



## Chapter 2: Cultural Diversity and Conformity

**Case Study:** Body Ritual Among the Nacirema

**Section 1:** The Meaning of Culture

**Section 2:** Cultural Variation

**Section 3:** The American Value System

**Lab:** Applying What You've Learned

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



### Case Study: Body Ritual Among the Nacirema

Ceremonies and rituals are an important part of any culture. In the 1950s, Horace Miner examined some of the rituals of the Nacirema culture. His description of the culture included a portrait of an average Nacirema and his or her daily body ritual. Although the language Miner used made the culture seem exotic and strange, the description was a truthful representation of the American (Nacirema spelled backwards) morning ritual.

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



## Section 1 at a Glance

### The Meaning of Culture

- Culture is made up of the material and nonmaterial products of human groups.
- A society is a group of interdependent people who share a common culture and feeling of unity. Society differs from culture in that societies are made up of people and cultures are made up of products.
- All cultures share certain elements: technology, symbols, language, values, and norms.

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)

## Car Culture U.S.A.



The Wigwam Village Motel, in Holbrook, Arizona, gave drivers a fun place to rest while traveling on Route 66—the “Main Street of America.”

**How did the car influence American culture?**

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



# What Is Culture?

**Culture** consists of all the shared products of human groups, both physical and abstract. A **society** consists of the people who share a culture.

### *Physical products*

- Known as **material culture**
- Includes automobiles, books, building, clothing, computers, and cooking utensils

### *Abstract products*

- Known as **nonmaterial culture**
- Beliefs, family patterns, ideas, language, political and economic systems, rules, skills, and work practices



# The Components of Culture

## Technology

- Refers to objects and the rules for using them
- Any tool and its usage
- Any rule that makes a use of an object illegal

## Symbols

- The basis of human culture
- Any words, gestures, or images
- Different cultures use different symbols

< Back

Next >

Chapter Menu

Main ↑



# The Components of Culture

## Language

- Organization of written or spoken symbols into a standardized system
- Can be used to express any idea

## Values

- **Values** are shared beliefs
- Distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong, desirable and undesirable
- Group's values help to determine character and culture

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



# The Components of Culture

## Norms

- Shared rules of conduct in specific situations
- **Folkways** do not carry heavy moral significance
- **Mores** carry heavy moral significance
- **Laws** are written and enforced by government

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

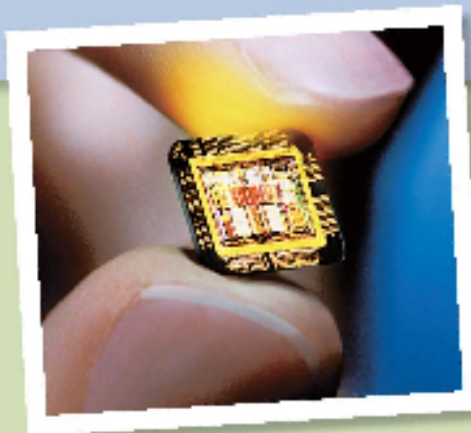
[Main ↑](#)



## The Elements of Culture

A culture is made up of all the shared products of a human group—everything from physical objects to beliefs, values, and behaviors. While cultures may differ from society to society, they all consist of the same key elements: technology, symbols, language, values, and norms. **Which element of culture do you feel is most important? Why?**

**Technology** For sociologists, technology refers not only to physical objects but also to the rules established for using those objects. So, technology involves an understanding of how a silicon chip works as well as the chip itself.



**Symbols** A symbol is any commonly understood gesture, word, object, sound, or design that has come to stand for something else. For example, the yin-yang symbol originated in China, but it has long been recognized as a symbol of harmony in many cultures.

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)

# Cultural Diversity and Conformity



**Language** Perhaps the most important element of culture is language, the organization of written or spoken symbols into a standardized system. In countries such as Canada, several languages are part of the culture. Above, a sign uses both English and Cree, a Native American language.



**Values** In sociological terms, values are shared beliefs about what is good, desirable, and proper. Respect for one's elders is an important value in many cultures. In Thailand, the new year festival, Songkran, is a time to honor one's elders.



**Norms** Cultural values are enforced by norms—shared rules of conduct people follow in their relations with one another. Some norms, such as obeying traffic signals, are formalized as written laws.

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



### Section 2 at a Glance

#### Cultural Variation

- Cultures can be very different from one another in many ways. There are, however, certain features that all cultures share. These are known as cultural universals.
- Variations exist between societies, but they also exist within societies. Subcultures and countercultures are examples of variations within societies.
- Sociologists must take care to view cultural variations without bias, allowing each culture to be judged by its own standards and not those of another culture.

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



## SOCIOLOGY CLOSE UP

## Time for Dinner



How do everyday activities such as eating dinner differ from culture to culture?

