults value science and technology, efficiency and practicality, morality and humanitarianism, equality, and “the American way of life.” A recent Pew Research Center examined the question of what respondents value as part of the American Dream: Interestingly, an “essential” part of the American Dream cited by 77% of respondents was “freedom of choice in how to live” (Figure 3.1; Smith, 2017).

Researchers have identified a widening split in political values in the U.S. population, most acutely along partisan lines: That is, there are growing differences in expressed attitudes about issues ranging from social welfare to traditional family values. Although there are many shared values across race, gender, class, and other demographic characteristics, there are stark and growing differences along party lines. According to Parker (2012), between 1987 and 2012, there was a dramatic split in the share of Republicans, Democrats, and independents who agreed that “the government

should take care of people who can’t take care of themselves” (see Figure 3.2). A more recent study suggests one possible explanation for this split: Republican respondents are likely to attribute poverty to a lack of effort, while their Democratic counterparts are more likely to attribute it to circumstances beyond a person’s control (see Figure 3.3; S. Smith, 2017).

The 2012 Pew survey also asked respondents about values they attribute to others: Respondents were asked to indicate whether they believed that “in the last 10 years, values held by the middle class and poor people have gotten more similar, more different, or have had no change.” About 47% of respondents said that they believed values between the social classes had gotten “more similar,” while 41% suggested they had gotten “more different.” (The remaining respondents indicated “no change” or “don’t know.”) Pew did not specify particular values. Hence, respondents were left to interpret the meaning of the question. How would you interpret this question on shifting values? How would you respond? How might we explain Pew’s results?

FIGURE 3.1
Views About the American Dream



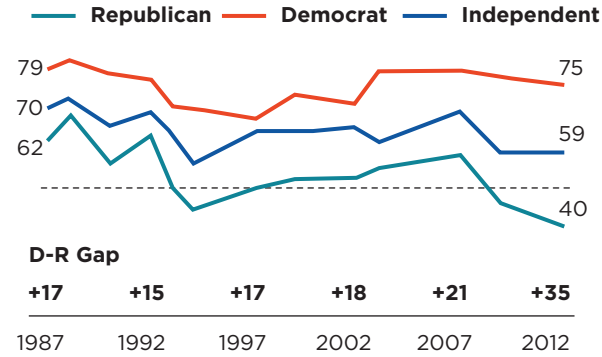
SOURCE: “Most think the ‘American dream’ is within reach for them.” Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (October 31, 2017) http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/10/31/most-think-the-american-dream-is-within-reach-for-them/ft_17-10-31_american_dream_definitions/.

FIGURE 3.2

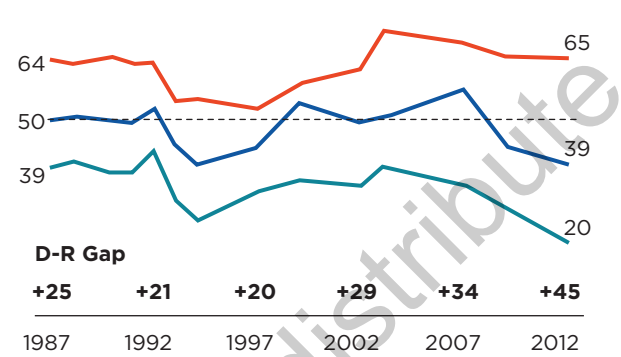
Political Party Affiliation and Support for Social Welfare

Percent who agree that the government should . . .

Take care of people who can't take care of themselves



Help more needy people, even if it means going deeper in debt

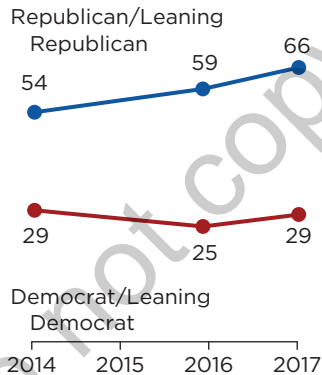


SOURCE: "Partisan Polarization Surges in Bush, Obama Years" Pew Research Center, Washington, DC (June, 2012). Retrieved from <http://www.people-press.org/2012/06/04/partisan-polarization-surges-in-bush-obama-years/>.

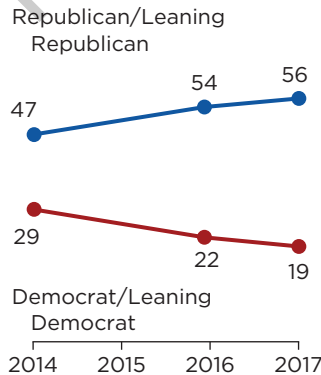
FIGURE 3.3

Political Party Affiliation and Attitude Toward Wealth and Poverty

Percent who say a person is **rich** generally because they worked harder than most other people



Percent who say a person is **poor** generally because of a lack of effort on their part



SOURCE: "Widening Gap Between Republicans and Democrats on Why People Are Rich And Poor," Pew Research Center, May 2, 2017. Retrieved from www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/02/why-people-are-rich-and-poor-republicans-and-democrats-have-very-different-views/ft_17-05-02_richpoor_2/.

Structural functionalists, including Talcott Parsons (1951), have proposed that values play a critical role in the social integration of a society. Nevertheless, values do not play this role by themselves. They are abstract—vessels into which any generation or era pours its

meanings in a process that can be both dynamic and contentious. For instance, equality is a value that has been strongly supported in the United States since the country's founding. The pursuit of equality was a powerful force in the American Revolution, and the



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The “ugly stepsisters,” Anastasia and Drizella, from the story of *Cinderella* are only two of many children’s story characters who combine an unattractive appearance with flawed personalities. How do we reconcile the idea that “beauty is only skin deep” with the images of popular culture?

Declaration of Independence declares that “all men are created equal” (G. S. Wood, 1993). Yet equality has been defined differently across various eras of U.S. history. In the first half of the country’s existence, *equality* did not include women or African Americans, who were, by law, excluded from its benefits. Over the course of the 20th century, equality became *more* equal as the rights of all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, gender, or class status, were formally recognized as equal before the law.

IDEAL AND REAL CULTURE IN U.S. SOCIETY

Beauty is only skin deep. Don’t judge a book by its cover. All that glitters is not gold. These bits of common wisdom are part of U.S. culture. We rarely recall where we first heard them; we simply know them because they are part of the cultural framework of our lives. These three statements represent

Ideal culture The values, norms, and behaviors that people in a given society profess to embrace.

Real culture The values, norms, and behaviors that people in a given society actually embrace and exhibit.

Cultural inconsistency A contradiction between the goals of ideal culture and the practices of real culture.

a commitment of sorts that society will value our inner qualities more than our outward appearances. They are also examples of **ideal culture**, *the values, norms, and behaviors that people in a given society profess to embrace*, even though the actions of the society may often contradict them.

Real culture consists of *the values, norms, and behaviors that people in a given society actually embrace and exhibit*. In the United States, for instance, empirical research shows that conventional attractiveness offers consistent advantages (Hamermesh, 2011). From childhood onward, the stories our parents, teachers, and the media tell us seem to sell the importance of beauty. Stories such as *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty* connect beauty with morality and goodness and unattractiveness with malice, jealousy, and other negative traits. The link between unattractive (or unconventional) appearance and unattractive behavior is unmistakable, especially in female figures. Consider other characters many American children are exposed to early in life, such as nasty Cruella de Vil in *101 Dalmatians*, the dastardly Queen of Hearts of *Alice in Wonderland*, and the angry octopod Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*.

On television (another medium that disseminates important cultural stories), physical beauty and social status are powerfully linked. Overweight or average-looking characters populate television shows featuring working- or lower middle-class people, for example, *Family Guy* and *The Office*. Programs such as *Modern Family* and *Mike & Molly* offer leading characters who are pleasant and attractive—and often overweight. In the latter, for instance, Mike is a police officer, and Molly is an elementary school teacher. (She later becomes an author.) They are also commonly featured in the role of the fat, funny sidekick, who can be seen in films such as *Bridesmaids*, *Pitch Perfect*, and *Lady Bird*. Typically, they have not broken the glass ceiling of high-status jobs that remain largely reserved for their thinner primetime peers. Characters such as those we encounter on *Scandal*, *Mad Men*, *Empire*, *Gossip Girl*, and *Sex and the City* are almost invariably svelte and stylish—and occupy higher rungs on the status hierarchy.

