Picture a house. First there is the wood frame, then the walls and roof. This provides the framework or structure. Within that structure, activities or processes take place—electricity to turn on lights and appliances, water to wash in and drink, and people to carry out these processes. If something goes wrong in the house, we take steps to control the damage and repair it.

Our social world is constructed in a similar way: social structure is the framework of society with its organizations, and social processes are the dynamic activities of the society. This section begins with a discussion of the structure of society, followed by the processes of culture and socialization through which individuals are taught cultural rules—how to function and live effectively within their society. Although socialization takes place primarily at the micro-level process, we will explore its implications at the meso and macro levels as well.

If we break the social structure into parts, like the wood frame, walls, and roof, it is the groups and organizations (including bureaucracies) that make up the structure. To work smoothly, these organizations depend on people’s loyalty to do what society and its groups need to survive; however, smooth functioning does not always happen. Things break down. This means those in control of societies try to control disruptions and deviant individuals in order to maintain control and function smoothly.

As we explore these chapters, we will continue to examine social life at the micro, meso, and macro levels, for each of us as individuals is profoundly shaped by social processes and structures at larger and more abstract levels, all the way to the global level.
SOCIETY AND CULTURE: Hardware and Software of Our Social World

What to Expect...

Society: The Hardware
Culture: The Software
Society, Culture, and Our Social World
The Components of Culture
Cultural Theory at the Micro Level
Cultural Theories at the Meso and Macro Levels
Policy and Cultural Change
The Fit between Hardware and Software
So What?

Computer hardware like the circuit board makes it possible for software to work. Likewise, social structure is the behind-the-scenes “hardware” that makes the culture—in colorful variety—possible.
Think About It . . .

1. Why do people live so differently?
2. Could you be “human” without culture?
3. How do national cultures, subcultures, microcultures, and countercultures influence what you do in your everyday lives?
4. Why are society and culture important in understanding your own life?
Aisha, an African woman from Sudan, is cooking the evening meal. As she pounds the cassava root into a pulp to make bread dough, she chairs with her husband's other wives about the impending marriage of their neighbor to his fourth wife, a young woman who will join his first three wives in the household.

In China, the workday in the fields has ended for the Liu family and the children have returned home from school. The village women are pitching in to prepare the evening meal of rice and vegetables before going to the village square for a farm cooperative meeting.

On an Israeli kibbutz, parents pick up their children after school and play, then join other community members in the central dining hall for an evening meal of dairy products and fresh fruits and vegetables. Families can choose to eat in their own homes, but after a long day, it is convenient to have the meal prepared for them.

In Kansas City, Bethany picks up her children from day care while her husband, Tad, begins to prepare the evening meal. Tonight, they hurriedly heat frozen pizza in the microwave before she goes to the school for a teacher's conference and Tad goes to a ball game where his son—from a previous marriage—is playing third base. On evenings when both Bethany and Tad must work late, the family eats at a neighborhood fast-food restaurant.

Millions of scenarios like these are played out as evening falls around the world. Whether food is prepared over an open fire or in a microwave oven, all humans have the universal need to eat. What foods are available, who prepares them, and how the preparation is done differ from one culture to another. Broad variations may exist even within one society, yet all of these examples have something in common: each represents a society that has a unique culture. A society consists of individuals who live together in a specific geographical area, who interact more with each other than they do with outsiders, cooperate for the attainment of common goals, and share a common culture over time. Culture is the way of life shared by a group of people—the knowledge, belief, values, rules or laws, language, customs, symbols, and material products within a society that help meet human needs (Tyler 1871/1958).

The way people think and behave in any society is prescribed to a large extent by that society's culture. All activities in the society, whether preparing and eating dinner, selecting leaders for the group, finding a mate, educating young members, or negotiating with other societies, are guided by cultural rules and expectations. In each society, culture provides the social rules for how individuals carry out necessary tasks. Our personal experiences in the world also are determined by the culture provided by our family and society and taught to us beginning at birth.

Whereas culture provides the “software program” or general guidelines for the way people live, society provides the “hardware” or the structure that provides organization and stability to group life. Each society includes major parts, or institutions—family, education, religion, politics, economics, and health—that meet basic human needs. (We will explore specific institutions later in the book.) A society, then, is the group of people who are organized and interdependent. A culture is their way of life. Society cannot exist without culture, and culture does not exist without a society. The two are not the same thing, but they cannot exist without each other, much as computer hardware and software are each useless without the other.

This chapter explores the ideas of society and culture and discusses how they relate to each other. We will look at what society is, how it influences and is influenced by culture, what culture is, how and why it develops, and where we as individuals fit into society and culture in our multileveled social world.
A society consists of individuals who live together in families and communities. Societies are composed of the structures—interdependent positions we hold (parents, workers), groups to which we belong (family, work group, clubs), and institutions as listed above that make up group life. This “hardware” (structure) of our social world provides the framework for “software” (culture) to function.

This section explores ways in which societies are organized, how societies have become more complex over time, and how change influences societies and cultures. Human societies have been in the hunter-gatherer stage for 99 percent of human existence, and a few groups still remain in this stage. In fact, as Table 3.1 illustrates, if all of human history were compressed into the lifetime of a 70-year-old person, humans would have left their cave dwelling only nine months ago. Note the incredible rate of change that has occurred in the past two centuries.

The stage of development that any society has reached depends on a range of factors including availability of resources, contact with other societies, and cultural beliefs. At each developmental stage, changes take place in social structures and relationships between people. It is important to note that not all societies go through all stages. Some are jolted into the future by political events or changes in the global system, and some resist pressures to become modernized.

What major changes have taken place in the past 200 years that affect the way people live today? You may want to use your own family’s history as a starting point.

Evolution of Societies

The simplest societies have only two or three social positions or statuses. The men can teach their sons everything they need to know, for all of the men do pretty much the same things—hunting, fishing, or farming, and protecting the community from danger. Likewise, girls learn their positions in the society from their mothers—usually child care, fetching water, food preparation, farming, and perhaps building the dwelling in which they live. In more complex societies, such as industrial societies, there are thousands of interdependent statuses and division of labor, with each individual holding a specific position with designated tasks. The question here is how societies evolve into new types of societies.

Emile Durkheim (1893/1947), an early French sociologist, pictured a continuum between simple and complex societies. Simple premodern societies are characterized by mechanical solidarity, wherein society is held together by common beliefs, values, and emotional ties; division of labor is based largely on male/female distinctions and age groupings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,000,000 years ago</td>
<td><em>Pithecanthropus erectus</em> is born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500,000 years ago</td>
<td>Age 35: finally learned to make and use crude stone axes and knives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 years ago</td>
<td>Age 69: (nine months ago) the last ice age over, left cave dwellings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 years ago</td>
<td>Age 69: (about three months ago) began to cast and use metals and built the pyramids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 years ago</td>
<td>Age 69: seven weeks ago, Jesus was born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220 years ago</td>
<td>Age 69: five days ago, crossed the Delaware with George Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 years ago</td>
<td>Age 69: yesterday, the airplane was invented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 years ago</td>
<td>Age 69: this afternoon, landed on the moon; in early evening, broke the DNA (genetic) code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 CE</td>
<td>70th birthday: tonight celebrates the arrival of the twenty-first century</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Or several million years, according to some anthropologists.
in more complex societies. Each position developed specific tasks and was interdependent with other positions, what Durkheim called organic solidarity. To put together a car in a factory takes many individuals carrying out interdependent tasks. One reason the division of labor is critical to new stages of society is that it leads to new forms of social glue based on this interdependence. Changes from mechanical (traditional) to organic (more complex) societies depend on harnessing new forms of energy and finding more efficient ways to use energy; these elements are critical to evolution of societies (Nolan and Lenski 1999).

Also, as societies changed, they become more multi-leveled. The meso level—institutions and large bureaucratic organizations—came to have more influence. Still, as recently as 200 years ago, even large societies had little global interdependence, and life for the typical citizen was influenced mostly by local community events at the meso level.

As you read about each of the following types of societies, from most simple to most complex, notice the presence of these variables: division of labor, interdependence of people’s positions, increasingly advanced technologies, and new forms and uses of energy. While none of these variables appears sufficient to trigger evolution to a new type of society, they may all be necessary in order for a transition to occur.

In the simpler, more traditional societies, interpersonal interaction was very important. The economy, religion, educational, political systems, and health care were all largely functions held by the family or individuals serving families, such as shamans for health care. While a specialist—a shaman—might perform healing functions, health care was not a complex institution or even an organization. Developing meso and macro levels of society seems to have been a result of changes in society rather than a cause. As we move through the process of sociocultural evolution, however, the meso- and macro-level institutions of the social world become more organized and have more profound impacts on the lives of individuals.

Types of Societies
Sociologist and anthropologists typically identify five stages in the process of sociocultural evolution (Nolan and Lenski 1999), beginning with foraging societies in which the people hunt and gather in order to survive. Horticultural, agricultural, industrial, and then information-age (postindustrial) societies are increasingly complex social systems.

Hunter-Gatherer Societies
From the beginning of human experience until recently, hunting and gathering was the sole means of sustaining life. Other types of societies emerged only recently (Nolan and Lenski 1999), and today, only a handful of societies still rely on hunting and gathering.

Modern industrial societies are often held together through structural interdependence of roles and tasks (organic solidarity). Sharing the same values with others in the same occupation or position is less important than economic interdependence with each other.

Source: © Steve Raymer / Corbis.

A mother in Cote d’Ivoire (West Africa), carrying her load on her head returns to the village with her daughter after gathering wood. Carrying wood and water is typically women’s work. In this society, however, the primary social cohesion is mechanical solidarity.

Source: © Olivier Martel / Corbis.
In the Kalahari Desert of Southwest Africa live a hunter-gatherer people known as the '!Kung San. (The ' is pronounced with a click of the tongue.) The '!Kung live a nomadic life, moving from one place to another as food supplies are used up. They live in temporary huts, settling around water holes for a few months at a time. These settlements are small, rarely more than 20 to 50 people, for food supplies are not great enough to support larger, permanent populations (Lee 1984). A gender division of labor facilitates the effort to obtain food. '!Kung women are primarily responsible for gathering nuts and other edible plant matter, while '!Kung men are excellent hunters. When a large animal is killed, people gather from a wide area to share in the bounty, and great care is taken to ensure that the meat is distributed fairly. Beyond gender and age, there is little diversity in responsibilities and therefore few choices about what to do.