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



# What Do We All Have in Common?

- Humans have ability to meet needs in a vast number of ways
- Ability only limited by biological makeup and physical environment
- Ability leads to great diversity in many ways

## Cultural Universals

- **Cultural universals** are features developed by all societies to fulfill basic needs
- George Murdock compiled list of over 65 cultural universals
- Specific nature of the universals may vary widely between cultures

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



## CULTURAL UNIVERSALS

Anthropologist George Murdock identified more than 65 cultural universals—features that are common to all cultures. How these universals are expressed, however, differs from culture to culture.

### Arts and Leisure

athletic sports, dancing, decorative art, games, music

### Basic Needs

clothing, cooking, housing

### Beliefs

body adornment, dream interpretation, folklore, funeral rites, religious ritual, weather control

### Communication and Education

education, greetings, language

### Family

courtship, family feasting, kin groups, marriage

### Government and Economy

calendar, division of labor, government, law, property rights, status differentiation, trade

### Technology

medicine, toolmaking

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



## Cultural Variations

### *Subculture*

- Groups that share traits with each other but not the larger society
- Examples are groups organized by age, gender, politics, or geography
- Most do not reject all of the values of the larger society
- Most **subcultures** do not threaten the larger American culture



### *Counterculture*

- **Countercultures** adopt values that are designed to challenge the values of the larger society
- Examples are groups such as cyberpunks, anarchists, the Mafia, and hippies

< Back

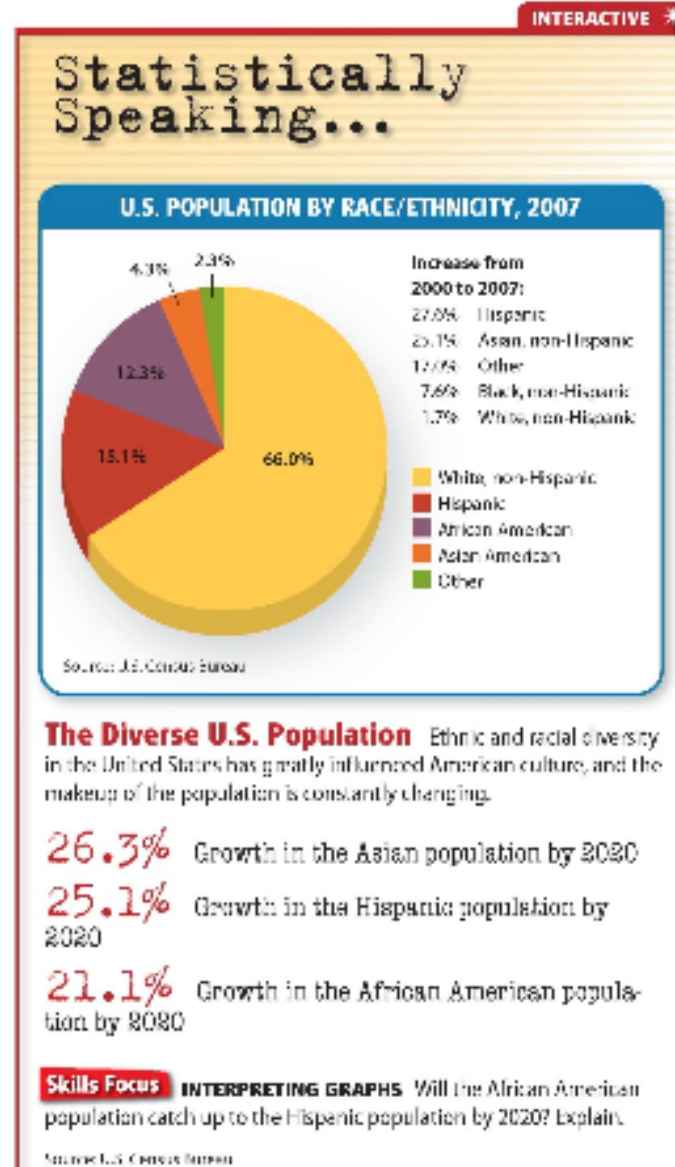
Next >

Chapter Menu

Main ↑

# Cultural Diversity and Conformity

Click on the image to play the Interactive.



< Back

Next >

Chapter Menu

Main ↑





# Response to Variation

## Ethnocentrism

- A tendency to view one's own culture and group as superior
- People from all cultures are somewhat ethnocentric at different times
- Can lead to discrimination
- Can cause the home culture to stagnate
- Even professional scholars struggle with **ethnocentrism**

## Cultural Relativism

- **Cultural relativism** is the idea that a culture should be judged by its own standards
- Can help explain beliefs or behaviors that seem strange or different

< Back

Next >

Chapter Menu

Main ↑



## Perspectives on Culture

**Functionalist Perspective** Culture reflects and enforces society's central values. It encourages harmony and stability by integrating individuals into society. Subcultures diffuse discontent of subgroups in society. Ethnocentrism encourages group solidarity.

**Conflict Perspective** Culture reflects and enforces the values of those who hold power. It encourages and maintains social inequality. Subcultures and countercultures challenge those in power. Ethnocentrism encourages discrimination against the powerless.

**Interactionist Perspective** Culture is maintained and modified through everyday social interaction. Interaction among subcultural groups helps to transmit customs and traditions and also introduces new cultural meaning systems.