There is a clear **cultural inconsistency**, *a contradiction between the goals of ideal culture and the practices of real culture*, in our society’s treatment of conventional attractiveness. Do we “judge a book by its cover”? Studies suggest this is precisely what many of us do in a variety of social settings:

- In the workplace, conventionally attractive job applicants appear to have an advantage in securing jobs (Hamermesh, 2011; Marlowe, Schneider, & Nelson, 1996; Shahani-Denning, 2003; Tews, Stafford, & Zhu, 2009). Women in one study who were an average of 65 pounds heavier than the norm of the study group earned about 7% less than their slimmer counterparts did, an effect equivalent to losing about one year of education or two years of experience. The link between obesity and a “pay penalty” has been confirmed by other studies (Harper, 2000; Lempert, 2007). Interestingly, some research has not found strong evidence that weight affects the wages of African American or Hispanic female workers (Cawley, 2001; DeBeaumont, 2009).
- In the courtroom, some defendants who do not meet conventional standards of attractiveness are disadvantaged (DeSantis & Kayson, 1997; Gunnell & Ceci, 2010; Taylor & Butcher, 2007). Mazzella and Feingold (1994) note that defendants charged with certain crimes, such as rape and robbery, benefit from being attractive. This is consistent with the “beautiful is good” hypothesis (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972), which attributes a tendency toward leniency to the belief that attractive people have more socially desirable characteristics. Ahola, Christianson, and Hellstrom (2009) suggest that female defendants, in particular, are advantaged by attractive appearance.
- Studies of college students have found that they are likely to perceive attractive people as more intelligent than unattractive people (Chia, Allred, Grossnickle, & Lee, 1998; Poteet, 2007). This bias has also been detected in students’ evaluations of their instructors: A pair of economists found that the independent influence of attractiveness gives some instructors an advantage on undergraduate teaching evaluations (Hamermesh & Parker, 2005).
- Social media is routinely used to shame both public and private figures who do not fit the mold of conventional body acceptability. For example, after hosting a 2012 presidential debate on television, veteran CNN correspondent Candy

Crowley was mocked on Twitter with comments about her weight. In 2013, BuzzFeed reported that a blog called Return of Kings sponsored a “fat shaming week” on Twitter (Okun, 2013). In 2016, Facebook rejected an ad featuring plus-size model Tess Holliday wearing a modest bikini, arguing that it violated the company’s “health and fitness policy” for ads. Facebook later apologized (Hillin, 2016).

Another example of cultural inconsistency can be seen in our purported commitment to the ideal that “honesty is the best policy.” We find an unambiguous embrace of honesty in the stories of our childhood. Think of *Pinocchio*: Were you warned as a child not to lie because it might cause your nose to grow? Did you ever promise a friend that you would not reveal his or her secret with a pinky swear and the words, “Cross my heart and hope to die; stick a needle in my eye”? Yet most people do lie.

Why is this so? We may lie to protect or project a certain image of ourselves. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959), a symbolic interactionist, called this *misrepresentation*. Goffman argued that all of us, as social actors, engage in this practice because we are concerned with defining a situation—whether it be a date or a job interview or a meeting with a professor or boss—in a manner favorable to ourselves. It is not uncommon for job seekers to pad their résumés, for instance, to leave the impression on potential employers that they are qualified or worthy. A CareerBuilder survey recently found that about 56% of employers had detected lying on a résumé. Common lies included misrepresentations of educational credentials, skill sets, dates of employment, and prior job responsibilities. According to the same survey, about 70% of employers spend under 5 minutes reviewing a résumé, and half spend less than 2 minutes (CareerBuilder, 2015), suggesting that some dishonesty probably goes unnoticed.

Studies suggest that cheating and plagiarism are common among high school students (Table 3.2) and college students. In one study of 23,000 high school students, about half reported that they had cheated on a test in the past year. Just under a third also responded that they had used the Internet to plagiarize assigned work (Josephson Institute Center for Youth Ethics, 2012). Notably, a 2009

study suggests that about half of teens age 17 and younger believe cheating is necessary for success (Josephson Institute of Ethics, 2009). A recent *Atlantic Monthly* article on academic dishonesty suggests that

cheating is omnipresent in American higher education. In 2015, Dartmouth College suspended 64 students suspected of cheating in—irony of ironies—an ethics class in the fall term. The previous school year, University of Georgia administrators reported investigating 603 possible cheating incidents; nearly 70 percent of the cases concluded with a student confession. In 2012, Harvard had its turn, investigating 125 students accused of improper collaboration on a final exam in a government class. (Barthel, 2016, para. 1)

Much contemporary cheating takes place with the help of technology: That may include practices such as plagiarizing a term paper from the Internet or using a mobile phone to look up answers during class. In fact,

TABLE 3.2

Ethical and Unethical Behavior Among High School Students in 2012 (in Percentages)

	NEVER	ONCE	TWO OR MORE TIMES
Copied an Internet document for a class assignment	45	26	29
Cheated on a test	49	24	28
Lied to a teacher about something significant	45	26	29

SOURCE: Josephson Institute Center for Youth Ethics. (2012). *2012 Report Card on the Ethics of American Youth*.

Doxic Taken for granted as natural or normal in society.



©Image Source/Getty Images

Is academic integrity the norm in higher education today? Or do you think that many students engage in activities such as cheating on tests or plagiarizing papers? How would you design a study to examine these questions at your own school?

reports of academic dishonesty have risen with the advent of the Internet, though a leading researcher in the field suggests that it has turned down again recently. Are high levels of plagiarism and cheating a product primarily of access to opportunities enabled by the Internet—or are they a product of trends in the culture that diminish the importance of integrity? What do you think?

Why do you think there is such a big gap between what we say and what we do? Do you think most people are culturally inconsistent? What about you?

ETHNOCENTRISM

Much of the time, a community’s or society’s cultural norms, values, and practices are internalized to the point that they become part of the natural order. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977) describes these internalized beliefs as **doxic**: those beliefs that are *taken for granted as natural or normal in society*. But the social organization of our lives is not natural, although it appears that way. Instead, norms, values, and practices are *socially constructed*. That is, they are the products of decisions and directions chosen by groups and individuals (often, a conflict theorist would argue, those with the most power). And although all human societies share certain similarities, different societies construct different norms, values, and practices and then embrace them as “just the way things are.”

Ideal Culture and Its Consequences

Whether you are male or female, you may sometimes experience feelings of inadequacy as you follow your favorite celebrities on Instagram, watch popular series on television or Netflix, or leaf through ads in magazines like *Vogue*, *Cosmopolitan*, or *GQ*. You may get a sense that, in this market- and media-constructed universe, your face, hair, body, and clothing do not fit the ideal. You may wish that you had the “right look” or that you were leaner, thinner, or more muscular. You would not be alone.

One survey of college-age women found that 83% desired to lose weight. Among these, 44% of women of normal weight intentionally ate less than they wanted, and most of the women did not have healthy dieting habits (Malinauskas, Raedeke, Aeby, Smith, & Dallas, 2006). Another study examining body weight perceptions among college students found that women with exaggerated body weight perceptions were more likely to engage in unhealthy weight management strategies and were more depressed than those women with accurate perceptions of their weight (Harring, Montgomery, & Hardin, 2011).

Using our sociological imagination, we can deduce that the weight concerns many people—particularly women—experience as personal troubles are, in fact, linked to public issues. Worrying about (and even obsessing over) weight is a widely shared phenomenon. Millions of women diet regularly, and some manifest extreme attention to weight in the form of eating disorders (National Institute of Mental Health, 2017).

In addition to dieting, one way many people try to combat a negative body image is through posts on social media. With the growth of social-media outlets such as Facebook and Instagram, photo-editing applications, and capturing the perfect

angle, individuals have the opportunity to alter their image to fit society’s body ideal in only a few clicks, something that used to take professionals hours to do—or that could not be done at all (Cosslett, 2016). Whether it is through a simple filter or extensive alterations, people can digitally rid themselves of insecurities and present their ideal image to the world. One researcher also found that some girls had images of Victoria’s Secret models as their phone screensaver as “thinspirations,” a motivational term often used in pro-anorexia/bulimia circles that promotes thinness and glorifies certain aspects of thinness, such as visible ribs and thigh gaps (Cosslett, 2014, 2016).

As individuals, we experience the consequences of an artificially created ideal as a personal trouble—unhappiness about our appearance—but the deliberate construction and dissemination of an unattainable ideal for the purpose of generating profits is surely a public issue. Reflecting a conflict perspective, psychologist Sharlene Hesse-Biber (1997) has suggested that to understand the eating disorders and disordered eating so common among U.S. women, we ought to ask not “What can women do to meet the ideal?” but “Who benefits from women’s excessive concern with thinness?” (p. 32). This is the sociological imagination at work.

Think It Through

- How would you summarize key factors that explain the broad gap between ideal culture, which entreats us not to judge a book by its cover, and real culture, which pushes women and men to pursue unattainable physical perfection?

Because we tend to perceive our own culture as natural and normal, it emerges as the standard by which we tend to judge everything else. This is indicative of ethnocentrism, which, as noted in Chapter 1, is *a worldview whereby we judge other cultures by the standards of our own and regard our own way of life as normal and better than*

others. That which deviates from our own normal social order can appear exotic, even shocking. Other societies’ rituals of death, for example, can look astonishingly different from those to which we are accustomed. This description of an ancient burial practice from the North Caucasus provides an illustration:

Scythian-Sarmatian burials were horrible but spectacular. A royal would be buried in a *kurgan* [burial mound] alongside piles of gold, weapons, horses, and, Herodotus writes, “various members of his household: one of his concubines, his butler, his cook, his groom, his steward, and his chamberlain—all of them strangled.” A year later, 50 fine horses and 50 young men would be strangled, gutted, stuffed with chaff, sewn up, then impaled and stuck around the *kurgan* to mount a ghoulish guard for their departed king. (S. Smith, 2001, pp. 33–34)

Let’s interpret this historical fragment using two different cultural perspectives. From an **etic perspective**—that is, *the perspective of the outside observer*—the burial ritual looks bizarre and shockingly cruel. Nevertheless, to understand it fully and avoid a potentially ethnocentric perspective, we need to call on an **emic perspective**, *the perspective of the insider*, and ask, “What did people in this period believe about the royals? What did they believe about the departed and the experience of death itself? What did they believe about the utility of material riches in the afterlife and the rewards the afterlife would confer on the royals and those loyal to them?” Are there death rituals in the U.S. cultural repertoire that might appear exotic or strange to outsiders even though we see them as normal?