Because they are a nomadic people, the '!Kung San have few personal possessions. All the available resources are shared among the people who live at a water hole and those who come to visit. However, sharing is regulated by a complex system of obligations. A visitor who eats food at another's hearth is expected to repay that hospitality in the future. Without question, the ability to control the source of food was a major turning point in cultural evolution for several reasons. First, because horticultural societies were more settled and surplus food was a possibility, the size of societies increased. A community might now contain as many as 2,000 to 3,000 individuals. Yet because the land became exhausted, many groups still moved periodically, a situation that limited both group size and number of possessions.

The Masai are a herding society: their food-producing strategy is based on their herds of domesticated animals, whose care is the central focus of their activities. Rather than hunt for meat, they tame animals such as sheep, goats, pigs, dogs, and camels, and use them for a food supply. Horticultural societies engage in primitive agriculture using digging sticks and wooden hoes to plant and maintain small garden plots. They domesticate beans, corn, squash, and other plants rather than gather wild vegetables. Both herding and horticultural societies are distinguished from hunter-gatherer societies in that their members cultivate food and have some control over its production (Ward 2006).

Without question, the ability to control the source of food has either disappeared or is now protected on game preserves. In addition, the governments of South Africa and Botswana have attempted to settle the groups on reservations. These nations create a macro-level dimension to the lives of these people that they had not known before. By becoming connected to other ways of life, by choice or force, they will experience change. Thus, the hunter-gatherer lifestyle is becoming extinct.

Herding and Horticultural Societies

The Masai tribespeople inhabit the grasslands of Kenya and Tanzania, depending on their herds for survival. Their animals—cattle and goats—are their primary source of nutrition, providing meat, milk, and blood (which they drink). A semi-nomadic society, the Masai move from settlement to settlement to find grazing land for their animals, setting up semipermanent shelters for the few months they will remain in one area. All of the huts in the village are constructed in a circle; often a fence surrounds the compound to discourage unwelcome animal intruders. The group may return to an old compound after some time has elapsed and the grazing is favorable again. They often grow short-term crops to supplement their diet. The Masai live as they have lived for centuries, in balance with their environment. However, the government of Kenya, a relatively new macro-level influence on their lives, now restricts their territory and practices that overlap with wild animal refuges, and tourism is influencing their economy.

The culture of the '!Kung San and the few other hunter-gatherer societies in the world today have changed rapidly in recent years. Much of the wild game on which they subsisted has either disappeared or is now protected on game preserves. The government of Botswana has either disappeared or is now protected on game preserves. In addition, the governments of South Africa and Botswana have attempted to settle the groups on reservations. These nations create a macro-level dimension to the lives of these people that they had not known before. By becoming connected to other ways of life, by choice or force, they will experience change. Thus, the hunter-gatherer lifestyle is becoming extinct.
advances in irrigation systems, fertilization of land, and rotation of crops. However, the technological breakthrough that moved many societies into the next stage was the plow, introduced about 6,000 years ago. It marked the beginning of the agricultural revolution in Europe and the Middle East and brought massive changes in social structures to many societies.

**Agricultural Societies**

Pedro and Lydia Ramirez and their four young children live in a small farming village in Nicaragua. They rise early, and while Pedro heads for the fields to do some work before breakfast, Lydia prepares his breakfast and lunch and sees that their eldest son is up and ready to go to school. After school, the boy also helps in the fields. Most of the land in the area is owned by a large company that grows coffee, but the Ramirez family is fortunate to have a small garden plot of their own where they grow some vegetables for themselves. At harvest time, all hands help, including young children. The families receive cash for the crops they have grown, minus rent for the land. The land is plowed with the help of strong animals such as horses and oxen, and fertilizers are used. Little irrigation is attempted, though the garden plots may be watered by hand in the dry season.

The Ramirez's way of life is typical of an agricultural society. Like horticulturalists, agrarian farmers rely primarily on raising crops for food. However, **agriculture societies** are more efficient than horticulture: technological advances such as the plow, irrigation, use of animals, and fertilization allow intensive and continuous cultivation of the same land, thus permitting permanent settlements and greater food surpluses. Through time, as increasingly sophisticated agricultural technology resulted in surplus food, the size of population centers increased to as much as a million or more.

As surpluses accumulated, land in some societies became concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. Wealthy landowners built armies and expanded their empires; during these periods, controlling land took precedence over technological advance. War was prevalent, and societies were divided increasingly into rich and poor classes. Those who held the land and wealth could control the labor source and acquire serfs or slaves. Thus, the feudal system was born. Serfs (the peasant class) were forced to work the land for their survival; food surpluses also allowed some individuals to leave the land and to trade goods or services in exchange for food. For the first time, social inequality became extensive enough that we can refer to social classes. At this point, religion, political power, a standing army, and other meso-level institutions and organizations come to be independent of the family. The meso-level becomes well established.

As technology advanced and goods were manufactured in cities, peasants moved from farming communities to rapidly growing urban areas, where the demand for labor was great. It was not until the late 1700s in England that the next major transformation of society took place, resulting largely from technological advances and harnessing of power.
Industrial Societies

The Industrial Revolution brought the harnessing of steam power and gasoline engines, permitting power-driven machines to replace human and animal power; a tractor can plow far more land in a week than a horse, and an electric pump can irrigate more acres than an ox-driven pump. As a result, raw mineral products such as ores, raw plant products such as rubber, flax or fiber, and raw animal products such as hides could be transformed by chemical or machine power into consumer goods. The Industrial Revolution brought enormous changes in society in both products and structure.

Several characteristics typify industrial societies, societies that rely primarily on mechanized production for subsistence. First, the division of labor is more pronounced as industries develop sophisticated machines requiring human expertise. Second, economic resources increase and tend to be distributed more widely among individuals in industrial societies, although inequities are great between the owners and the laborers. Highly skilled workers demand higher wages, whereas unskilled workers receive lower wages. Third, industrialization alters the structure of society as peasants move from rural areas to cities to find work in factories. Most jobs are in the production of machines and products: cars, television sets, washing machines, and so forth. Cities come to be populated by millions of people.

Finally, kinship patterns also change. Whereas agrarian societies favor large, land-based extended family units (recall that the Ramirez children in Nicaragua all help out at harvest time), family needs are different in industrial societies. Smaller, nuclear families are now preferable because of crowded urban conditions; children become a liability because they contribute less to the finances of the family. The meso- and macro-level dimensions of social life have major impacts on the lives of people.

Perhaps the most notable characteristic of the industrial age is the rapid rate of change compared to other stages of societal development. Whereas the beginning of industrialization in England was gradual, requiring many years of population movement, urbanization, technological development, modernization, and other changes, today societal change is occurring so rapidly that some developing societies virtually bypass the industrial age and move almost directly into the postindustrial era. Much of the rapid change is connected to the increasing complexity of the social world, typical of the postindustrial stage.

Global organizations such as the World Bank, the World Court, the United Nations, and the World Health Organization address problems at a global level and sometimes even make decisions that change national boundaries or national policies. Medical organizations such as Doctors without Borders work cross-nationally; corporations become multinational; and voluntary societies such as Amnesty International lobby for human rights in places around the globe. By the time the next stage is reached, the term global village will have become a commonly accepted notion among those who work on social policies.

Postindustrial or Information Societies

In the Japanese metropolis of Osaka, the service industry is booming. The world’s most modern technology—that is, scientific knowledge used for utilitarian or economic purposes—is produced here. New micro-technology firms open every week, and the entire society feeds on new knowledge in the electronic age. Since World War II, Japan has moved rapidly from agricultural to industrial to postindustrial society, with elements of each stage coexisting. Buddhist monks practice their ancient religion at nearby shrines, and women and men dressed in traditional kimonos perform the ancient ritual tea ceremony next to high-tech companies producing the world’s latest electronic gadgets.

The Akamoto family lives in a large apartment building near Osaka. On one side of their building are similar apartments, and on the other side is a rice paddy. From their window, the Akamotos can watch peasant farmers work in the small fields by hand while traffic rushes past on the superhighway. Mr. Akamoto travels to his office in Osaka each day where he works long hours in a banking firm. His college-educated wife is a homemaker. Although an increasing number of Japanese women delay marriage and childbearing in order to work outside the home, few work after they are married and have children.

After World War II, starting in the 1950s, the transition from industrial to postindustrial society began in the United States and spread throughout the Western world.
States, Western Europe (especially Germany), and Japan. This shift was characterized by movement from human labor to automated production and from manufacturing into service jobs such as computer operators, bankers, scientists, teachers, public relations workers, stockbrokers, and salespeople. More than two-thirds of all jobs in the United States now reside in organizations that produce and transmit information. Daniel Bell (1973) described this transformation of work, information, and communication as “the third technological revolution.” As the society transforms, the culture also changes, stimulated by the development of the computer. High levels of technical and professional education are required for those holding key positions; those without technical education are less likely to find rewarding employment (Tapscott 1998). Thus, new class lines are being drawn, based in part on skills and education in new technologies. There is already evidence of a growing divide between communities and schools with ready access to computers and those without. In 2003, 62 percent of households in the United States had one or more computers, and 88 percent of these had Internet access. However, only 35 percent of householders aged 65 and older, 45 percent of Black or Hispanic householders, and 28 percent of householders with less than a high school education had a computer (U.S. Census Bureau 2005), illustrating the technological gap.

Postindustrial societies rely in part on new sources of power such as atomic, wind, and solar energy, automation, and computer-controlled robots, eliminating all but the most highly skilled technicians. Thus, control of information and ability to develop technologies or provide services rather than control of money or capital become most important.

In the twenty-first century, values of postindustrial societies favor scientific approaches to problem solving, creativity, research, and development. These approaches are becoming dominant in world economies. Although the technological era in which many of us are immersed is in its early stages, its effects are being felt throughout the world through satellites, computers, the Internet, cell phones, and other information systems.

One sociologist has actually chosen to study the relationship of creativity to local cultural climate and to economic prosperity; his research has important applied
dimensions. An Applied Sociologist at Work explores this fascinating research and explains why it is important to policy makers in local communities.

As Richard Florida’s research makes clear, the organization of the society and the means of providing the necessities of life have a profound impact on values, beliefs, lifestyle, and other aspects of culture. In much of this book, we focus on this complex, multilayered society, for this is the type of system in which most of us reading this book now live. We turn next to a discussion of the social software that complements the hardware of our society.

**CULTURE: THE SOFTWARE**

Each social unit of cooperating and interdependent people, whether at the micro, meso, or macro levels, develops a culture. This culture—including knowledge, beliefs, values, rules or laws, language, customs, and symbols—provides guidelines for the actions and interaction of individuals and groups within the society. For example, consider the cultural guidelines that people follow when they greet another person. In the United States, proper greetings include a handshake, a wave, or saying “hello” or “hi.” The greeting ceremony in Japan includes bowing, with the depth of the bow defined by the relative status of each individual. To know the proper bowing behavior, Japanese business people who are strangers exchange business cards upon introduction. Their titles, as printed on their cards, disclose each person’s status and thus provide clues as to how deeply each should bow. The proper greeting behavior in many European countries calls for men as well as women to kiss acquaintances on both cheeks.

