Chapter 2: Culture and Society
What is culture?

- **Culture** is a set of values, norms, and behaviors shared by a social group.
- **Values** are those ideals that a society holds above all others (e.g., honesty, honor).
- These values are the building blocks of **norms**, which are basic rules of social conduct.
- Another part of culture is the **material objects** we create.
An expanded notion of culture

• Culture also encapsulates the way of life of a social group.

• Ann Swidler (1986) described a cultural “toolkit” from which we can choose the appropriate tools—values, norms, practices—for any social situation.

• Key point: culture is learned, not instinctual or inherited.
Culture varies both across and within societies.
What is important and seemingly “normal” in one society may not be in another.
Even within a society, the dominant values and norms change over time.
What is society?

- Societies are systems of relationships between people.
- Societies consist of members that share some sense of common identity and be small (like a family) or large (like a nation-state).
- Shared culture is important in holding a society together.
Conformity and social control

- Societies need a significant degree of conformity to function smoothly.
- Members learn norms through the process of socialization.
- Because people accept the norms and values of their societies as natural, they largely conform.
- Those who do not conform are subject to measures of social control.
What makes humans different

- Culture versus instinct
- The ability to reason, to think in the abstract, allowed for the development of culture.
- This included the development of complex systems of communication and future-oriented thought and planning.
- Complex thinking also makes humans strong innovators.
Nature or nurture?

• Sociologists today largely agree that the social environment interacts with biology.
• Even so, we strongly resist the idea that genetics predetermine an individual’s social life and potentialities.
Nature *and* nurture

• Sociologists now study how nature and nurture interact to produce particular behaviors.
• The interest in nurture has led to an ongoing focus on the importance of socialization.
• Examining cultural variation offers evidence of the role of the social in explaining human behaviors and values.
Cultural diversity

• Studying diversity is very important for sociologists; comparative research is common.

• Things to be aware of:
  – Ethnocentrism—viewing one’s own culture as normal and, oftentimes, superior
  – Cultural relativism—judging other cultures based on their own norms and standards
Cultural diversity

- Diversity within societies is also important.
- There are the obvious kinds of social groups (e.g. race, gender, religion) that constitute a society, but there are also subcultures.
- A subculture is a group whose norms and values differ from those of the “mainstream.”
Diversity today

- In diverse societies like the United States, studies of assimilation and multiculturalism are common.
- These studies attempt to understand how diverse societies (and the individuals in them) can best function.
- Globalization has led to increased diversity in most countries.
How many of the following words or phrases can you identify? The United States is a melting pot, where many cultures live side-by-side. Americans often share in the cuisines, music, holiday traditions, and even language of cultures that are very different from their own family heritages. Yet even within a single ethnic or religious subculture, further subcultures exist, such as generational subcultures—where people born in the 1990s experience culture in very different ways than their parents or grandparents. Turn the page (or ask one of your classmates) to find out the answers.

1. bhangra
2. bocce
3. acupuncture
4. futon
5. tah deeg
6. pierogi
7. jumping the broom
8. chuppah
9. ushanka
10. sarape
11. djembe
12. sitar
13. LP
14. kaffeklatsch
15. getting pinned
1. **bhangra**: A type of music and dance that originated in the Punjab region of India, especially among Sikhs. American music fans may recognize bhangra melodies and rhythms from hip-hop artists including Beyonce and Beenie Man.

2. **bocce**: Bocce is a sport similar to bowling, although it takes place outside—usually on one’s lawn or on a court made of stones or shells. The sport originated in Italy, and literally means “bowls.”

3. **acupuncture**: A form of Chinese medicine that has grown in popularity in the United States over the past decade. It involves inserting fine needles into specific points on the body to relieve pain.

4. **futon**: A thick mattress with a cloth cover, used for sleeping. Although futons are common in college dorm rooms, they originated as beds in Japan.

5. **tah deeg**: A much-sought-after delicacy in Persian cooking; it is the crispy layer of browned rice at the bottom of a pan of cooked rice.

6. **pierogi**: A boiled dumpling of unleavened dough stuffed with ingredients such as potatoes or cheese. Pierogis can be found at American grocery stores, but originally are from eastern European nations such as Poland.

7. **jumping the broom**: A common custom at African American wedding ceremonies. The bride and groom end their ceremony by jumping together or separately over a broom that is lying in front of the altar.

8. **chuppah**: A canopy traditionally used in Jewish weddings. It symbolizes the home the couple will build together.

9. **ushanka**: A fur cap with ear flaps that can be tied under the chin to protect the ears from the cold. The ushanka originates from Russia.
10. **sarape**: A colorful shawl or poncho worn in Mexico.

11. **djembe**: A large drum from West Africa. *Djembe* literally means “everyone gather together.” American popular musicians Ben Harper, Paul Simon, and the Grateful Dead have added the djembe to their percussion lines.

11. **sitar**: A long-necked stringed instrument that is plucked. It is used primarily in music from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Sitar music was widely introduced to the Western world when Ravi Shankar performed with the Beatles in the 1960s.

12. **LP**: a long-playing record, also known as a 33 1/3 rpm vinyl record. In the 1960s through the mid 1980s, this is how most people listened to recorded music. The LP has since given way to CDs and downloaded music stored in iPods.