Putting aside the ethnocentric perspective allows us to embrace **cultural relativism**, *a worldview whereby we understand the practices of another society sociologically, in terms of that society’s norms and values and not our own*. In this way, we can come closer to an understanding of cultural beliefs and practices such as those that surround the end of life. Whether the body of the departed is viewed or hidden, buried or burned, feasted with or feasted for, danced around or sung about, a culturally relativist perspective

Etic perspective The perspective of the outside observer.

Emic perspective The perspective of the insider, the one belonging to the cultural group in question.

Cultural relativism A worldview whereby the practices of a society are understood sociologically in terms of that society’s norms and values, not the norms and values of another society.

allows the sociologist to conduct his or her examination of the roots of these practices most rigorously.

We may also call on cultural relativism to help us understand the rituals of another people, the Nacirema, described here by anthropologist Herbert Miner (1956):

Nacirema culture is characterized by a highly developed market economy which has evolved in a rich natural habitat. Although much of the people’s time is devoted to economic pursuits, a large part of the fruits of these labors and a considerable portion of the day are spent in ritual activity. The focus of this activity is the human body, the appearance and health of which loom as a dominant concern in the ethos of the people. . . .

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

The focal point of the shrine is a box or chest which is built into the wall. In this chest are kept many charms and magical potions without which no native believes he could live. These preparations are secured from a variety of specialized practitioners. However, the medicine men do not provide the curative potions for their clients, but decide what the ingredients should be and then write them down in an ancient and secret language. This writing is understood only by the medicine men and by the herbalists who, for another gift, provide the required charm. (pp. 503–504)

What looks strange here, and why? Did you already figure out that *Nacirema* is *American* spelled backward? Miner invites his readers to see American rituals linked to the body and health not as natural but as *part of a culture*. Can you think of other norms or practices in the United States that we could view from this perspective? What about the all-American game of baseball, the high school graduation ceremony, the language of texting, or the cultural obsession with celebrities or automobiles?



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In the Tibetan sky burial, the body is left on a mountaintop exposed to the elements. This once-common practice of “giving alms to the birds” represented belief in rebirth and the idea that the body is an unneeded empty shell.

SUBCULTURES

When sociologists study culture, they do not presume that in any given country—or even community—there is a single culture. They may identify a dominant culture within any group, but significant cultural identities exist in addition to—or sometimes in opposition to—the dominant one. These are **subcultures**, *cultures that exist together with a dominant culture but differ from it in some important respects.*

Some subcultures, including ethnic subcultures, may embrace most of the values and norms of the dominant culture while simultaneously choosing to preserve the values, rituals, and languages of their (or their parents’ or grandparents’) cultures of origin. Members of ethnic subcultures such as Armenian Americans and Cuban Americans may follow political events in their heritage countries or prefer their children to marry within their groups. It is comfort in the subculture rather than rejection of the dominant culture that supports the vitality of many ethnic subcultures.

In a few cases, however, ethnic and other subcultures do reject the dominant culture surrounding them. The Amish choose to elevate tradition over modernity in areas such as transportation (many still use horse-drawn

buggies), occupations (they rely on simple farming), and family life (women are seen as subordinate to men), and they lead a retreatist lifestyle in which their community is intentionally separated from the dominant culture.

Sociologists sometimes also use the term *counterculture* to designate subcultural groups whose norms, values, and practices deviate from those of the dominant culture. The hippies of the 1960s, for example, are commonly cited as a counterculture to mainstream middle America, although many of those who participated in hippie culture aged into fairly conventional middle-class lives.

Even though there are exceptions, most subcultures in the United States are permeated by the dominant culture, and the influence runs both ways. What, for example, is an “all-American” meal? Your answer may be a hamburger and fries. But what about other U.S. staples, such as Chinese takeout and Mexican burritos? Mainstream culture has also



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In Indonesia, mass cremations take place where bodies are placed in sarcophagi of various sizes with animal representations.

Subcultures Cultures that exist together with a dominant culture but differ from it in some important respects.



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In New Orleans, a casket is paraded through the street. Death and burial rituals are components of culture.

absorbed the influence of the United States' multicultural heritage: Salsa music, created by Cuban and Puerto Rican American musicians in 1960s New York, is widely popular, and world music, a genre that reflects a range of influences from the African continent to Brazil, has a broad United States following. Some contemporary pop music, as performed by artists such as Lady Gaga, incorporates elements of British glam, U.S. hip-hop, and central European dance. The influence is apparent in sports as well: Soccer, now often the youth game of choice in U.S. suburbs, was popularized by players and fans from South America and Europe. Mixed martial arts, a

Language A symbolic system composed of verbal, nonverbal, and written representations that are vehicles for conveying meaning.

combat sport popularized by the U.S. organization Ultimate Fighting Championship, incorporates elements of Greco-Roman wrestling, Japanese karate, Brazilian jujitsu, and Muay Thai (from Thailand).

CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

3.2 Recognize the significance of language in representing culture.

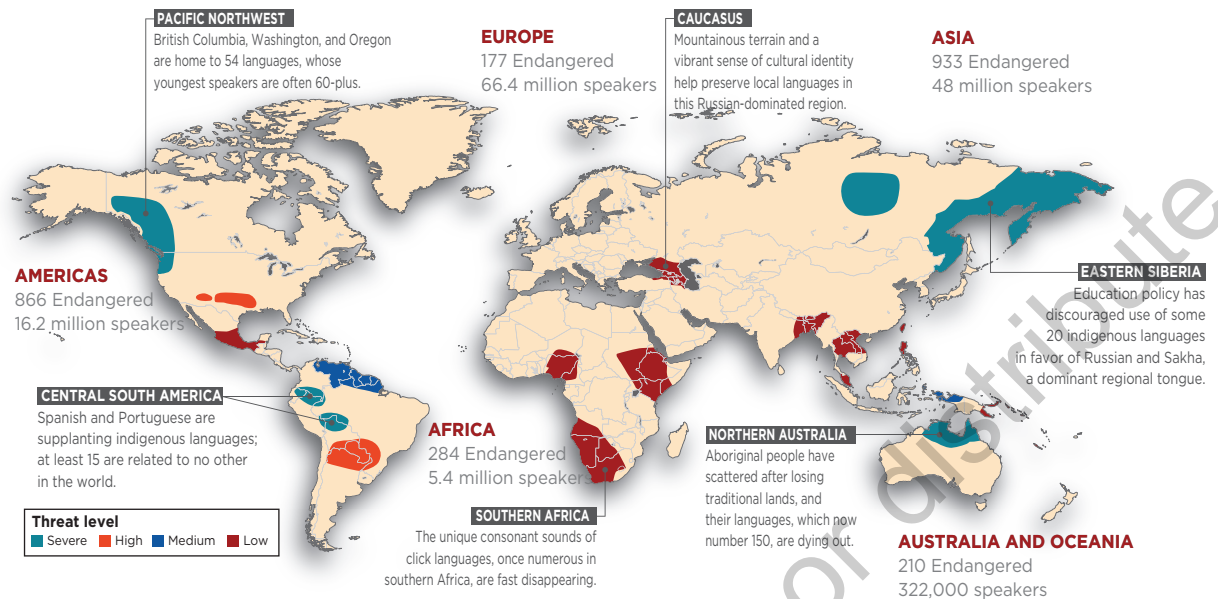
Well over a billion people on our planet speak a dialect of Chinese as their first language. English and Spanish are the first languages of another 300 million people each. More than 182 million people speak Hindi, the primary official language of India, as a first language. In contrast, the world's 3,500 least widely spoken languages share 8.25 million speakers. Aka, another language of India, has between 1,000 and 2,000 native speakers. The Mexican language of Seri has between 650 and 1,000 speakers. Euchee, a Native American language, has four fluent speakers left. According to an article in *National Geographic*, "one language dies every 14 days," and we can expect to lose about half the 7,000 languages spoken around the world by the end of the 21st century (Rymer, 2012). What is the significance of language loss for human culture?

Symbols, like the names we assign to the objects around us, are cultural representations of social realities or, as we put it in Chapter 1, representations of things that are not immediately present to our senses. They may take the form of letters or words, images, rituals, or actions. When we use language, we imbue these symbols with meaning. **Language** is a symbolic system composed of verbal, nonverbal, and written representations that are vehicles for conveying meaning.

In the 1930s, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf developed the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*, which posits that our understandings and actions emerge from language—that is, the words and concepts of our own languages structure our perceptions of the social world. Language is also closely tied to cultural objects and practices. Consider that the Aka language has more than 26 words to describe beads, a rich vocabulary suited for a culture in which beads not only are decorative objects but also convey status and facilitate market transactions. In the

FIGURE 3.4

Endangered Languages Worldwide



SOURCE: Mason, Virginia W. National Geographic Creative. Reprinted with permission.