The definition of culture used in this book differs from the meaning of culture in everyday usage. You have probably heard the term culture used to refer to the fine arts—classical music, opera, literature, ballet, theater (what some call high culture)—or to pop culture, including such phenomena as country music, TV sitcoms, professional wrestling, Harlequin romance novels, and other mass entertainment. Although the sociological definition of culture includes both high culture and pop culture, the term has much broader meaning. Everyone shares a culture, and culture is equally important to all people, although there may be different views within and between cultures about what rules and behaviors are most important. No one could survive without culture, for without culture, there would be no guidelines or rules of behavior and societies would be chaotic masses of individuals.

Culture evolves over time. What is normal, proper, and good behavior in hunter-gatherer societies, where cooperation and communal loyalty is critical to the hunt, differs from that in an information age where individualism and competition may be encouraged and enhance one’s well-being. Culture provides us with routines, patterns, and expectations for carrying out daily rituals and interactions.

The creation of culture is ongoing and cumulative because individuals and societies build on existing culture. The behaviors, values, and institutions that are natural to us are actually shaped by our culture. In fact, culture is so much a part of our lives that what may strike an outsider as unusual is, for the most part, unseen by members of the culture. We do not think about eating with a fork, but this seems strange to others who eat with chopsticks or with fingers.

Culture is the feature that most separates us from other animals, for only humans have a shared culture. Humans adapt to the environment in a much more flexible manner than animals that use primarily their instincts. *Instincts*, which are a complex series of drives and reflexes that help animals cope with the environment, are programmed into

**THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY**

What are likely to be the growth areas in your society? What competencies (e.g., thinking and analysis) and what skills (e.g., interpersonal abilities and communication skills) will be essential in the future for you to find employment and be successful on the job?
Creativity, Community, and Applied Sociology

Like the transformations of societies from the hunter-gatherer to the horticultural stage or from the agricultural to the industrial stage, our own current transformation seems to have created a good deal of “cultural wobble” in the society. How does one identify the elements or the defining features of a new age—the Post industrial Era or the Information Age or the Age of Creativity—while the transformation is still in process? This was one of the questions that intrigued sociologist Richard Florida.

Dr. Florida (2002) combined several methods. First, he traveled around the country to communities that were especially prosperous and seemed to be on the cutting edge of change in U.S. society. In these communities, he did both individual interviews and focus-group interviews—the latter being a type of group interview with seven or eight people where ideas can be generated from the group, the discussion recorded, and the transcript of the discussion analyzed. These semistructured interviews in which open-ended questions are asked helped Professor Florida identify the factors that caused people to choose the place where they decided to live. His informants discussed quality of life and the way they make decisions. As certain themes and patterns emerged, he tested the ideas by comparing statistical data for regions that were vibrant, had growing economies, and seemed to be integrated into the emerging information economy. He used already existing archival data collected by various U.S. government agencies, especially the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the U.S. Census Bureau, to compare communities and regions of the country.

In addition to the broad changes occurring in the United States, Florida was interested in the elements of economic prosperity and growth. The economy of the twenty-first century is largely driven by creativity, and creative people often decide where to live based on certain features of the society. He also found that modern businesses flourish when they hire highly creative people. Thus, growing businesses tend to seek out places where creative people locate.

Currently, more than one-third of the jobs in the United States—and almost all of the extremely well-paid professional positions—require creative thinking. These include not just the creative arts but scientific research, computer and mathematical occupations, educational and library science positions, and many media, legal, and managerial careers. People in this “creative class” are given an enormous amount of autonomy, problems to solve, and freedom to figure out how to solve them. Florida (2002) writes, “Access to talented and creative people is to modern business what access to coal and iron ore was to steel making” (p. 6). The winners in virtually every field—from fashion to architecture, from automobiles to food products, from music to information technology—are those who continually create.

Fairly early in his research, Florida identified regions and urban areas that are especially creative. A young scholar, Gary Gates, was doing research on communities that are open and hospitable to gays and lesbians. Gates and Florida were amazed to find that their lists were nearly identical. Yet the more research Florida did, the more that made sense. Creative people thrive on diversity—ethnic, gender, religious, and otherwise—for when creative people are around others who think differently, it tends to spawn new avenues of thinking and problem solving. Tolerance of difference and even the enjoyment of individual idiosyncrasies is a hallmark of thriving communities. Such communities also have a number of places for creative people to meet and exchange ideas—coffeehouses and wineries that sponsor poetry readings and local musicians, Saturday art markets, and “public squares” or walkways.

Creative and successful businesses have learned that they must be flexible, resulting in businesses that relax the dress codes, allow flexibility in the workday, provide stimulating environments and colleagues, permit a great deal of autonomy to workers to solve problems for themselves, and downplay hierarchical relationships. Just as farmers took great care of the oxen that pulled their plows, creative people and successful businesses seek environments that allow creativity to flourish.

Interestingly, Florida is now very much in demand as a consultant to mayors and urban-planning teams, and his books have become required reading for city council members in places such as Corvalis, Oregon. Some elected officials have decided that fostering an environment conducive to creativity that attracts

(Continued)
the brain of the animal from birth. However, humans rely largely on culture. Passing on culture as a means of adapting to the environment is highly useful, for humans are the only mammals that can adapt and manipulate their environment to survive on the equator or in the Arctic.

Try playing a game of cards with four people in which each player thinks a different suit is trump. (Trump is a rule that any card from the trump suit wins over any card from a different suit.) In this game, one person believes hearts is trump, another assumes spades is trump, and so forth. What would happen? How would the result be similar to a society with no common culture?

The Study of Culture

Real and Ideal Culture

Through the process known as socialization (see Chapter 4), we learn from birth the patterns of behavior approved in our society, and for the most part, we hardly question these practices and beliefs that we see around us. Rather like animals who have only lived in a rain forest and cannot imagine a treeless desert, we can fail to notice how much we rely on our culture to make sense of things.

Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativity

Sociologists may learn the ideal rules of a culture by asking questions and reading the laws, but the real behavior patterns are more difficult to discern. Years of living in and observing a group may be needed to sort out the differences between real and ideal culture.

The Japanese schoolgirl might think that eating with a fork or spoon was quite strange. She has been well socialized to know that polite eating involves competent use of chopsticks.

Source: © Karen Kasmauski / Corbis.
each group thinks its own values are natural and its behaviors are normal and proper. Consider the following example.

The Arapesh of New Guinea, a traditional society, encourage premarital sex; a female who proved her fertility was more attractive as a mate. Anthropologist Margaret Mead (1963) found that the Arapesh not only allowed but encouraged young teens to engage in clandestine premarital sex. The babies resulting from these meetings were absorbed into the matrilineal structure (family ancestry traced through the female line). Their care, support, belonging, and lineage were not major issues for the Arapesh; the babies were simply accepted and welcomed as new members of the mother's family, because the structure was able to absorb them. The society was stable; families were supportive. For the Arapesh, sexual behavior outside of marriage is not a moral issue. Other societies, such as the Bontoc of the Philippines, have similar views.

From studies of 154 societies documented in the Human Relations Area Files (Ford 1970) (a valuable source of information on societies around the world), scientists have found that approximately 42 percent of the 154 societies encourage premarital sex, whereas 29 percent forbid such behavior and punish those who disobey this rule. The remainder fall in between. These figures suggest an important point: values, beliefs, and behaviors are created by societies and can vary dramatically from one society to the next. For many people, this variation is highly threatening and even offensive, because most people judge others according to their own perspectives, experiences, and values.

Ethnocentrism describes this tendency to view one's own group and its cultural expectations as right, proper, and superior to others. Many individuals brought up in societies that discourage or forbid premarital sex, for instance, judge groups such as the Arapesh as immoral. In some Muslim societies, for example, offending persons would be severely punished, even killed. In turn, the Arapesh would find rules of abstinence to be strange and even wrong.

It is important for societies to instill a degree of ethnocentrism in their members, for these beliefs make members feel that they belong to the group and help hold the group together. Ethnocentrism promotes loyalty, unity, morale, and conformity to the rules of society. Fighting for one's country, for instance, requires some degree of belief in the rightness of one's own society and its causes. Ethnocentric attitudes also help to protect societies from rapid, disintegrating change. If most people in a society did not believe in the rules and values of their own culture, the result could be dissension, controversy, and widespread crime or deviance.

Unfortunately, however, the same ethnocentric attitudes that strengthen societies may also encourage hostility, racism, slavery, war, and even genocide against others—even others within the society—who are different. Old war movies and propaganda news clips about World War I and World War II labeled enemies as “krauts,” “Japs,” “barbarians,” “savages,” and “heathens.”

Dehumanizing another group with labels makes it easier to kill them or perform acts of discrimination and destruction. We see this in current conflicts in Iraq in which both sides in the conflict feel hatred for the other combatants. However, as we become a part of a global social world, it becomes increasingly important to accept those who are “different.” Bigotry and attitudes of superiority do not enhance cross-national cooperation—which is what the global village and globalization entail.

Ethnocentrism can lead to misunderstandings between members of different cultures. Consider the American businesspeople who go to Japan to negotiate deals and sign
contracts. The Japanese way of doing business takes time; it involves getting to know the other party by socializing over drinks in the evening. It is important not to rush the deal. To the Japanese, the Americans seem pushy, too concerned about contract details rather than trust, and in too much of a hurry. Many an international business arrangement has fallen through because of such cultural misunderstandings.

U.S. foreign relations also illustrate how ethnocentrism can produce hostility. Many U.S. citizens are surprised to learn that the United States—great democracy, world power, and disseminator of food, medicine, and technological assistance to developing nations—is despised in many countries; this is largely because of American dominance and the threat it poses to other people's way of life (Hertsgaard 2003). Americans are regarded by some as thinking ethnocentrically and only about their own welfare as they exploit weaker nations. American tourists are often seen as loudmouthed ignoramuses whose ethnocentric attitudes prevent them from seeing value in other cultures or from learning other languages.

Anti-American demonstrations in South America, the Middle East, and Asia have brought this reality to life through television. Indeed, politicians in several Latin American and European countries have run for office on platforms aimed at reducing U.S. influence. Thus, American ethnocentrism may foster anti-American reactions of ethnocentrism by people from other countries. Note that even referring to citizens of the United States as Americans—as though people from Canada, Mexico, or South America do not really count as Americans—is seen as ethnocentric by many people from these other countries. America and the United States are not the same thing, but many people in the United States, including some presidents, fail to make the distinction, much to the dismay of other North and South Americans.