13. **kaffeeklatsch**: An informal gathering of friends to drink coffee and chat, like on the television show *Friends*. This is a German word, although the idea is very familiar to Americans.

14. **getting pinned**: In the 1940s and 1950s, when a dating couple decided they wanted to be “exclusive,” the boy would present the girl with a “pin”— typically earned for his athletic or academic achievements.
Cultural universals

• Social institutions found in virtually all societies are called cultural universals.
• Language is one of the most significant cultural universals (others include marriage and art).
• Languages are complex systems of communication, which are fundamental to human social life as they free us from our immediate environments.
Pre-modern societies

• **Hunting and gathering** societies were the dominant social form for most of human history.
  – Relatively egalitarian, with no class structures
  – Cooperative rather than competitive

• **Settled agrarian and pastoral** societies emerged approximately 15,000 years ago.
  – Somewhat less egalitarian
  – More accumulation of wealth and goods; larger groups
Pre-modern societies

“Civilizations” or city-states developed about 8,000 years ago.

- These societies were typically large and had a significant degree of inequality.
- They were also usually imperial, meaning that the conquest of other peoples and societies was commonplace.
Industryization

• Beginning in the eighteenth century in Britain, mass production, via mechanized factories, rapidly changed the economy.

• The Western European countries and the United States were the early industrializers, experiencing fast-paced innovation simultaneous with their development as nation-states.
Industrialization and colonialism

- Early industrializers colonized other countries for economic gain (and political power).
- Such relationships frequently interfered with social structures already in place in destructive ways.
- Though now independent nation-states, these formerly colonized countries largely constitute what we call the “developing world.”
Modern, industrial societies

• In these societies, greater than 90 percent of the population lives in urban settings.
• Work is almost exclusively non-agricultural.
• Such societies are often characterized as impersonal and anonymous, though not all sociologists agree with this representation.
Globalization and culture

- There is virtually no escape from globalization today as a result of technology.
- Television, the “global economy,” multinational corporations (MNCs), and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), along with e-communication, have changed the face of culture the world over, leading to increased interdependence.
Map 2.1 The Exploding Internet, 2008
Response to globalization

- Not everyone is happy with globalization.
- There has been a rise of nationalism, tribalism, and other forms of protest that is largely a rejection of Western culture (often seen as Americanization).
- Part of the response has also been an emphasis on the importance of local culture.
This concludes the Lecture PowerPoint Presentation for Chapter 2: Culture and Society

For more learning resources, please visit our online StudySpace at:
http://www.wwnorton.com/college/soc/essentials-of-sociology2/

W. W. Norton & Company
Independent and Employee-Owned
Clicker Questions

1. The goods we consume, from the clothes we wear, to the cars we drive, to the houses we live in, are all part of:

   a. symbolic culture.
   b. material culture.
   c. modern culture.
   d. popular culture.
2. What is a signifier?

a. A signifier is the name given to the meaning of a spoken or written word.

b. A signifier is any vehicle of meaning, such as speech, writing, dress, or buildings.

c. A signifier is the meaning of a symbol.

d. A signifier is an electronic sign.
3. Computer hackers could be said to be an example of which of the following?

a. a culture
b. a subculture
c. a society
d. a cultural composite
4. Which of the following is an example of a cultural universal?

a. the prohibition against incest
b. the right to political protest
c. a concept of individual rights and freedoms
d. the idea of a teenager
5. What is the position of sociologists on the nature/nurture debate?

a. Sociologists believe that “biology is destiny.”
b. Sociologists ask how nature and nurture interact to produce human behavior.
c. No sociologists today acknowledge a role for nature.
d. Sociologists do not have a position.
Clicker Questions

6. What happened to destroy the forms of society (hunter-gatherer, pastoral, agrarian and traditional/civilization) that dominated the whole of history up to two centuries ago?

a. cultural relativism
b. the cultural turn
c. globalization
d. industrialization
7. Which of the following is an example of a cultural universal?

a. the prohibition against incest
b. the right to political protest
c. a concept of individual rights and freedoms
d. the idea of a teenager
Art Presentation Slides

Chapter 2

Culture and Society

Anthony Giddens
Mitchell Duneier
Richard P. Appelbaum
Deborah Carr
A woman looks at a dish of worms during the Taipei Chinese Food Festival in Taiwan.
Members of a 1960s commune pose together for a group portrait
Harajuku girls stroll down a street in Tokyo, Japan
Papua New Guinean men in traditional clothing and face paint at the Sing-Sing Annual Cultural show.
Spinach Pierogi
Cologne Cathedral, built in the Middle Ages, stands at the center of Cologne, Germany, and towers over the city, symbolizing the central role Christianity played in medieval European life.
Over 90 percent of the people who live in industrial societies live in cities or towns.
Women waiting in line for food in Calcutta, India
Map 2.1 The Exploding Internet, 2008
Using the Internet to connect with the world around them is common among young people across cultures.
This concludes the Art Presentation Slides Slide Set for Chapter 2 Essentials Of Sociology

THIRD EDITION

by
Anthony Giddens
Mitchell Duneier
Richard P. Appelbaum
Deborah Carr