Seri language, to inquire where someone is from, you ask, “Where is your placenta buried?” This question references a historical cultural practice of burying a newborn’s afterbirth by covering it with sand, rocks, and ashes (Rymer, 2012).

As languages like Aka and Seri die out, usually replaced by dominant tongues such as Spanish, English, Chinese, Arabic, and Russian, we lose the opportunity to more fully understand the historical and contemporary human experience and the natural world (see Figure 3.4). For instance, the fact that some small languages have no words linked to specific numbers and instead use only relative designations such as *few* or *many* opens the possibility that our number system may be a product of culture rather than of innate cognition, as many believe. Or consider that the Seri culture, based in the Sonoran Desert, has names for animal species that describe behaviors that natural scientists are only beginning to document (Rymer, 2012). Language is a cultural vehicle that enables communication, illuminates beliefs and practices, roots a community in its environment, and contributes to the cultural richness of our world. Each language

lost represents the erasure of cultural history, knowledge, and human diversity (Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages, n.d.).

LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Conflict theorists focus on disintegrative forces in society, while functionalists study integrative forces. Where social conflict theorists see culture as serving the interests of the elite, functionalists argue that shared values and norms maintain social bonds both between individuals and between people and society (Parsons & Smelser, 1956). By serving as a vehicle for the dissemination of these values and norms, culture functions to keep society stable and harmonious and gives people a sense of belonging in a complex, even alienating, social world (Smelser, 1962). To illustrate, consider the issue of language use in the United States.

In part as a response to the increased use of Spanish and other languages spoken by members of the nation’s large immigrant population, an English-only movement has arisen that supports the passage of legislation to make English the only official language of the United

undermines the common socialization that comes from a shared language and culture.

A substantial proportion of U.S. residents support legislation making English the official language: A 2014 *Huffington Post/YouGov* survey found that 70% of respondents agreed with this position (Swanson, 2014). A year later, in 2015, some members of Congress introduced a bill that would have declared English as the official language and would have required that all new citizens show English proficiency. While that bill did not pass, 31 states have adopted English as the official language (Govtrack, 2016).

At the same time, most homes and residents are already active users of English, even if one fifth also use another home language. Interestingly, a 2013 Gallup poll found that about half of respondents agreed that it is “essential” (20%) or “important” (50%) for Americans to learn a second language, although only about a third are conversant in a second language (J. Jones, 2013).

Many people embrace cultural diversity and emphasize the value of **multiculturalism**, a commitment to respecting cultural differences rather than trying to submerge them into a larger, dominant culture. Multiculturalism recognizes that the country is as likely to be enriched by its differences as it is to be divided by them. In a globalizing world, knowledge of other cultures and proficiency in languages other than English is important. In fact, a functionalist might also regard the U.S. Census data cited previously as indicative of *both* the common language that proponents of official English see as crucial to national unity and the cultural diversity that enriches the country and allows it to incorporate a variety of languages in its national and global political, cultural, and economic dealings—which is also positively functional for the country (Figure 3.5).

CULTURE AND MASS MEDIA

3.3 Discuss the relationship between culture and mass media and the debate over mass culture and violence.

From a sociological perspective, we are all *cultured* because we all participate in and identify with a culture or cultures. In one conventional use of the term, however, some classes of people are considered *more cultured* than others. We refer to people who attend the symphony, are knowledgeable about classic literature and

fine wines, and possess a set of distinctive manners as cultured, and we often assume a value judgment in believing that being cultured is better than being uncultured.

We commonly distinguish between high culture and popular culture. **High culture** consists of *music, theater, literature, and other cultural products that are held in particularly high esteem in society*. It can also encompass a particular body of literature or a set of distinctive tastes. High culture is usually associated with the wealthier, more educated classes in society, but this association can shift over time. William Shakespeare’s plays were popular with the English masses when they were staged in open public theaters during his lifetime. Lobster was a meal of the poor in colonial America. This suggests that high culture’s association with educated and upper-income elites may be more a function of accessibility—the prohibitive cost of theater tickets and lobster meat today, for instance—than with “good taste” as such.

Popular culture encompasses *the entertainment, culinary, and athletic tastes shared by the masses*. It is more accessible than high culture because it is widely available and less costly to consume. Popular culture can include music that gets broad airplay on the radio, television shows and characters that draw masses of viewers (for example, *The Walking Dead*, *Stranger Things*, *The Crown*, and *Homeland*), blockbuster films and series (such as *Black Panther*, *Star Wars*, or *Wonder Woman*), Oprah’s Book Club, and spectator sports (such as professional wrestling and baseball). Because it is an object of mass consumption, popular culture plays a key role in shaping values, attitudes, and consumption in society. It is an optimal topic of sociological study because, as we noted in our opening story, it not only *shapes* but also *is shaped by* society.

Multiculturalism A commitment to respecting cultural differences rather than trying to submerge them into a larger, dominant culture.

High culture Music, theater, literature, and other cultural products that are held in particularly high esteem in society.

Popular culture The entertainment, culinary, and athletic tastes shared by the masses.

GLOBAL ISSUES

Language, Resistance, and Power in Northern Ireland

This chapter raises the problem of language loss—that is, the persistent and expanding extinction of small languages across our planet. In a few places, however, little-used languages are being revived for reasons that range from cultural to economic to political. In some instances, as in the case of Northern Ireland, language revival fits into all three categories.

The dominant language in the country of Northern Ireland has long been English, but there is a growing campaign to revive the Irish language, a tongue with little in common with English (consider the Irish word for independence: *neamhspleáchas*). The Irish language (also known as Irish Gaelic or *Gaeilge*) is a minority language in Northern Ireland. As of the country's 2001 census, 167,487 people (10.4% of the population) had “some knowledge of Irish” (Zenker, 2010). The use of Irish in Northern Ireland had nearly died out by the middle of the 20th century, but today, efforts are underway to bring the language back to education, commerce, and political life (“In the Trenches,” 2013).

Northern Ireland has a history of violent conflict with its British neighbor. Early in the 20th century, Ireland was shaken by conflict between the Irish Catholic majority and the Protestant minority, who supported British rule and feared the rule of the Catholic majority. In 1920, the British Parliament passed the Government of Ireland Act, which sought to pacify the parties with the separation of Ireland into a free state of southern counties. In 1922, the larger

part of Ireland seceded from the United Kingdom to become the independent Irish Free State (after 1937, this became the current state of Ireland). The six northeastern counties, together known as Northern Ireland, remained within the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland has since been the site of sporadic conflict between (mainly Catholic) nationalists and (mainly Protestant) unionists (Kennedy-Pipe, 1997).

The area remained largely peaceful until the late 1960s, when violence broke out in Londonderry and Belfast, foreshadowing three decades of armed conflict between British troops stationed in Northern Ireland and the rebellious Irish Republican Army (IRA), which represented primarily the interests of the Irish Catholic population. The violent conflicts over home versus British rule, which included terrorism committed by the IRA against British interests and populations, resulted in more than 3,000 deaths in this period (“History: The Troubles,” 2014). A U.S.-brokered agreement helped to quell the violence in 1998, though sporadic problems remained. Nearly a decade later, in 2007, key parties to the conflict, including leaders of the Catholic and Protestant factions, took the reins of the country in a power-sharing agreement.

The interest in revival of the language dates back to the period of conflict, known locally as “the Troubles.” In the 1960s, a small number of language enthusiasts set up a tiny Irish-speaking community in a Belfast neighborhood. By the 1970s, with the conflict in progress, Irish nationalist prisoners being held by the British in Maze Prison also began learning Irish, calling out words between cells and scrawling their words on the prison walls (Feldman, 1991). The effort spread to neighborhoods where families of the prisoners resided and, according to author Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh (2013), it became part of an “anticolonial struggle.”

Today, Irish nationalists, some of them veterans of the war against British rule, have taken up the mantle of Irish language revival, and the language is now the medium of instruction for about 5,000 schoolchildren

(Continued)



©Paul White/Alamy Stock Photo

(Continued)

in the country. Although this is only a tiny fraction of the total school population, supporters of language revival occupy some key governmental positions in Northern Ireland, and there has been an effort to enact the Irish Language Act, which would establish new rights to the use of the language in official business, thus creating new job opportunities for fluent speakers (“In the Trenches,” 2013).

Today, Northern Ireland is peaceful. The Irish language, a part of the local heritage, is being revived. It remains to be seen, however, whether this will serve to draw together two communities with a long history of conflict (the country is about evenly split

between the Catholic and Protestant communities) or will deepen the divide as the nationalist Catholic population embraces Irish while the pro-British Protestants resist.

Think It Through

- Why does language matter to communities large and small? What does the Irish language revival movement share with movements such as the official English movement in the United States, which supports a powerful and widespread language? How is it different?