Cultural relativism requires setting aside personal beliefs and prejudices to understand a culture through the eyes of members of that culture and by its own standards. Instead of judging cultural practices as good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable, superior or inferior with reference to one's own cultural practices, the goal is to learn objectively the purpose and the consequences of each practice in the culture under study. Just as we may have preferences for certain software programs to do word processing, we can recognize that other software programs are quite good, may have some features that are better than the one we use, and are ingeniously designed.

Yet being tolerant and understanding is not always easy. For even the most careful observer, the subtleties of other cultures can be elusive. The idea of being “on time,” which is so much a part of the cultures of the United States, Canada, and parts of Europe is a rather bizarre concept in many societies. Among many Native American people, such
Evolutionary Cuisine

**Early Human’s Salad Bar**

This menu comes from early hominids who lived in the savannahs of Eastern and Southern Africa from roughly 1.5 to 5 million years ago. Everything was served raw. Cooking with fire had not been invented.

- **Main Course:** Nuts, birds’ eggs, roots, tubers, beans, leaves, gum, sap, greens, insects, worms, grubs, termites, and seasonal berries and fruits. (90 percent of the diet.)

- **Raw Meat Appetizer Tray:** Opportunist and gathered delicacies include small mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, shellfish, slow game, dead or dying animals, and infants of species such as antelope, pig, giraffe, or baboons when available. Bone marrow or the contents of animal heads and stomachs are delicious additions to this menu. Season with honey, rock salt, or puree of worms and insects. (10 percent of the diet.)

Ancestral Potluck Dinner

The first members of our own genus, Homo erectus, used these recipes from about 100,000 to 1.5 million years ago in the tropical and temperate zones of Africa and Eurasia. New technologies in fire making, advanced scavenging, and simple hunting as well as social advances in cooperation, sharing, and the gender division of labor provided some very tasty and nourishing meals for our ancestors.

- **Main Courses:** Stew or soup made with vegetables, bird bones, roots, nuts, and foods from the Salad Bar and Raw Meat Appetizer Tray plus other gathered foods as available. Add leftovers and herbal seasonings. (80 percent of the diet.)

- **Outdoor Barbecue:** Sizzling deer haunch, roasted rabbit, shellfish, wild boar, ox, or cattle ribs. (20 percent of the diet.)


Sociology Around the World

as the Dineh (Apache and Navajo), it is ludicrous for people to let a timepiece that one wears on one’s arm—a piece of machinery—govern the way one lives life. The Dineh orientation to time, that one should do things according to a natural rhythm of the body and not according to an artificial ticking mechanism, is difficult for many North Americans to grasp. Misunderstandings occur when those of European heritage think “Indians are always late,” jumping to an erroneous conclusion that “Indians” are dependable. Native Americans, on the other hand, think whites are neurotic about letting some instrument control them (Basso 1979; Farrer 1996; Hall 1959, 1983).

Another example of ethnocentrism that is hard to overcome is our notions of what is food and what is just not edible. While food is necessary for survival of all humans, there are widespread cultural differences in what people eat, where and how they obtain it, and how they prepare and consume it. The French revere truffles, whereas a New Guinea tribe savors grasshoppers, Europeans and Russians relish raw fish eggs (caviar), Eskimo children find seal eyeballs a treat, Indonesians eat dog, and some Nigerians prize termites. Whether it is from another time period or another society, variations in food can be shocking to us, making it hard to understand other people and other times, as the essay above on Sociology Around the World illustrates. Cultural relativism requires that we shrug our shoulders and admit, “Well, they are getting vitamins, proteins, and other nutrients, and it seems to work for them.”

Adopting a cultural relativist perspective helps ensure objectivity in studying the widely varying values and social rules that shape people’s lives. However, it does not mean that social scientists accept or agree with all the beliefs and practices of the cultures they study. Social scientists may personally oppose acts such as infanticide, head-hunting, slavery, removal of the clitoris from females, gender inequality, forced marriages, cannibalism, terrorism, and genocide. Yet, even though they disagree with such practices, it is important to understand those practices in the context of another society’s values and structures. Many social scientists do take strong stands against violations of human rights, environmental destruction, and other policies—basing their positions on what they consider universal human rights and the potential for harm to human beings and to the world community. However, it is important to bear in mind that cultural values in most Western democracies are adaptations to systems that thrive on values of extreme individualism, differentiation, and competition, consistent with very complex society.

Small, tightly knit societies with no meso or macro level often stress cooperation, conformity, and personal sacrifice for the sake of the community. Complex societies with established meso- and macro-level linkages are more frequently individualistic, stressing personal uniqueness, individual creativity, and critical thinking. Why might this be so?
Whether you are eating termite eggs or chicken eggs, societies always have a culture and culture is always linked to a society. Culture determines the way of life in each level of society, from the global system to the individual family. The social world model at the beginning of the chapter shows that smaller social units such as a college operate within larger social units such as the community, which is also part of a region of the country; what takes place in each of these is determined by the culture. A society’s culture provides the guidelines for proper actions—the “software”—for each structural “hardware” unit, from micro-level, two-person relationships to ethnic group subcultures at the meso level to interactions between societies at the macro level.

Micro-level analysis focuses on social interactions in small group or organizational settings. To apply this idea to culture, we look at microcultures. Groups and organizations such as a girl scout troop or a local chapter of the Rotary Club involve a small number of people. These organizations influence only a portion of members’ lives; thus, they are not truly subcultures. When the culture affects only a small segment of one’s life, affecting a portion of one’s week or influencing a limited period of one’s life, it is called a microculture (Gordon 1970). Additional examples include a street gang, a college sorority, a business office, or a summer camp group.

Hospitals are social units with microcultures. People in different colored uniforms scurry around carrying out their designated tasks as part of the organizational culture. Hospital workers interact among themselves to attain goals of patient care. They have a common in-group vocabulary, a shared set of values, a hierarchy of positions with roles and behaviors for each position, and a guiding system of regulations for the organization—all of which shape the interactions during the 40 hours a week that each member works in the hospital. Yet the hospital culture may have little relevance to the rest of the everyday lives of the employees.

Microcultures may survive over time, with individuals coming in and going out from the group, but no one lives their entire life within a microculture. The values, rules, and specialized language used by the hospital staff continue as one shift ends and other medical personnel enter and sustain that microculture.

Every organization, club, and association has its own set of rules and expectations; these are organizational microcultures. Schools develop their own unique cultures, as do firemen’s unions. The microculture of a fraternity impacts current students; as students graduate and move out of that microculture, others move into it. Some microcultures exist for a limited period of time. A summer camp microculture may develop but exists only for that summer; the following summer, a very different culture may evolve because of new counselors and campers. A girl’s softball team may develop its own cheers, jokes, insider slang, and values regarding competition or what it means to be a good sport, but next year the girls may be realigned into different teams and the transitory culture of the previous year would not survive. In contrast to microcultures, subcultures continue across a person’s life span.
Subcultures add their own set of conventions and expectations to the general standards of the dominant culture. Within each subculture, members maintain a feeling of “we” and a belief in the rightness of their customs, rituals, religious practices, dress, food, or whatever else distinguishes them. Note that many categories into which we group people are not subcultures; redheads, left-handed people, tall people, individuals who read *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, and DVD watchers do not make up subcultures because they do not have a common way of life. A motorcycle gang, a college fraternity, and a summer camp are also not subcultures since they affect only a segment of one’s life (Gordon 1970; Yablonski 1959). A subculture, on the other hand, influences a person’s life in pervasive ways throughout the life span.

In the United States, subcultures include ethnic groups, such as Italian American and Chinese American; religious groups that influence everyday life, such as the Mennonites in Ohio and Orthodox Jews in New York City; and social class groups, including the exclusive culture of the elite upper-class on the East and West coasts of the United States. For example, while Hasidic Jews adhere to the same values and most of the behavioral standards of the predominantly Christian-American culture, they follow additional rules specific to their religion: their clothing and hairstyles follow strict rules, with men wearing beards and temple-locks, and married women wearing wigs; their religious holidays are different from those of the dominant Christian culture; they observe dietary restrictions such as the avoidance of pork and shellfish; and they observe the Sabbath from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday.

One can be African Canadian, Chinese Canadian, or Hispanic Canadian, living within an ethnic community that provides food, worship, and many other resources, and still be a good Canadian citizen. One can also be a Mormon and live almost all of one’s life in Utah, interacting entirely with other Mormons, and still be a good American citizen. Many groups have their own subcommunities within the dominant culture of the larger society.

At the meso level, the social unit plays a more continuous role in the life of members; one can be born, marry, and die in that social unit. The social unit is smaller than the nation but is large enough to sustain people throughout the life span; such a subsoociety has its own culture, a *subculture*. A subculture is in some ways unique to that group yet shares the culture of the dominant society (Arnold 1970; Gordon 1970).
In each case, one can live virtually one’s entire life under the influence of the values and rules of the subculture.

A give-and-take exists between subcultures and the dominant culture, with each contributing to and influencing the other. Hispanic Americans have brought many foods to American cuisine, including tacos, burritos, paella, salsa, and the custard dessert known as flan.

Subcultural practices can be the source of tensions with the dominant group that has the power to determine cultural expectations in society. In direct conflict with the law, a very small faction of Mormons in the United States believe in and practice polygamy. Having more than one wife violates state laws in Utah, where many live, although polygamists seldom are prosecuted.

When conflict with the larger culture becomes more serious, and laws of the dominant society are violated, we can begin to see a different type of culture. Countercultures are groups with expectations and values that contrast sharply with the dominant values of a particular society (Yinger 1960). Driving down back roads of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, one is likely to encounter horse-drawn buggies of Amish families. The Amish seldom use electricity or modern machines, distinguishing their group from the surrounding society. Conflicts between federal and state laws and Amish religious beliefs have produced shaky compromises on issues of educating children, using farm machinery, and transportation. The Old Order Amish prefer to educate their children in their own communities, insisting that their children not go beyond an eighth-grade education in the public curriculum. They do not use automobiles or conventional tractors. The Amish are also total pacifists and will not serve as soldiers in the national military. They reject many mainstream notions of success and replace them with their own values and goals. They are one type of counterculture.

In some cases, a counterculture may be interested in bringing about the downfall of the larger culture. Examples of this type of counterculture are numerous: rebellious “survival groups” such as militia and skinheads reject the principles of democratic pluralism, the “old believers” of nineteenth-century Russia committed group suicide rather than submit to the authority of the Czar of Russia on matters of faith and lifestyle (Crummey 1970). The Ranters—a group that arose in sixteenth-century England, when strict puritan attitudes regarding sensuality and sex were common—flaunted the dominant conventional rules and values by running naked through the streets and engaging in sexual acts in open village squares (Ellens 1971; Hill 1991).