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



## Cultural Change

- **Cultural diffusion**

- **Cultural diffusion** is the spreading of culture traits from one society to another
- Today it can happen almost instantly

- **Cultural lag**

- **Cultural lag** is the time it takes for nonmaterial culture to “catch up” to changes in material culture

- **Cultural leveling**

- **Cultural leveling** is a process by which cultures become more and more alike
- Some suggest it is the first step toward a global culture

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



# Cultural Diversity and Sociology

## The Adaptive American Culture

The long history of immigration to the United States has resulted in an American culture that embraces values, behaviors, and material culture from other cultures around the world.

- Latino influence is especially strong as Hispanics are the largest minority group
- Influences food, clothes, and cars available
- Latino holidays are celebrated
- Spanish-language advertisements are common
- South Asians are becoming a larger and larger portion of U.S. population
- Pakistani and Indian food has quickly become more popular
- Bollywood movies are popular

< Back

Next >

Chapter Menu

Main ↑

## Cultural Diversity and Conformity



Grocery stores that cater to both South Asian immigrant communities and the wider U.S. society are becoming more common.

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



## Thinking Critically

- How have immigrant groups influenced American culture?
- What are some examples of how food, business practices, and advertising have changed because of immigration?

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



### Section 3 at a Glance

#### The American Value System

- Over the years, sociologists have identified what they believe are the core values of American society.
- Among these values are work, individualism, morality and humanitarianism, personal achievement, and others.
- American values have not stayed the same over time, however. New values, such as respect for the environment, regularly develop and become part of American culture.

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)

## “Work Is Its Own Reward”



How important is work in the American value system?

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



# Cultural Diversity and Conformity

## AMERICAN VALUES

QUICK  
FACTS

American society is made up of many diverse groups, but there is a core set of values that the majority of these groups share.

### **Personal Achievement**

Doing well at school and at work is important. Gaining wealth and prestige is a sign of success.

### **Progress and Material Comfort**

History is marked by ongoing progress, and this progress improves people's lives.

### **Work**

Discipline, dedication, and hard work are signs of virtue.

### **Individualism**

Hard work, initiative, and individual effort are the keys to personal achievement.

### **Efficiency and Practicality**

Every problem can be solved through efficiency and practicality. Getting things done well in the shortest time is very important.

### **Morality and Humanitarianism**

Judgments should be based on a sense of right and wrong. This sense of morality also involves helping the less fortunate.

### **Equality and Democracy**

Everyone should have an equal chance at success and the right to participate freely in government.

### **Freedom**

Personal freedoms, such as freedom of religion, speech, and the press, are central to the American way of life.

< Back

Next >

Chapter Menu

Main ↑



## Other Core Values

- **Nationalism**
- **Patriotism**
- **Science and rationality**
- **Racial and group superiority**
- **Education**
- **Religion**
- **Romantic love**

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



## American Values: What's Your Opinion?

Do young Americans still uphold traditional American values? Or are the core values of American culture changing? Poll your fellow students to discover what they think.

### PROCEDURE

- 1 Review the traditional American values listed in this section.
- 2 Working in a group with two or three classmates, develop a questionnaire addressing these values. Each question should take the form of a statement on one of the values with several possible responses—strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree, for example.
- 3 Make copies of your questionnaire and distribute them to the rest of the class.

### Quick Lab

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### ANALYSIS

1. Collate all the responses to the questionnaires and present your findings to the class.
2. Lead a class discussion of your findings, using questions such as: Which core values do young people still hold? Which core values seem to be falling out of favor? Are there other values that should be considered core American values?



# Our Changing Values

While the United States has a set of core values, new values or changed values are sometimes noted.

### *New Values*

- Leisure
- Physical fitness
- Youthfulness
- **Self-fulfillment** – commitment to development of one's own talent and abilities
- Environmentalism
- Progress

### *Self-fulfillment and Narcissism*

- Some scholars see self-fulfillment as a healthy new value, while others view its extreme, **narcissism**, as detrimental to society as a whole.

< Back

Next >

Chapter Menu

Main ↑



# Lab: Applying What You've Learned

## Analyzing Material Culture

How can material culture be used to tell about cultural values and differences?

### 1. Introduction

- In this lab, you will compare your values with others in the American Teen subculture.
- Bring two items that reveal your values.
- Compare your items with those of classmates.

### 2. Selecting Your Items

- Choose one item you value highly and one that you place little value on.
- Decide what value, if any, you place on the item.

< Back

Next >

Chapter Menu

Main ↑



## Lab (cont.)

### 3. Analyzing Your Selection

- Write an analysis of your chosen items.
- Describe the process you used to choose your items.



### 4. Presenting and Judging the Items

- The class will decide for each item whether the item has value or not.
- Each student will then explain what his or her items were, and why he or she placed such a value on the items.

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)



## Lab (cont.)

### 5. Discussion

- Hold a group discussion about the differences in valuation that you discovered.
- How would these valuations change over time or place?

[< Back](#)

[Next >](#)

[Chapter Menu](#)

[Main ↑](#)