Mass media is *media of public communication intended to reach and influence a mass audience*. The mass media constitutes a vehicle that brings us culture, in particular—although certainly not exclusively—popular culture. Although mass media permeates our lives today, its rise is more recent than we may realize. Theorist Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989) points out that the *public sphere* as a fundamental part of social life emerged only with the rise of industrial society; that is, prior to the development of printing presses and the spread of literacy, most communication was oral and local. The appearance of mass-circulation newspapers in the 1700s and the growth of literate populations spurred the growth of a public sphere in which information could be widely circulated and, as Habermas points out, public attitudes shaped. In the 20th century, mass media gained influence through the adoption of electronic means of communication ranging from the radio to television to the Internet.

Marshall McLuhan (1964) sought to understand the influence of mass media on society, suggesting that “the medium is the message”—the medium itself has an influence on how the message is received and perceived. Television, for instance, is fundamentally different from print in how it communicates information. In other words, in looking at only a particular message, we may miss the power of the messenger itself and how that transforms social life. McLuhan also asserted that electronic media, such as television, constructed a *global village* in which people around the world, who did not and

never would know one another, could be engaged with the same news event. For example, it was reported by FIFA, the world’s governing body of soccer, that in the summer of 2014, more than a billion people (about a seventh of the world’s population) tuned in for the final game between Germany and Argentina (“2014 World Cup,” 2015).

From a sociological perspective, the function of the mass media can be paradoxical. On the one hand, mass media is a powerful and effective means for conveying information and contributing to the development of an informed citizenry: Mass-circulation newspapers, television networks such as CNN and BBC, and radio news programs inform us about and help us understand important issues. On the other hand, some sociologists argue that mass media promotes not active engagement in society but rather disengagement and distraction. Habermas (1962/1989), for instance, writes of the salons and coffeehouses of major European cities, where the exchange of informed opinions formed a foundation for later public political debates. He suggests, however, that the potential for the development of an active public sphere has been largely quashed by the rise of media that have substituted mass entertainment for meaningful debate, elevating sound bites over sound arguments.

Mass media Media of public communication intended to reach and influence a mass audience.

Douglas Kellner (1990) has written that modern technology and media—and television in particular—constitute a threat to human freedom of thought and action in the realm of social change. Kellner suggests that the television industry “has the crucial ideological functions of legitimating the capitalist mode of production and delegitimizing its opponents” (p. 9). That is, mainstream television appears to offer a broad spectrum of opinions, but in fact, it systematically excludes opinions that seem to question the fundamental values of capitalism (for example, the right to accumulate unlimited wealth and power) or to critique not individual politicians, parties, and policies but the system within which they operate. Because television is such a pervasive force in our lives, the boundaries it draws around debates on capitalism, social change, and genuine democracy are significant.

Karl Marx wrote that the ruling ideas of any society are those of the ruling class. Arguably, many of those ideas are conveyed through television. Does television, which delivers images and messages to our homes as we watch for an average of 7 hours a day, foster passivity and make us vulnerable to manipulation? What about the Internet? How does it expand human creativity, freedom, and action? How does it limit them?

The mass media brings us the key forms of modern entertainment that constitute popular culture. Although some researchers theorize the effects of mass media on the public sphere, others look at how these media shape attitudes and practices—sometimes in negative ways. In the section that follows, we turn our attention to another dimension of culture: the controversial relationship between culture, mass media, and the negative but pervasive phenomenon of sexual violence against women.

CULTURE, MEDIA, AND VIOLENCE

Statistics suggest that rape and sexual assault devastate the lives of thousands of U.S. women every year. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, in 2016, there were 323,450 rapes, attempted rapes, or sexual assaults in

Rape culture A social culture that provides an environment conducive to rape.

the United States (Morgan & Kena, 2017). Men and boys also fall prey to these crimes, though in smaller numbers.

One explanation for this number might be that these sexual assaults are perpetrated by thousands of deviant individuals and are the outcomes of particular and individual circumstances. Applying the sociological imagination, however, means recognizing the magnitude of the problem and considering the idea that examination of individual cases alone, while important, is inadequate for fully understanding the phenomenon of rape and sexual assault in the United States. To paraphrase C. Wright Mills, it is a personal trouble *and* a public issue.

Some researchers have posited the existence of a **rape culture**, a social culture that provides an environment conducive to rape (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 2005; Sanday, 1990). According to some scholars, rape culture has been pervasive in the U.S. legal system. Feminist theorist and legal scholar Catharine MacKinnon (1989) argues that legislative and judicial processes regarding rape utilize a male viewpoint. Consider, for instance, that until the late 1970s, most states did not treat spousal rape as a crime. This conclusion was based, at least in part, on the notion that a woman could not be raped by her husband because sexual consent was taken as implied in the marital contract.

Some researchers argue that the legal culture takes rape less seriously than other crimes of violence (Taslitz, 1999). Legal scholar Stephen J. Schulhofer (2000) has written that the law

punishes takings by force (robbery), by coercive threats (extortion), by stealth (larceny), by breach of trust (embezzlement), and by deception (fraud and false pretenses). Yet sexual autonomy, almost alone among our important personal rights, is not fully protected. The law of rape, as if it were only a law against the “robbery” of sex, remains focused almost exclusively on preventing interference by force. (pp. 100–101)

Schulhofer notes that this problem is linked to a culture that treats male sexual aggression as natural. Taslitz (1999) asserts that the cultural stories brought into courtrooms render proceedings around rape problematic by situating them in myths, such as the idea that a female victim was “asking for it.”

Music, Money, and Marketing



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William Shakespeare famously wrote that “if music be the food of love, play on.” Bono, the lead singer of the globally recognized pop group U2, has said that “music can change the world because it can change people,” a sentiment echoed by renowned guitarist Jimi Hendrix, who asserted that “music doesn’t lie. If there is something to be changed in this world, then it can only happen through music.” Indeed, music is widely seen as a salve for emotional wounds (Michael Jackson called it “a mantra that soothes the soul”), a soundtrack for real-life romance and heartbreak, a vehicle of release from stress, and a carrier of powerful messages of societal transformation.

But music today is also a significant marketing tool. A report in *The Atlantic Monthly* points out that more brands are paying for product placement in pop songs. The article quotes Adam Kluger, chief executive officer (CEO) of the Kluger Agency, which specializes in “lyrical product placements,” as saying that a brand placement in a hit single “can easily offset the entire production and marketing budget” for the song (Brennan, 2015, p. 40). Brand references in music are growing. According to William Brennan’s calculation, these references appeared 109 times in the top 30 *Billboard* songs in 2012 compared with 47 times in 2002—and zero times in 1962. The popular song “I Am the One” by DJ Khaled featuring Justin Bieber, Chance the Rapper, Lil Wayne, and Quavo references two fashion brands (Chanel and Gucci). The song also talks about Netflix. Similarly, in

“Closer,” the Chainsmokers (a DJ duo) sing to their love interest, asking her to meet “in the backseat of (her) Rover.” Product placement is also present in music videos. For example, Ariana Grande’s 2016 “Focus on Me” video features the young singer with her Samsung Galaxy Note phone dancing in a galaxy-themed background.

The appearance of brand name goods and companies in popular music, whether purchased by an advertiser or not, is common. A National Public Radio report noted that an examination of the top 20 songs of the three years up to 2017 determined that about 212 different brands had been mentioned in songs. The recent rap song, “Bad and Boujee,” by Migos and Lil Uzi Vert features 19 brand names (Lonsdorf, 2017).

The melding of advertising and culture is a topic in which sociologists have taken an interest. Critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (Horkheimer, 1947; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2007) write of the “culture industry.” They distinguish between *culture*, which, they suggest, retains the potential to be a vehicle for creativity, critique, and social change, and the *culture industry*. In contrast to culture, the culture industry engages in a mass deception by manufacturing homogenized, predictable, and banal cultural products that function to pacify and sell rather than inform and provoke. Indeed, the two theorists judge the culture industry to be one that promises an “escape from reality but it really offers an escape from the last thought of resisting that reality” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2007, p. 116). The road to happiness, as told by the culture industry, is through consumption and conformity. The magic (or deception) of the culture industry is rendered all the more powerful for the fact that its coercion and “unfreedom” are pleasant to the masses (Marcuse, 1964).

From the perspective of the critical theorists, the marriage of music and marketing is predictable, the outcome of a process of consumerization of culture that characterizes modern capitalism. Can music be independent of the market? Should it strive to be? What do you think?

Think It Through

- Can popular music play a role as both a progressive force and a marketing tool? Can you think of examples of artists or songs that occupy one or both roles?

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Some research in the fields of sociology and communications suggests that popular culture promotes rape culture by normalizing violence. This is not to argue that culture is a direct cause of sexual violence (or other kinds of violence) but rather to suggest that popular culture renders violence part of the social scenery by making its appearance so common in films, video games, and music videos that it evolves from being shocking to being utterly ordinary (Katz & Jhally, 2000a, 2000b). How does this process occur?

Some scholars argue that popular media embraces *violent masculinity*, a form of masculinity that associates *being a man* with being aggressive and merciless. Popular action films often highlight violent male protagonists, as in *X-Men: Apocalypse* (2016), *Logan* (2017), and *Deadpool 2* (2018). Outside of the realm of fiction, dominant male sports, such as football and hockey, elevate physical violence as entertainment and venerate the toughest players on the field or the ice.