Some countercultures continue over time and can sustain members throughout their life cycle—such as the Amish. However, most countercultural groups, like punk rock groups or violent and deviant teenage gangs, are short-lived or are relevant to people only at a certain age. Figure 3.1 graphically illustrates the types of cultures in the social world. Countercultures, as depicted, view themselves and are viewed by others as at least partial outsiders within a nation.

Members of countercultures do not necessarily reject all of the dominant culture, and parts of their culture may eventually come to be widely accepted by the dominant culture. During the Vietnam War, for instance, some antiwar protestors focused their lives on protesting the U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia (and related political and economic issues). By the early 1970s, opposition to the war had become widespread in society, so antiwar protesters were no longer outside of the mainstream; they were less likely to be labeled as unpatriotic or anti-American for their beliefs. Following the war, many counterculture antiwar hippies became active in the mainstream culture and developed conventional careers in the middle class. Thus, ideas, protest songs, emblems, longer hair for men, and the peace symbol from the 1960s civil rights and antiwar movements in the United States, for example, were absorbed into the larger culture.

Countercultures are not necessarily bad for society. According to the conflict perspective, introduced in Chapter 2, the existence of counterculture groups is clear evidence that there are contradictions or tensions within a society that need to be addressed. Countercultures often challenge unfair treatment of groups in society that do not hold power. Sometimes, countercultures become social organizations or protest groups. Extremist religious and political groups, whether Christian, Islamic, Hindu, or other, may best
be understood as countercultures against what they perceive as the invasive Western or global culture threatening their ethnic culture. Cultures that operate at each level of our social world may be mutually supportive or they may be in conflict.

Describe a counterculture group whose goals are at odds with those of the dominant culture. Do you see evidence that the group is influencing behavioral expectations and values in the larger society? What effect do they have on your life?

Canada is a national society, geographically bounded by the United States on the south, the Pacific Ocean and Alaska on the west, the Atlantic Ocean on the east, and the Arctic on the north. The government in Ottawa passes laws that regulate activities in all provinces, and each province (like states) passes its own laws. These boundaries and structures make up the national society of Canada.

**National society and culture**

Every culture is intricately related to a society and to social units within that society. The national society is geographically defined by the political boundaries of that nation. The nation itself is made up of a group of people who interact more with each other than with outsiders and who cooperate for the attainment of certain goals. Within the nation, there may be smaller groups, such as ethnic, regional, or tribal subcultures made up of people who identify closely with each other. Most nations have a national culture of common values and beliefs that tie citizens together, and they may have subcultures within the national culture. The national culture generally affects the everyday lives of the people within the nation, although that impact varies greatly. In some places in Africa and the Middle East, local ethnic or religious loyalties are much stronger than any sense of national culture; consider the loyalties of Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds in Iraq. Even there, national culture has some influence over citizens through laws, traditions, and sometimes force.

The sense of nation has grown stronger in many industrialized societies over the past century. In colonial
America, people thought of themselves as Virginians or Rhode Islanders rather than as U.S. citizens. Even during the “war between the states” of the 1860s, the battalions were organized by states and they often carried their state banners into battle. The fact that the southern states still call it the war between the states rather than the civil war communicates the struggle over recognizing the nation or states as the primary social unit of loyalty and identity. People in the United States today are increasingly likely to think of themselves as Americans (rather than as Ohioans or Floridians), yet the national culture determines only a few of the specific guidelines for everyday life.

Global Society and Culture

Several centuries ago, it would have been impossible to discuss a global culture, but with expanding travel, economic interdependence of different countries, international political linkages, global environmental concerns, and technology allowing for communication throughout the world, people now interact across continents in seconds. Globalization refers to the entire globe becoming “a single socio-cultural place” (Robertson 1997; Robertson and Khondker 1998). The structures such as government and economy that are dominating world patterns make up the global society. These patterns have emerged largely through the process of modernization, the domination of the Western (Europe and U.S.) worldview, and Western control over resources. For example, the very idea of governing a geographic region with a bureaucratic structure known as a nation-state is a fairly new notion, formerly, many small bands and tribal groupings dominated areas of the globe. However, with globalization, nation-states now exist in every region of the world.

Global culture refers to behavioral standards, symbols, values, and material objects that have become common across the globe. For example, beliefs that monogamy is normal, that marriage should be based on romantic love, and that women should have rights such as voting are spreading across the globe (Leslie and Korman 1989; Newman and Grauerholz 2002). During the twentieth century, the insistence on individual rights and liberties became an increasingly shared notion around the world, although there are backlashes against these and other Western ideas as seen in the acts of small groups from impoverished nations that have embraced terrorism (Misztal and Shupe 1998; Turner 1991a, 1991b). Still, these trends are aspects of the emerging global culture. Clearly, such a global culture did not exist at all as recently as a few hundred years ago.

Even today, global culture probably has fairly minimal impact on the everyday interactions and lives of the average person. As the world community becomes more interdependent and addresses issues that can only be dealt with at the global level (such as global warming or international terrorism), the idea of a common “software” of beliefs, social rules, and common interests takes on importance. Common ideas for making decisions allow for shared solutions to conflicts that previously would have resulted in war and massive killing of people. Global culture at the most macro level will increasingly be a reality in the third millennium.

This section explored how society and culture operate at micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis. Much of this book focuses on social interaction and social structures, including interpersonal networking, the bureaucratic structures, social inequality within the structure, and the core institutions that serve the needs of society. In short, social “hardware”—society—is the focus of many subsequent chapters. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the “software” dimension (culture) and how we study it.

The Components of Culture

Things and thoughts—these make up much of our culture. From our things—material culture—to our thoughts (feelings, beliefs, values, attitudes)—nonmaterial culture—culture provides the guidelines for our lives.

Material Culture: The Artifacts of Life

Material culture includes all the objects we can see or touch, all the artifacts of a group of people—their grindstones for grinding cassava root, microwave ovens for cooking, bricks of mud or clay for building shelters, hides or woven cloth for making clothing, books or computers for conveying information, tools for reshaping their environments, vessels for carrying and sharing food, and weapons.
used for dominating and subduing others. Material culture includes anything you can touch that is made by humans.

Some material culture is of local, micro-level origins; the kinds of materials with which homes are constructed and the materials used for clothing often reflect the geography and resources of the local area. Likewise, types of jewelry, pottery, musical instruments, or clothing reflect tastes that emerge at the micro and meso levels of family and community. At a more macro level, national and international corporations interested in making profits work hard to establish trends in fashion and style that may cross continents and oceans.

The way we construct our material world, however, has increasingly taken on global proportions. Many of our clothes are now made in Asia or Central American countries; our shoes may well have been produced in the Philippines, the oil used to make plastic devices in our kitchens likely came from the Middle East, and the food itself is imported year-round from around the planet. That romantic diamond engagement ring—a symbol that represents the most intimate tie—may well be imported from South Africa. Our cars are assembled from parts produced on nearly every continent. Moreover, we spend many hours in front of a piece of material culture—our computers—surfing the World Wide Web. Material culture is not just for local homebodies anymore.

**Nonmaterial Culture: Beliefs, Values, Rules, and Language**

Nonmaterial culture refers to invisible and intangible parts of culture that are of equal or even greater importance than material culture, for they involve the society’s rules of behavior, ideas, and beliefs that shape how people interact with others and with their environment. Although you cannot touch the nonmaterial components of your culture, they pervade your life and are instrumental in determining how you think, feel, and behave. Nonmaterial culture is complex, comprising four main elements: beliefs, values, norms or rules, and language.

Beliefs are ideas we hold about life, about the way the society works, and about where we fit into it. Beliefs come from traditions established over time, religious teachings, experiences people have had, and lessons given by parents and teachers or other individuals in authority. Beliefs influence the choices we make. Hindus, for example, believe that fulfilling behavioral expectations of one’s own social caste will be rewarded in the person’s next incarnation; in the next life, good people will be born to a higher social status. By contrast, some Christians believe that one’s fate in the afterlife depends on whether one believes in certain ideas—for instance, that Jesus Christ is one’s personal savior.

Values are nonmaterial shared judgments about what is desirable or undesirable, right or wrong, good or bad. They express the basic ideals of any culture. In industrial societies, for instance, a good education is highly valued. Gunnar Myrdal (1964), a Swedish sociologist and observer of U.S. culture, called the U.S. value system the “American creed,” values that are so much a part of the way of life that they are sometimes hard to identify; they are taken for granted. Freedom, equality, individualism, democracy, efficiency, progress, and patriotic loyalty seem to be at the core of the value system of the United States (Macionis 1999; Williams 1970). At the micro level, values related to family loyalty or friendship bonds have high priority and will determine how you spend your days.

At the macro level, conflicts may arise between groups in society because of differing value systems. For example, there are major differences between the values of various Native American groups and the dominant culture—whether that dominant culture is in North, Central, or South America (Lake 1990; Sharp 1991). Consider the story in the Sociology Around the World (next page), told by Rigoberta Menchu, about the experiences of Native American populations living in Guatemala. How are different cultural values the source of problems for native peoples?

The conflict in values described in the story of Rigoberta Menchu is not unlike conflicts between Native American meso-level subcultures and other national cultures in North America. Cooperation is a cultural value that has been passed on through generations of Native Americans because group survival depends on group cooperation in the hunt, in war, and in daily life. This value may have led to unwarranted trust in others. As a result, some people believe that Native Americans have received the worst terms in many treaties and other agreements with governments, especially when native populations unintentionally gave up rights to lands that had once been their domain. The value of cooperation can place native children at a disadvantage in North American schools that emphasize competition. Native American and Native Canadian children experience more success in classrooms that stress cooperation and sociability over competition and individuality (Lake 1990; Mehan 1992).

Another Native American value is the appreciation and respect for nature. Conservation of resources and protection of the natural environment—Mother Earth—have always been important because of the dependence on nature for survival. Today, we witness disputes between native tribes and governments of Canada, the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil and other countries over raw resources.
found on native reservations. While many other North and South Americans also value cooperation and respect for the environment, these values do not govern decision making in most communities (Brown 2001; Marger 2006). The values honored by governments and corporations are those held by the people with power, prestige, and wealth.

Norms are rules of behavior shared by members of a society and rooted in the value system. Norms range from religious warnings such as “thou shalt not kill” to the expectation that young people will complete their high school education. Sometimes, the origins of particular norms are quite clear. Few people wonder, for instance, why it is a norm to stop and look both ways at a stop sign. Other norms, such as the rule in many societies that women should wear skirts but men should not, have been passed on through the generations and become unconsciously accepted patterns and a part of tradition. Sometimes, we may not know how norms originated or even be aware of norms until they are violated.

Norms are generally classified into three categories—folkways, mores, and laws—based largely on how important the norms are in the society and people’s response to the breach of those norms. Folkways are customs or desirable behaviors, but they are not strictly enforced: responding appropriately and politely when introduced to someone, speaking quietly in a library, not scratching your genitals in public, using proper table manners, or covering your mouth when you cough. Violation of these norms causes people to think you are weird or even uncouth but not necessarily immoral or criminal.

Mores are norms that most members observe because they have great moral significance in a society. Conforming to mores is a matter of right and wrong, and violations of many mores are treated very seriously. The person who deviates from mores is considered immoral or bordering on criminal. Being honest, not cheating on exams, and being faithful in a marriage are all mores. Table 3.2 provides examples of folkways and mores.

Life and Death in a Guatemalan Village

In her four decades of life, Rigoberta Menchu experienced the closeness of family and cooperation in village life. These values are very important in Chimel, the Guatemalan hamlet where she lives. She also experienced great pain and suffering with the loss of her family and community. A Quiche Indian, Menchu became famous throughout the world in 1992 when she received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work to improve the conditions for Indian peoples.

Guatemalans of Spanish origin hold the power and have used Indians almost as slaves. Some of the natives were cut off from food, water, and other necessities, but people in the hamlet helped to support each other and taught children survival techniques. Most people had no schooling. Her work life in the sugar cane fields began at age 5. At 14, she traveled to the city to work as a domestic servant. While there, she learned Spanish, which helped her to be more effective in defending the rights of the indigenous population in Guatemala. Her political coming of age occurred at age 16 when she witnessed her brother’s assassination by a group trying to expel her people from their native lands.

Her father started a group to fight repression of indigenous and poor, and at 20, Menchu joined the movement, Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC), which the government claimed was communist inspired. Her father was murdered during a military assault, and her mother was tortured and killed. She moved to Mexico with many other exiles to continue the nonviolent fight for rights and democracy.

The values of the native population represented by Menchu focus on respect for and a profound spiritual relationship with the environment, equality of all people, freedom from economic oppression, the dignity of her culture, and the benefits of cooperation over competition. The landowners tended to stress freedom of people to pursue their individual self-interests (even if inequality resulted), the value of competition, and the right to own property and to do whatever one desired in order to exploit that property for economic gain. Individual property rights were thought to be more important than preservation of indigenous cultures; economic growth and profits were held in higher regard than religious connectedness to the earth.

The values of the native population and landowners are in conflict. Only time will tell if the work of Indian activists such as Rigoberta Menchu and her family will make a difference in the lives of this indigenous population.
SOCIETY AND CULTURE: HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE OF OUR SOCIAL WORLD

TABLE 3.2  Types of Norms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Folkways: Conventional Behaviors</th>
<th>Mores: Morally Significant Behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proper, polite: violators are &quot;weird&quot;</td>
<td>Right and wrong: violators are &quot;immoral&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swearing in house of worship</td>
<td>Lying or being unfaithful to a spouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing blue jeans to the prom</td>
<td>Buying cigarettes or liquor for young teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using poor table manners</td>
<td>Having sex with a professor as a way to increase one's grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picking one's nose in public</td>
<td>Parking in handicap spaces when one is in good physical condition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Taboos are the strongest form of mores; they concern actions considered unthinkable or unspeakable in the culture. For example, most societies have taboos that forbid incest (sexual relations with a close relative) and prohibit defacing or eating a human corpse. Taboos are most common and most numerous in societies that do not have centralized governments to establish formal laws and to maintain jails.

Taboos and other moral codes may be of the utmost importance to a group, yet behaviors that are taboo in one situation may be acceptable at another time and place. The incest taboo is an example found in all cultures, yet application of the incest taboo varies greatly across cultures (Brown 1991). In Medieval Europe, if a man and woman were within seven degrees of relatedness and wanted to marry, the marriage could be denied by the priest as incestuous. (Your first cousin is a third degree of relatedness from you.) On the other hand, the Balinese permit twins to marry because it is believed they have already been intimately bonded together in the womb (Leslie and Korman 1989). In some African and Native American societies, one cannot marry a sibling but might be expected to marry a first cousin. As Table 3.3 illustrates, the definition of what is and what is not incest varies even from state to state in the United States.

TABLE 3.3  Incest Taboos in the United States: States that Allow First-Cousin Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alabama</th>
<th>Alaska</th>
<th>California</th>
<th>Colorado</th>
<th>Connecticut</th>
<th>Florida</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following states also allow first-cousin marriage but only under certain conditions such as marriage after the age of 60.

Arizona, Illinois, Maine, Wisconsin

All other U.S. states disallow marriages to first cousins within the state. Historically, in the United States, incest laws forbid in-law marriages far more than first-cousin marriages.


Laws are norms that have been formally encoded by those holding political power in society, such as laws against stealing property or killing another person. The violator of a law is likely to be perceived not just as a weird or immoral person but as a criminal who deserves formal punishment. Many mores are passed into law, and some folkways are also made into law. Formal punishments are imposed. Spitting on the sidewalk is not a behavior that has high levels of moral content, yet it is illegal in some cities, with fines to punish violators. Furthermore, behaviors may be folkways in one situation and mores in another. For example, nudity or various stages of near nudity may be only mildly questionable in some social settings (the beach or certain fraternity parties) but would be quite offensive in others (a four-star restaurant or a house of worship).

Sanctions reinforce norms through rewards and penalties. Formal sanctions used to enforce the most important norms are those given by official action. Fines for parking in marked spaces, lowered grades in a class for plagiarism, or expulsion for bringing drugs or weapons to school for fighting are formal negative sanctions your school might impose. Honors and awards are formal positive sanctions. Informal sanctions are unofficial rewards or punishments. A private word of praise by your professor after class about how well you did on your exam would be an informal positive sanction; gossip or ostracism by other students would be informal negative sanctions. Sanctions vary with the importance of the norm and can range from a parent frowning at a child who fails to use proper table manners (a micro-level setting) to a prison term or death sentence. Similarly, when we obey norms, we are rewarded, sometimes with simple acts such as smiles and jokes and pats on the back that indicate solidarity with others. Most often, adherence to norms is
Since 1989, there have been 2,000 reported public executions for drug dealing in Iran. There is little tolerance for deviation from legal and moral boundaries. Formal sanctions are severe. This scene is from the capital, Tehran, in 2001.

Source: © Corbis Sygma.

Ingrained so deeply that our reward is simply “fitting in.” Your reward for polite social behavior—for asking about someone’s interests and activities, for not being overly shy or pushy in conversation—is friendship and fitting into the group. Folkways and many mores are enforced through informal sanctions.

Sometimes, penalties for deviant behavior can be severe. In Iran, any involvement with drugs is punishable by hanging. In other societies such as Saudi Arabia, thieves are punished on the spot by having their fingers or right hand cut off, a sanction that is all the more severe because Saudi society does not approve use of the left hand for common activities such as eating; that hand is used for bathroom hygiene.

Norms concerning sexual behaviors are often very strong and carry powerful sanctions, sometimes even imposed by national governments. A woman who becomes pregnant outside of marriage in societies that condemn premarital and nonmarital sex is likely to be ostracized and her child labeled illegitimate. Such children may be stigmatized for life, living in poverty as outcasts. This was the case in the early 1970s during Bangladesh’s war for independence from Pakistan. Many Bangladeshi women were raped by Pakistani army troops and had children as a result. Although they already had suffered the humiliation of rape, some of these women and their children were rejected by their husbands and refused homes with their families. Bangladesh is an Islamic society, and chastity is crucial to the honor of the family and for determining inheritance. Only after these women had endured much suffering and with international pressure did the government declare them national heroines and allow outside agencies to provide for them and their children. The systematic rape of Muslim women by Serbian troops in Bosnia appears to have resulted in another generation of innocent children born to be rejected.

When a society faces change, especially from war, rapid urbanization, industrialization, and modernization, traditional norms that have worked for the society for centuries are challenged. In the past few decades, examples have been seen in many Islamic countries in which modernization has met with a resurgence of religious fundamentalism. A case in point is Iran. The rapid modernization and social changes that took place in the post–World War II era under the Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, were met by a backlash from religious fundamentalists. When the Shah was ousted...

Mina Tačić, 26, lives in this room with 12 other people from the Prijedor region of Bosnia. Mina, her son, and her mother have witnessed many rapes in this refugee camp. An investigative commission concluded that 20,000 women and children were victims of rape by the Serbs during the war in Bosnia.

Source: © Sophie Elbaz / Sygma / Corbis.
in 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini restored traditional Islamic rule. Radio music and drinking of alcoholic beverages were banned, and women were required to again wear the veil, as in previous times. Afghanistan and other Muslim nations are currently struggling with the conflicting values and norms brought about by pressures from the environment, in this case Western nations, for change and modernization, and traditional religious and cultural values.

At the global level, there are fewer norms since this level of interaction is rather new; likewise, there are only newly emerging norms in some areas of technology, such as the Internet and the World Wide Web. In situations in which there are no norms, guidelines are missing for interactions between people. E-mail has existed for civilians since only 1994, so social scientists have been able to watch the emergence of norms in this new social environment. Communication is often mediated and enhanced through nonverbal indicators such as tone of voice, inflection, facial expressions, or other gestures that communicate emotion. In e-mail, the words are just words without context. To establish norms, many listserves now have rules for polite communication to avoid flaming someone—insulting them with insensitive words by a faceless person. The development of smileys and emoticons add combinations of characters that represent the emotional context of the message. A few examples of smileys appear in Figure 3.2.

![Internet Smileys](image)

Figure 3.2 Internet Smileys

Norms of Internet communication are still emerging, and you probably have experienced times when messages have been misunderstood because the norms of communication are ambiguous.

Think of examples of common folkways and mores in your society. What punishment or sanction would you expect to receive if you violated each of them? What types of behaviors bring the most severe sanctions in your community?

**Language** is the foundation of every culture. The min-drama between infant and adult is played out every day around the world as millions of infants learn the language of the adults who care for them. In the process, they acquire an important part of culture. Although many animals can communicate, the ability to speak a language is unique to humans. Human infants have the potential for developing language because the human voice box, tongue, and brain make speech biologically possible. At about one year of age, most infants begin to pronounce recognizable words in the language of their culture. The human infant is capable of making roughly 1,000 sounds, but any given society only considers about 40 or 50 of these to be language sounds. The baby soon learns that some of those sounds elicit enthusiastic responses from the adult caretakers.