While popular culture features many images of male violence against other men, violent images may also normalize violence against women. Hip-hop has long been associated with misogynistic lyrics and videos, although it is hardly alone in its objectification of women (J. Morgan, 1999; Pough, 2004; Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009). Many commercial films also feature rough—even violent—treatment of women, offered as entertainment. The most gratuitous violence in films such as *Halloween* (2018), *Hush* (2016), *The Cutting Room* (2015), *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* (2011), and *The Killer Inside Me* (2010) is reserved for female victims. Popular culture's most predictable normalization of violence against women occurs in pornography, a multibillion-dollar-a-year industry in the United States. Fictionalized portrayals of sexual activity range from coercion of a compliant and always-willing female to violent rape simulations in which consent is clearly refused.

Although researchers do not propose that lyrics or images disseminated by mass media cause sexual violence *directly*, some suggest that popular culture's persistent use of sex-starved, compliant, and easily victimized female characters sends messages that forced sex is no big deal, that women really want to be raped, and that some invite rape by their appearance. In a study of 400 male and female high school students, Cassidy and Hurrell (1995, cited in Workman & Freeburg, 1999) determined that respondents who heard a vignette about a rape scenario and then viewed a picture of the victim (in reality, a model for the research) dressed in provocative clothing were more likely than those who saw her dressed in conservative clothing, or who saw no picture at all, to judge her responsible for her assailant's behavior and to say his behavior was justified and not really rape. More recent studies have reproduced findings that rape myths are widely used to explain and even justify sexual violence (Hammond, Berry, & Rodriguez, 2011).

A 2003 study found that victims' attire is not a significant factor in sexual assault. Instead, rapists look for signs of passivity and submissiveness (Beiner, 2007). Why, with evidence to the contrary, do such rape myths (common but rarely true beliefs about rapists and rape victims) exist? Studies link regular exposure to popular print, television, film, and Internet media with acceptance of rape myths among college-age men and women (Kahlor & Morrison, 2007; Katz, 2006, cited in Lonsway et al., 2009; Reinders, 2006), although female undergraduates in a comparative study were less likely to believe rape myths and more likely to believe victims than their male peers (Stephens et al., 2016).

Is culture, particularly culture that includes music and movies that normalize violence, a sociological antecedent of real violence? How does this affect men? How does it affect women?

Discover Intersections

Images of Black Women in Mass Media

In this chapter, you learned about sociological perspectives on mass media. Mass media plays an important role in modern societies: It brings the world to our door, opens opportunities to learn about people we have not met and places we have not been, and informs and entertains us. Mass media has a variety of positive functions, but it may also function as a vehicle of social and cultural distortion.

Consider, for instance, ways in which media representations often show minorities in a manner that implies they are dangerous: In 2018, 18-year-old Nia Wilson and her sister were victims of an unprovoked and vicious attack. The sisters were at a transit station when they were assaulted by a man with a knife. Wilson died on the platform, and her sister was injured. After her death, photos from her Facebook page appeared elsewhere on the Internet. Like most teens, Nia Wilson populated her social media with selfies and group shots with friends. Notably, the photo selected by television station KTVU to represent Nia Wilson sparked a backlash. The station chose to air a picture of Nia Wilson appearing to hold a gun. “What a shocker,” one viewer tweeted, “@KTVU ran their live tv story using a photo of #NiaWilson holding a gun, in order to characterize her as violent. Out of respect for Miss Wilson, I won’t repost the photo, but this is the perfect example of how black victims are further victimized after death.” The photo of Nia Wilson, the viewer was clearly suggesting, represented her not as a victim of mortal violence but as a dangerous Black woman. Soon after the story was aired, KTVU anchor Frank Somerville posted a lengthy apology for choosing that photo on his Facebook page (Chiu, 2018).

A 2017 Color of Change study that examined media representations found that Black families are substantially overrepresented in media portrayals of poverty, parental absence, criminality, and social instability, while White families are underrepresented. The study concluded that, “news and opinion media propagate racialized cause-effect explanations for social problems, cumulatively characterizing Black families, Black people, and Black culture as presenting a fundamentally destabilizing force in their own communities and beyond” (Dixon, 2017).

Nia Wilson’s case, among others like those examined in the Color of Change study, recalls sociologist Patricia Hill Collins’s (1990) observation that, “Black women’s experiences with work, family, motherhood, sexual politics . . . have been routinely distorted in or excluded from traditional academic discourse” (p. 201). A similar story may hold for mass media. Images produced about marginalized groups by more powerful groups are, suggests Hill Collins, distorting. By contrast, knowledge about a social group produced by the group itself is empowering. A critical perspective on mass media invites us to ask who has the power to construct knowledge—including dominant images—about women of color and to recognize the importance of knowledge production as a source of power.

CULTURE, CLASS, AND INEQUALITY

3.4 Explain how sociologists theorize the relationship between culture and social class.

In their studies of culture and class, sociologists consider whether the musical and artistic tastes of different socioeconomic classes vary and, if so, why. Although the



Many popular sports, including hockey, football, and boxing, feature violence as a key component of the entertainment. What makes the physical violence of these sports enthralling for audiences?

answer may be interesting in itself, researchers are also likely to go a step farther and examine the links among culture, power, and class inequality. Particularly when using a social conflict lens, sociologists have long sought to show how elites use culture to gain or maintain power over other groups.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has used culture to help explain the phenomenon of **social class reproduction**, *the way in which class status is reproduced from generation to generation*. Bourdieu (1984) discusses the concept of **cultural capital**, *wealth in the form of knowledge, ideas, verbal skills, and ways of thinking and behaving*. Karl Marx argued that the key to power in a capitalist system is economic capital, particularly possession of the means of production. Bourdieu extends this idea by suggesting that cultural capital can also be a source of power. Children from privileged backgrounds have access to markedly different stores of cultural capital than do children from working-class backgrounds.

Children of the upper and middle classes come into the education system—the key path to success in modern industrial societies—with a set of language and academic skills, beliefs, and models of success and failure that fit into and are validated by mainstream schools. Children from less privileged backgrounds enter with a smaller amount of validated cultural capital; their skills, knowledge base, and styles of speaking are not those that schools conventionally recognize and reward. For example, while a child from a working-class immigrant family may know how to care for her younger siblings, prepare a good meal, and translate for non-English-fluent parents, her parents (similar to many first-generation immigrants) may have worked multiple jobs and may not have had the skills to read to her or the time or money to expose her to enriching activities. By contrast, her middle-class peers are more likely to have grown up with parents

Social class reproduction The way in which class status is reproduced from generation to generation, with parents passing on a class position to their offspring.

Cultural capital Wealth in the form of knowledge, ideas, verbal skills, and ways of thinking and behaving.

Habitus The internalization of objective probabilities and subsequent expression of those probabilities as choice.

who regularly read to them, took them to shows and museums, and quizzed them on multiplication problems. Although both children come to school with knowledge and skills, the cultural capital of the middle-class child can be more readily “traded” for academic success—and eventual economic gains.

In short, schools serve as locations where the cultural capital of the better-off classes is exchanged for educational success and credentials. This difference in scholastic achievement then translates into economic capital as high achievers assume prestigious, well-paid positions in the workplace. Those who do not have the cultural capital to trade for academic success are often tracked into jobs in society’s lower tiers. Class is reproduced as cultural capital begets academic achievement, which begets economic capital, which again begets cultural capital for the next generation.

Clearly, however, the structure of institutional opportunities, while unequal, cannot alone account for broad reproduction of social class across generations. Individuals, after all, make choices about education, occupations, and the like. They have free will—or, as sociologists put it, *agency*, which is understood as the capacity of individuals to make choices and to act independently. Bourdieu (1977) argues that agency must be understood in the context of structure. To this end, he introduces the concept of **habitus**, *the internalization of objective probabilities and the subsequent expression of those probabilities as choice*. Put another way, people come to want that which their own experiences and those of the people who surround them suggest they can realistically have—and they act accordingly.

Consider the following hypothetical example of habitus in practice. In a poor rural community where few people go to college, fewer can afford it, and the payoff of higher education is not obvious because there are few immediate role models with such experience, Bourdieu would argue that an individual’s choice not to prioritize getting into college reflects both agency *and* structure. That is, she makes the choice not to prepare herself for college or to apply to college, but going to college would likely not have been possible for her anyway as a result of her economic circumstances and perhaps as a result of

an inadequate education in an underfunded school. By contrast, the habitus of a young upper-middle-class person makes the choice of going to college almost unquestionable. Nearly everyone around her has gone or is going to college, the benefits of a college education are broadly discussed, and she is socialized from her early years to understand that college will follow high school—alternatives are rarely considered. Furthermore, a college education is accessible—she is prepared for college work in a well-funded public school or a private school, and family income, loans, or scholarships will contribute to making higher education a reality. Bourdieu thus suggests that social class reproduction appears on its face to be grounded in individual choices and merit, but fundamental structural inequalities that underlie class reproduction often go unrecognized (or, as Bourdieu puts it, “mis-recognized”), a fact that benefits the well-off.

CULTURE AND GLOBALIZATION

3.5 Apply functionalist and conflict perspectives to the phenomenon of global culture.

There is a pervasive sense around the world that globalization is creating a homogenized culture—a landscape dotted in every corner of the globe with the Golden Arches and the face of Colonel Sanders beckoning the masses to consume hamburgers and fried chicken. The familiar songs of Beyoncé, Ed Sheeran, and Drake are broadcast on radio stations from Bangladesh to Bulgaria to Belize, while rebroadcasts of such popular U.S. soap operas as *The Bold and the Beautiful* provide a picture of ostensibly “average” U.S. lives on the world’s television screens. In fact, about 70% of studio revenue in Hollywood is generated in overseas markets; that is, many films make far more money abroad than in the United States. Action-oriented films, in particular, garner large audiences in markets such as China and Russia (Brook, 2014): For example, within weeks of its release, *The Fate of the Furious* (2017) had earned \$1 billion, with over 80% of that earned overseas. More recently, *Wonder Woman* took in about \$411 million in the United States and another \$819 million worldwide (Mendelson, 2017).



Many U.S. films earn more money abroad than they do in the U.S. Action films like *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) are particularly popular with moviegoers around the globe. What makes these films popular with global audiences?

We see the effects of globalization—and of Americanization, in particular—in cultural representations such as McDonald’s restaurants, U.S. pop music and videos, and bottles of Coca-Cola spreading around the world. According to press reports, even in the Taliban era in Afghanistan, a time when a deeply conservative Islamist ideology was enforced throughout society, the culture of global Hollywood seeped in through the cracks of fundamentalism’s wall. In January of 2001, the Taliban rounded up dozens of barbers in the capital city of Kabul because they had been cutting men’s hair in a style known locally as the “Titanic”:

At the time, Kabul’s cooler young men wanted that Leonardo DiCaprio look, the one he sported in the movie. It was an interesting moment because under the Taliban’s moral regime, movies were

illegal. Yet thanks to enterprising video smugglers who dragged cassettes over mountain trails by mule, urban Afghans knew perfectly well who DiCaprio was and what he looked like. (Freund, 2002, p. 24)

How should a sociologist evaluate the spread of a globalized culture? Is globalization, on balance, positive or negative for countries, communities, and corporate entities? Is it only about business, or does it also have political implications? The conflict and functionalist perspectives offer us different ways of seeing contemporary **global culture**, a type of culture—some would say U.S. culture—that has spread across the world in the form of Hollywood films, fast-food restaurants, and popular music heard in virtually every country. This is a culture that draws heavily, though by no means exclusively, on U.S. trends and tastes.

A functionalist examining the development and spread of a broad global culture might begin by asking, “What is its function?” He or she could deduce that globalization spreads not only material culture in the form of food and music but also nonmaterial culture in the form of values and norms. Globalized norms and values can strengthen social solidarity and consequently serve to reduce conflict between states and societies. Therefore, globalization serves the integrative function of creating some semblance of a common culture that can foster mutual understanding and a foundation for dialogue.

Recall from Chapter 1 that functionalism assumes that the social world’s many parts are interdependent. Indeed, globalization highlights both the cultural and the economic interdependence of countries and communities.

Global culture A type of culture—some would say U.S. culture—that has spread across the world in the form of Hollywood films, fast-food restaurants, and popular music heard in virtually every country.



In its more than half-century of operation, McDonald's has become one of the most recognized icons of U.S. life and culture; Ronald McDonald is said to be the most recognized figure in the world after Santa Claus. McDonald's serves 68 million customers every day in about 37,855 restaurants in 120 countries around the globe.

The book *Global Hollywood* (Miller, Govil, McMurria, & Maxwell, 2002) describes what its authors call a *new international division of cultural labor*, a system of cultural production that crosses the globe, making the creation of culture an international rather than a national phenomenon (though profits still flow primarily into the core of the filmmaking industry in Hollywood).

The blockbuster film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) offers an example of the international division of cultural labor. The film, about a poor 18-year-old orphan who finds himself on the cusp of winning India’s “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” quiz show, was directed by Englishman Danny Boyle and codirected by New Delhi native Loveleen Tandan from a screenplay by Boyle’s countryman Simon Beaufoy that was based on the 2005 novel *Q & A* by Indian writer Vikas Swarup. In 2009, the film, distributed in the United States by Warner Independent Pictures but shown internationally, received nine Academy Awards, including Best Picture. The Indian cast of *Slumdog Millionaire* includes both established local actors and young Mumbai slum dwellers, some of whom were later found to have earned very little from their efforts. Boyle has argued, however, that the filmmakers worked to ensure future educational opportunities and shelter for the young actors. The film’s global appeal was huge, and

Violence in Media

Motion: Exposure to violence in films, television programs, music, and video games is harmful to children. It has negative individual and societal effects.

Background: Media is an important part of everyone’s life, particularly in the age of smartphones and other technologies that bring us near-constant access to news, entertainment, and social interaction. Violent content is common in the media to which we are exposed: According to one study, about 90% of movies, 68% of video games, and 60% of TV shows include some depictions of violence (B. J. Wilson, 2008). The rate of gun violence in PG-13 rated films, especially comic book inspired, exceeds that of R-rated films and has done so since 2012 (Romer, Jamieson, & Jamieson, 2017). Research also shows that young people ages 8 to 12 spend, on average, 6 hours per day engaged with media, while teenagers age 13 to 18 spend about 9 hours per day (Common Sense Media, 2015). More than 20 hours per week are spent playing video games, and some males are exposed to video games for 40 hours or more per week (Bailey, West, & Anderson, 2011). Popular examples of violence in media include movies such as the *Avengers*, *John Wick*, and *X-Men* series; television programs such as *Game of Thrones*, *The Walking Dead*, and *Power Rangers*; and video games such as *Call of Duty* and *Grand Theft Auto*.

The question of whether children’s exposure to violence is causally related to increased aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, and fear of being harmed is one that evokes significant debate.

Questions for Consideration

- If research shows a relationship between exposure to violence in media and real-life consequences such as aggression and desensitization to violence, whose responsibility is it to respond? How should the government, parents, and the producers of cultural products respond?
- Is the inclusion of violence in films, television, and other media an issue of free speech? Can it be legally controlled? Should it be legally controlled?
- Should adult exposure to violent media be a concern for society?

Debate Tip

- It is important to have strong opening and concluding statements. Direct quotations, facts and figures, and thought-provoking questions help in making a strong opening for a debate. Finish with a statement that wraps up your argument and guides your audience to a conclusion.

AFFIRMATIVE ARGUMENTS	OPPOSITION ARGUMENTS
Media is an important agent of socialization, so we would expect exposure to violence in media to affect children and young people. Exposure to violence in films, television programs, and videos is associated in numerous research studies with greater propensity for aggressive behavior in children and adolescents.	Correlation is not causation: A correlation between the presence of violence in media and violence in real life does not establish a direct causal relationship between the two.
Violence in media rarely depicts consequences. Especially in video games and action films, harming or killing someone is often an action that is rewarded. This sends confusing messages to children.	Violent crime rates in the United States have declined in recent years. The experience of some other countries also challenges this argument. For example, Japan has high levels of media violence in popular films and video games, but the incidence of serious crimes committed by young people is falling.
Research shows that children, particularly very young children, cannot distinguish reality from fiction.	It is challenging to isolate triggers for real-life violence: In addition to media, violent behavior may be linked to mental health issues, exposure to interpersonal threats or violence, economic deprivation, and access to weapons, among others.

it generated almost \$378 million in box office returns, leading the *Wall Street Journal* to label it “the film world’s first globalized masterpiece” (Morgenstern, 2008).

From the social conflict perspective, we can view the globalization of culture as a force with the potential to perpetuate economic inequality—particularly because globalization is a product of the developed world. Although a functionalist would highlight the creative global collaboration and productive interdependence of a film such as *Slumdog Millionaire*, a conflict theorist would ask, “Who benefits from such a production?” Although Western film companies, producers, and directors walk away with huge profits, the slum dwellers used as actors or extras garner far less sustained global interest or financial gain.

A conflict theorist might also describe how the globalization of cheap fast food can cripple small independent eateries that serve indigenous (and arguably healthier) cuisine. An influx of global corporations inhibits some local people from owning their own means of production and providing employment to others. The demise of local restaurants, cafés, and food stalls represents a loss of the cuisines and, thus, the unique cultures of indigenous peoples. It also forces working people to depend on large corporations for their livelihoods, depriving them of economic independence.

Although functionalism and conflict theory offer different interpretations of globalization, both offer valuable insights. Globalization may bring people together through common entertainment, eating experiences, and communication technologies, and, at the same time, it may represent a threat—real or perceived—to local cultures and economies as indigenous producers are marginalized and the sounds and styles of different cultures are replaced by a single mold set by Western entertainment marketers.

Journalist Thomas Friedman has suggested that although most countries cannot resist the forces of globalization, it is not inevitably homogenizing. In *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, Thomas L. Friedman (2000) writes that

the most important filter is the ability to “glocalize.” I define healthy glocalization as the ability of a culture, when it encounters other strong cultures, to absorb influences that naturally fit into and can enrich that culture, to resist those things

that are truly alien and to compartmentalize those things that, while different, can nevertheless be enjoyed and celebrated as different. (p. 295)

The concept of *glocalization* highlights the idea of cultural hybrids born of a pastiche of both local and global influences.