Transport a baby from France to the Arapesh tribe in New Guinea and another baby from New Guinea to France, and each will learn to speak the language and adhere to the culture in which it is brought up. The reason is that language, like other components of culture, is learned. Language conveys verbal and nonverbal messages among members of society. Simply put, without language there would be little, if any, culture. Through the use of language, members of culture can pass on essential knowledge to children and can share ideas with other members of their society. Work can be organized; the society can build on its experiences and plan its future. Through language, members express their ideas, values, beliefs, and knowledge, a key ingredient in the ability of humans to sustain social life as we know it.

Language takes three primary forms: spoken, written, and nonverbal. **Spoken language** allows individuals to produce a set of sounds that symbolizes an object or idea. That sound combination is learned by all who share a culture, and it generally holds similar meaning for all members. **Written language** enables humans to store ideas for future generations, accelerating the accumulation of ideas on which to build. It also makes possible communication over distances. Members of a society learn to read these shared symbols, some of which are displayed in Figure 3.3.

![Societies Use Various Symbols to Communicate Their Written Language](image)

Figure 3.3 Societies Use Various Symbols to Communicate Their Written Language
Nonverbal language consists of gestures, facial expressions, and body postures(127,119),(862,954); this mode of communication may carry as much as 90 percent of the meaning of the message (Samovar and Porter 2003). Every culture uses nonverbal language to communicate, and just like verbal language, those cues may differ widely among cultures. For instance, an A-OK gesture or a hand wave that is positive in one culture may have a negative, even obscene, meaning in another.

The power to communicate nonverbally is illustrated in American Sign Language, designed for the hearing challenged and the mute. Complex ideas can be transmitted without vocalizing a word. Indeed, one can argue that the deaf have a distinctive culture of their own rooted in large part in the unique language that serves them. Technology has aided communication among the hearing-impaired through text messaging.

Misunderstandings can occur between ethnic groups because of cultural differences regarding communication. The Apache Indians in the American Southwest tell “whiteman jokes”—ridiculing white people because they engage in such grossly unacceptable actions as calling one another by name even when they do not know each other intimately, asking about one another’s health, complimenting one another’s clothing, and greeting others who walk into a room. Because so many white U.S. citizens do not understand that these behaviors are viewed as offensive, they may violate expectations and create difficulties for themselves in dealing with Apaches. They may act in ways that are considered ill-mannered and rude (Basso 1979).
Misinterpretation of nonverbal signals can also occur between male and female microcultures in Western societies. When women nod their heads in response to a person who is talking, they often are encouraging the speaker to continue, signaling that they are listening and that they want the speaker to carry on with clarification and explanation. It does not signal agreement. When men nod their heads when another person is speaking, they typically assume the message is “I agree with what you are saying.” This can lead to awkward, confusing, and even embarrassing miscues when men and women talk to one another, with a man mistakenly confident that the woman agreed with his ideas (Stringer 2006).

Language also plays a critical role in perception and in thought organization. The linguistic relativity theory (Sapir 1929, 1949; Whorf 1956) posits that the people who speak a specific language make interpretations of their reality—they notice certain things and fail to notice certain other things. Many nonindustrial peoples in Asia, Africa, Australia, and South and North America do not keep time in the kinds of simple units used in the industrial world. The smallest units might be sunrise, morning, midday, late afternoon, dusk, and night (Hall 1983). Meeting someone for an appointment requires great patience, for there are no words for what we call “seconds,” “minutes,” or even “hours.” Think about how this would change your life and the pace of everything around you. If you showed up at a predesignated location, your friend might appear three hours later but would be on time since the unit of time would include a four- or five-hour time period. One eats when food is prepared or when one is hungry. One gets up when one is rested. Time-based words cause most of us to organize our days in particular ways and even to become irritated with others who do not adhere to these expectations (Bertman 1998).

To use another example, in the English language, people tend to associate certain colors with certain qualities in a way that may add to the problem of racist attitudes. In Webster’s Unabridged English Dictionary, the definition of the word black includes “dismal,” “boding ill,” “hostile,” “harmful,” “inexcusable,” “without goodness,” “evil,” “wicked,” “disgrace,” and “without moral light.” The word white, on the other hand, is defined as “honest,” “dependable,” “morally pure,” “innocent,” and “without malice.” If the linguistic relativity thesis is correct, it is more than coincidence that bad things are associated with the “black sheep” of the family, the “blacklist,” or “Black Tuesday” (when the stock market dropped dramatically).

This association of blackness with negative images and meanings is not true of all languages. The societies that have negative images for black and positive images for white are the same societies that associate negative qualities to people with darker skin. The use of white as a synonym for “good” or “innocent”—as in reference to a “white noise machine” or a “white lie”—may contribute to a cultural climate that devalues people of color. In essence, English may influence our perception of color in a manner that contributes to racism.

Children in each different culture will learn about the world within the framework provided by their language. Scientists continue to debate the extent to which language can influence thought, but most agree that while language may contribute to certain ways of thinking, it does not totally determine human thinking (Gumper and Levinson 1991).

One thing is clear: different language evolves in different settings in the social world. In a prison where inmates are closed off from the larger world, a whole lingo evolves that is incomprehensible to outsiders but essential to survival within the prison: kites, rats, store, punks, wolves, cops, and ballbustor are examples. Even within your own college, there are probably terms used to refer to course sequences, majors, or Greek houses in ways that people at other universities would find bewildering. At Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for example, students often respond to the question “What is your major?” with the number from the catalog: “I’m majoring in 23.” That would be a truly bizarre response at some other campuses. Within the medical profession (at the meso level), people may discuss MRIs, brain scans, heart catheterizations, PSA tests, and other processes that are meaningful in that context but may be utterly confusing to a girl scout group or in the World Bank. Discussion of GNP (gross national product) is a phrase generated at the national and global levels to discuss the economic health of a nation or to

Language varies from one social setting to another, and one must learn the language to survive. The prison is a society separated from the larger society, and it develops its own microculture. In prison, one must learn the lingo and the associated values that are applied to “kites, rats, store, punks, wolves, cops, and ballbustor.” Inmates, such as these men in the yard of San Quentin State Prison, develop their own insider lingo.

Source: © Kim Kulish / Corbis.
compare the financial vitality of nations. Some terms are relevant to macro-level conversations, and they become necessary for discussing issues that are important at that level.

When grouped together, material and nonmaterial components form cultural patterns. People's lives are organized around these patterns; for example, family life includes patterns of courtship, marriage, child-rearing, and care of the elderly. Table 3.4 illustrates some of the more prominent material and nonmaterial cultural components involved in one pattern of Western society, the ritual of courtship.

**TABLE 3.4 Material and Nonmaterial Cultural Components in Western Courtship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material objects</th>
<th>Nonmaterial cultural components</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rings, flowers, candy, and similar tokens of caring are given or displayed.</td>
<td>Beliefs: Young people date before marriage; marriage is based on romantic love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Values: Courtship is needed to provide a period for getting to know the partner, for falling in love; couples that are getting close to permanent commitment ought to be exclusive in their romantic and sexual relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rules: Couple must be officially sanctioned to make the bond permanent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language or symbols: Couple expresses their feelings verbally and nonverbally; special names are used: significant other, boyfriend, fiancée, soul mate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Couple shows affection through gift giving, exchanging meaningful objects such as a diamond engagement ring, and exclusive dating.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have seen that material artifacts and nonmaterial beliefs, values, norms, and language are the basic components of culture. Next, we explore theoretical explanations for culture.

**CULTURAL THEORY AT THE MICRO LEVEL**

When students first read about sociology or other social sciences, the underlying message may seem to be that humans are shaped by the larger society in which they live. External forces do shape us in many ways, but that is not the whole story as we see when we examine the symbolic interaction approach to culture.

**Symbolic Interaction Theory**

How amazing it is that babies learn to share the ideas and meanings of complex cultures with others in those cultures. Symbolic interaction theory considers how we learn to share meanings of symbols, whether material or nonmaterial. Culture is about symbols, such as rings, flags, and words that stand for or represent something else. A ring means love. A flag represents patriotism and love of country. Word symbols conjure up pictures in our heads of what the words symbolize. Symbols summarize shared meanings with others with whom we interact and define what is real and normal. Symbolic interaction theory maintains that our humanness comes from the impact we have on each other through these shared understandings of symbols that humans have created. The meanings of symbols are learned as individuals interact with one another; we learn how to fit into society because of shared perceptions or shared meanings. By interpretation of symbols and their meaning, we define situations and determine how we should act.

When people create symbols, such as a new greeting (“give me five”) or a symbolic shield for a fraternity or sorority, symbols come to have an existence and importance for a group. This is step one: the symbol is created. Who was it that designed the Star of David and gave it meaning as a symbol of the Jewish people? Who initiated the sign of the cross for Catholics before prayer? Who designed the fraternity's or sorority's shield? Who determined that an eagle should symbolize the United States? Most people do not know the answers to these, but they do know what the symbol stands for. They do share with others the meaning of a particular object. This is step two: the symbol is objectified, assuming a reality independent of the creator. In fact, people may feel intense loyalty to the symbol itself. An entire history of a people may be recalled and a set of values rekindled when the symbol is displayed. This is step three: the group has internalized the symbol. This may be the case regardless of whether the symbol is part of material culture or a nonmaterial gesture. Members of a culture absorb the ideas or symbols of the larger culture—which were originally created by some individual or small group.

The words bachelor and spinster are supposedly synonymous terms, referring to unmarried adult males and females, respectively. Generate a list of adjectives that describe each of these words and that you frequently hear associated with them (e.g., eligible, swinging, old, unattractive). Are the associated words positive or negative in each case? Does this hold cultural meaning?
Symbolic interaction theory pictures humans as consciously and deliberately creating their personal and collective histories. It emphasizes the part that verbal and nonverbal language and gestures play in the shared symbols of individuals and smooth operation of society. More than any other theory in the social sciences, symbolic interaction stresses the active decision making role of individuals.

This notion that individuals shape culture and that culture influences individuals is at the core of symbolic interaction theory. Other social theories tend to focus at the macro levels.

**Thinking Sociologically**

Remember some of the local “insider” symbols that you used as a teenager—friendship bracelets, pet rocks or mood rings? Some individual started each idea, and it spread rapidly from one school to another and one community to another. How are the three steps in the creation of symbols illustrated by this pattern?

**Cultural Theories at the Meso and Macro Levels**

How can we explain such diverse world practices as eating grubs and worshipping cows? Why have some societies allowed men to have four wives while others—such as the Shakers—have prohibited sex between men and women entirely? Why do some groups worship their ancestors while others have many gods or believe in a single divine being? How can societies adapt to extremes of climate and geographical terrain—hot, cold, dry, wet, mountainous, flat? Humankind has evolved practices so diverse that we would have trouble imagining a practice that has not been adopted in some society at some time in history.

To explain cultural differences, we will examine two perspectives that have made important contributions to understanding culture at the meso and macro levels: structural-functional and conflict theories.

**Structural-Functional Theory**

Structural-functional theory seeks to explain why members of a society or an ethnic subculture engage in certain practices. To answer why, structural-functional theorists look for the functions or purposes of these practices. Consider the worship of cows in India: the sacred cow is treated with respect and is not used for food for sensible historical reasons that have become laws over time (Harris 1989). Cows are necessary for agricultural work and therefore must be protected from hungry people for survival of the group.

Functionalists view societies as composed of interdependent parts, each fulfilling certain necessary functions or purposes for the total society (Radcliffe-Brown 1935). Shared norms, values, and beliefs, for instance, serve the function of holding a society—or a subculture—together. Throughout history, societies and subcultures have defended their religious or political beliefs against threats from other societies in their environments. We see this today as fundamentalists from various religions attempt to protect their beliefs from Western ideologies and globalization. At a global macro level, functionalists see the world moving in the direction of having a common culture, potentially reducing “we” versus “they” thinking and promoting unity across boundaries. Synthesis of cultures and even the loss of some cultures are viewed as a natural result of movement into a postindustrial world.

Although most cultural practices serve positive functions for the maintenance and stability of the society, some practices, such as slavery or child abuse, may be dysfunctional for minority groups or individual members of society. The functionalist perspective has been criticized because it fails to consider how much dysfunction or conflict a society can tolerate and how much unity is necessary for a society to survive. Some critics argue that functional theory overemphasizes the need for consensus and integration among different parts of society, thus ignoring conflicts that may point to problems in societies (Dahrendorf 1959).

**Conflict Theory**

Whereas functionalists assume consensus because all persons in society have learned the same cultural values, rules, and expectations, conflict theorists do not view culture as having this unifying effect. Conflict theorists describe societies as composed of groups—class, ethnic, religious, and political groups at the meso level—vying for power; each group protects its own self-interests and struggles to make its own cultural ways dominant in the society. Instead of consensus, the dominant groups may impose their cultural beliefs on minorities and other subcultural groups, thus laying the groundwork for conflict. Conflict theorists identify tension between meso and macro levels, whereas functionalists tend to focus on harmony and smooth integration.

Actually, conflict may contribute to a smoother-running society in the long run. The French sociologist Georg Simmel (1955) believed that some conflict could serve a positive purpose by alerting societal leaders to problem areas that need attention. This view is illustrated by the political changes that followed the women’s movement or by the organic food industry that has arisen in response to corporate agribusiness and massive use of pesticides.

Conflict theorists argue that the people with privilege and power in society manipulate institutions such as religion and education; in this way people learn the values, beliefs, and norms of the privileged group and foster beliefs that justify the dominant group’s self-interests, power, and advantage. The needs of the privileged are likely to be met, and their status will be secured. For instance, lower-class schools usually teach obedience to authority, punctuality, and respect for superiors,
Conflict theorists believe that society is composed of groups that each seek their own self-interest, and those groups struggle to make their own cultural values supreme in the society. The recent 2006 conflict over immigration laws is illustrated by the thousands of protesters who expressed their opinions in New York as Democrats and Republicans remained divided over plans to overhaul immigration laws.

Source: © Shannon Stapleton / Reuters / Corbis.

Children at a preparatory school play lacrosse and other "exotic" sports that are generally the province of the affluent. Their games are different, as are their academics and their futures, from those of the middle, working, and lower classes. Further, Ivy league colleges provide athletic scholarship for sports like lacrosse and crew, and you can guess who qualifies for those scholarships.

Conflict theorists believe that society is composed of groups that each seek their own self-interest, and those groups struggle to make their own cultural values supreme in the society. The recent 2006 conflict over immigration laws is illustrated by the thousands of protesters who expressed their opinions in New York as Democrats and Republicans remained divided over plans to overhaul immigration laws.

Source: © Shannon Stapleton / Reuters / Corbis.

Technology is bringing change to societies around the world, often with unanticipated consequences. While technology (an example of material culture) advances rapidly, the non-material culture lags behind, resulting in social disruption. Sociologist William Ogburn (1950) used the term cultural lag for this change that occurs unequally between material culture (tangible objects) and nonmaterial culture (ideas, beliefs, and values). Rapid change is opposed by people whose lifestyle is threatened and who wish to preserve the native cultures. Should policy makers respect these differences and reduce the impact of change? That is the policy dilemma.

Imagine living in a remote village on Borneo that, due to its location in the East Indies, has remained largely isolated all of which make for good laborers. The children of the affluent, meanwhile, are more likely to attend schools stressing divergent thinking, creativity, and leadership, attributes that prepare them to occupy the most professional, prestigious, and well-rewarded positions in the society. Conflict theorists point to this control of the education process by those with privilege as part of the overall pattern by which the society benefits the rich.

Conflict theory can also help us to understand global dynamics; poor nations feel that the global system protects the self-interests of the richest nations and that those rich nations impose their own culture, including their ideas about economics, politics, and religion, on the less affluent. Many believe there is great richness in local customs that is lost when homogenized by the cultural domination in the macro-level trends of globalization.

Conflict theory is useful for analyzing relationships between societies (macro level) and between subcultures (meso level) within complex societies. It also helps illuminate tensions in a society when local (micro-level) cultural values clash with national (macro-level) trends. Conflict theory is not as successful, however, in explaining simple, well-integrated societies in which change is slow to come about, new ideas are few, and cooperation is an organizing principle. Many societies have little conflict within but encounter other societies in their environments that challenge their way of life.
from the outside world for hundreds of years. Traditions are well established, and members seldom question how things are done. Then television comes to the village—one set located in a central meeting hut. Initially, it would be used for educational programs, but the village TV receives its share of Western movies and reruns of American situation comedies. The advertisements also expose people to new consumer products. This village in Borneo will never be the same again. Villagers develop a desire for goods hitherto unknown, and young people leave for cities and new opportunities. Refrigerators, dishwashers, and fancy autos become known commodities. They learn that modern medicines can relieve suffering, cure some illnesses, and extend life, making for a higher quality and longer life for many people. Change also challenges the old traditions; without new norms to take their place, disorganization can occur.

Isolation of societies in the global system is rare; most are drawn into the dynamics of the twenty-first century, even if they are not full participants. Societies interact constantly through negotiation, trade, alliances, competition, compromise, conflict, and war. External forces bring about change in political and economic ideologies and make available raw materials, new products, and growing markets.

The social costs of rapid change can be great. During the period of early industrialization, newly arrived peasants lived in an urban squalor hard to imagine today. Karl Marx produced much of his work, which provided the foundation for conflict theory, while living in poverty in London. His wife and two of his daughters died of disease because they could not afford adequate food, housing, or medicines. Even today, these problems exist as people in impoverished regions of the world leave their villages to seek employment in overcrowded urban areas. New technologies have the potential to save lives and to make life less harsh, but introduction of Western technology can also disrupt and even destroy indigenous cultures. This disruption of a culture—called ethnocide—can be extremely disorienting to the people. A contributing factor to terrorism is the challenge to traditional culture and values.

Policy makers cannot stop change, but they can determine how to introduce change for the most beneficial and positive results.

### THE FIT BETWEEN HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE

Computer software may not work with noncompatible machines. Some documents cannot be easily transferred to another piece of hardware, although sometimes a transfer can be accomplished with significant modification in the formatting of the document. The same is true with the hardware of society and the software of culture. For instance, having large extended families, typically valued in agricultural societies, does not work well in industrial and postindustrial societies. Other values such as rewarding people based on individual merit, emphasizing the idea that humans are motivated primarily by their own self-interests, or believing that change in cultures is inevitable and equals progress are not particularly compatible with the hardware of horticultural or herding societies. Values and beliefs (“software”) can be transferred to another type of society (“hardware”); however, there are limits to what can be transferred and the change of “formatting” may mean the new beliefs are barely recognizable.

Policies to transport U.S.-style software—individualism, capitalism, and democracy—to other parts of the world illustrate that these ideas are not always successful in other settings. The hardware of other societies may be able to handle more than one type of software or set of beliefs, but there are limits to the adaptability. Thus, we should not be surprised when our ideas are transformed into something quite different when they are imported to another social system. If we are to understand the world in which we live and if we want to improve it, we must first fully understand the societies and cultures, including the links between them and the interconnections between the levels of our social world.

Each society relies on the process of socialization to instill the culture into its members. The next chapter discusses the ways in which we learn to become members of society.

### THINKING SOCIOLOLOGICALLY

Is it appropriate to try to change the politics or religion of another culture? Why or why not? Do individual human rights always have supremacy over the rights of a group to determine their own culture? These are tough questions that trouble many people who work in the area of human rights policy.

Some anthropologists argue that team sports, groups organized against each other in competition, was learned by Europeans from Native Americans. How has the diffusion of team sports into U.S. culture influenced the nature of U.S. society and culture? How might our society be different if we had only individual sports?
SO WHAT?

Individuals and small groups cannot live without the supports of a larger society, the hardware of the social world. Without the software—culture—we would be lost. Indeed, without culture, there would be no norms to guide our interactions with others in society. Humans are inherently social and learn their culture from others. Furthermore, as society has evolved to more complex and multitiered social systems, humans have learned to live in and negotiate conflicts between multiple cultures, including those at micro, meso, and macro levels. Life in an information-age society demands adaptability to different sociocultural contexts and tolerance of different cultures and subcultures. This is a challenge to a species that has always had tendencies toward ethnocentrism.

Since there is such variation between societies and cultures in what they see as normal, how do any of us ever adjust to our society’s expectations? The answer is addressed in the next chapter. Human life is a lifelong process of socialization to social and cultural expectations.

CONTRIBUTING TO YOUR SOCIAL WORLD

At the Local Level: Italian American, Japanese American or other ethnic group club: Consider exploring your own ethnic background and learning more about it from a local organization relevant to you.

Casa Amiga Communities or other local agencies: Volunteer or serve as an intern in an organization that helps immigrants deal with adjustment to American life.

At the National and Global Levels: Cultural Survival This is a group interested in helping indigenous cultures around the world to preserve their culture and avoid becoming victims of Westernization or of domination by a more powerful ethnic group in the nation or region. Visit their website at http://www.cs.org/

Visit www.pineforge.com/ballantinestudy for online activities, sample tests, and other helpful information. Select “Chapter 3: Society and Culture” for chapter-specific activities.