In the *Globalization of Nothing*, sociologist George Ritzer (2007) proposes a view of globalization that integrates what he calls *grobalization*, the product of “the imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and the like and their desire . . . to impose themselves on various geographic areas” (p. 15). Ritzer adds that the “main interest of the entities involved in grobalization is in seeing their power, influence, and in many cases, profits grow (hence the term *grobalization*) throughout the world” (p. 16). The concept of *grobalization* draws from classical sociological theorists such as Karl Marx and Max Weber. For instance, where Marx theorized capitalism’s imperative of economic imperialism, Ritzer offers contemporary examples of grobalization’s economic and cultural imperialism, exporting not only brand-name products but also the values of consumerism and the practical vehicles of mass consumption, such as credit cards.

How will the world’s cultures shift in the decades to come? Will they globalize or remain localized? Will they glocalize or grobalize? Clearly, the material culture of the West, particularly of the United States, is powerful: It is pushed into other parts of the world by markets and merchants, but it is also pulled in by people eager to hitch their stars to the modern Western world. Local identities and cultures continue to shape people’s views and actions, but there is little reason to believe that McDonald’s, KFC, and Coca-Cola will drop out of the global marketplace. The dominance of U.S. films, music, and other cultural products is also likely to remain a feature of the world cultural stage.

WHY STUDY CULTURE AND MEDIA THROUGH A SOCIOLOGICAL LENS?

Culture is a vital component of a community’s identity—through language, objects, and practices,

culture embodies a community and its environment. Culture is powerful and complex. As we have seen in this chapter, cultural products, including those disseminated by the mass media, both reflect and shape our societal hopes and fears, norms and beliefs, and rituals and practices. From superheroes and classical music to folk dances and folkways, culture is at the core of the human experience. We are all profoundly “cultured.”

Culture can be a source of integration and harmony, as functionalists assert, or it can be a vehicle of manipulation and oppression, as conflict theorists often see it. There is compelling evidence for both perspectives, and context is critical for recognizing which perspective better captures the character of a given cultural scenario.

The study of culture is much more than just an intellectual exercise. In this chapter, you encountered several key questions about culture that are important objects of public discussion today. Do the mass media foster engagement in public life, or does it distract and disengage us from the pressing problems of our time? Is violence in the media just entertainment, or does it contribute, even indirectly, to violence in relationships, communities, and society? Will the evolution of a more global culture play an integrative role, or will smaller cultures resist homogenization and assert their own power? These are questions of profound importance in a media-saturated and multicultural world—a sociological perspective can help us to make sense of them.

What Can I Do With a Sociology Degree?

Problem Solving

Problem solving is a fundamental skill in social scientific disciplines such as sociology and in a wide variety of contemporary occupational fields. Managing and addressing complex problems by identifying their dimensions, researching their roots, and using the knowledge to craft well-reasoned responses is a skill set that is developed through careful study, training in research and analysis, and practice. Problem solving is, in many respects, comprised of other key skills we discuss in this feature, including critical thinking, quantitative and qualitative research competency, and understanding of diversity. At the same time, it is a skill that has its own characteristics as a product of sociological training.

Sociological research data, which form the foundation of what sociologists do and teach, cannot solve problems; rather, research data contribute to the informed understanding of the dimensions of a problem. Data are also used to hypothesize the roots of a problem. Once the roots of a problem are identified, they can be addressed through, for instance, policy or community interventions. Research can be used to

follow up on whether and how solutions worked and to rework hypotheses based on new information.

Researching the roots of a problem can involve a spectrum of different approaches, and a sociologist often needs to try more than one approach to generate a comprehensive picture of the problem. Social life is complex, and most serious social problems are not amenable to simple solutions. At the same time, the probability of successfully addressing a problem is greater when one has used careful research to understand its causes.



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The problems encountered in different occupational fields vary, but the need for people who are skilled in breaking down a problem, defining it, analyzing it, crafting solutions based on good data, and effectively communicating identified paths of action is common across many areas.

Sociology teaches you to think critically about how policies and environmental factors impact certain populations and cultures. I studied sociology because I wanted to learn why some populations were less advantaged than others and what social determinants would change their life outcomes for the better.

In the nearly 10 years I have worked in the communications and public relations field, I have frequently utilized my knowledge of sociological theories and concepts. As a professional communicator, it is my job to break down complex topics and policies for the general public to understand. Knowing how those policies will impact different populations and cultures helps me create a message that is more succinct and relatable to my target audience.

My desire to work in health care is also tied to my interest in sociology. Access to affordable health care services is so critical in our society and affects issues like public safety and crime, the economy, and job creation—just to name a few. You cannot go to school,

take care of your family, or go to work if you are not healthy.

In my current job, I work with local nonprofits to provide financial sponsorship on behalf of Providence Health & Services Alaska for programs that align with our organizational mission to serve the most poor and vulnerable. This includes support for homeless youth shelters, soup kitchens, women's shelters, and many other important programs in order to improve health outcomes for Alaska families.

In sociology, you learn about social stratification and how factors like wealth and income influence a person's ability to succeed in life. Communicating about the importance of affordable health care and access to critical social services directly relates to this discussion of social inequalities.

Career Data: Public Relations Specialists

- **2018 Median Pay: \$60,000**
- **Typical Entry-Level Education: Bachelor's degree**
- **Job Growth Outlook, 2016–2026: 9% (as fast as average)**

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019f).

Summary

- **Culture** consists of the beliefs, norms, behaviors, and products common to members of a particular social group. **Language** is an important component of cultures. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis points to language's role in structuring perceptions and actions. Culture is a key topic of sociological study because, as human beings, we have the capacity to develop it through the creation of artifacts such as songs, foods, and values. Culture also influences our social development: We are products of our cultural beliefs, behaviors, and biases.
- Sociologists and others who study culture generally distinguish between material and nonmaterial culture. **Material culture** encompasses physical artifacts—the objects created, embraced, and consumed by a given society. **Nonmaterial culture** is generally abstract and includes culturally accepted ideas about living and behaving. The two are intertwined because nonmaterial culture often gives particular meanings to the objects of material culture.
- Norms are the common rules of a culture that govern people's actions. **Folkways** are fairly weak

norms, the violation of which is tolerable. **Mores** are strongly held norms; violating them is subject to social or legal sanction. **Taboos** are the most closely held mores; violating them is socially unthinkable. **Laws** codify some, although not all, of society's norms.

- **Beliefs** are particular ideas that people accept as true, although they need not be objectively true. Beliefs can be based on faith, superstition, science, tradition, or experience.
- **Values** are the general, abstract standards of a society and define basic, often idealized principles. We identify national values, community values, institutional values, and individual values. Values may be sources of cohesion or of conflict.
- **Ideal culture** consists of the norms and values that the people of a society profess to embrace. **Real culture** consists of the real values, norms, and practices of people in a society.
- Ethnocentrism is the habit of judging other cultures by the standards of one's own.
- Sociologists entreat us to embrace **cultural relativism**, a perspective that allows us to understand the practices of other societies in terms of those societies' norms and values rather than our own.
- Multiple cultures may exist and thrive within any country or community. Some of these are **subcultures**, which exist together with the dominant culture but differ in some important respects from it.
- **High culture** is an exclusive culture often limited in its accessibility and audience. High culture is widely associated with the upper class, which both defines and embraces its content. **Popular culture** encompasses entertainment, culinary, and athletic tastes that are broadly shared. As mass culture, popular culture is more fully associated with the middle and working classes.
- **Rape culture** is a social culture that provides an environment conducive to rape. Some sociologists argue that we can best understand the high number of rapes and attempted rapes in the United States by considering both individual circumstances and the larger social context, which contains messages that marginalize and normalize the problem of sexual assault.
- **Global culture**—some would say U.S. culture—has spread across the world in the form of Hollywood films, fast-food restaurants, and popular music heard in almost every country.

Key Terms

beliefs 68	global culture 91	multiculturalism 82
cultural capital 89	habitus 89	nonmaterial culture 68
cultural inconsistency 73	high culture 82	popular culture 82
cultural relativism 77	ideal culture 73	rape culture 85
culture 67	language 79	real culture 73
doxic 75	laws 70	social class reproduction 89
emic perspective 77	mass media 84	subcultures 78
etic perspective 77	material culture 67	taboos 70
folkways 70	mores 70	values 70

Discussion Questions

1. This chapter discusses tensions between ideal and real culture in attitudes and practices linked to conventional attractiveness and honesty. Can you think of other cases where ideal and real cultures collide?
2. Following the ideas of the critical theorists in sociology, this chapter suggests that mass media may play a paradoxical role in society, offering both the information needed to bring about an informed citizenry and disseminating mass entertainment that distracts and disengages individuals from debates of importance. Which of these functions do you think is more powerful?
3. What is cultural capital? What, according to Bourdieu, is its significance in society?
How does one acquire valued cultural capital, and how is it linked to the reproduction of social class?
4. The chapter presents an argument on the relationships among culture, social and mass media, and sexual violence with a discussion of the concept of a rape culture. Describe the argument. Do you agree or disagree with the argument? Explain your position.
5. Sociologist George Ritzer sees within globalization two processes—"glocalization" and "globalization." What is the difference between the two? Which is, in your opinion, the more powerful process, and why do you believe this? Support your point with evidence.



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