2 Culture

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

2.1 Explain the development of culture as a human strategy for survival.
2.2 Identify the elements of culture.
2.3 Analyze how a society’s level of technology shapes its culture.
2.4 Discuss the components of cultural diversity.
2.5 Apply sociology’s macro-level theories to gain greater understanding of culture.
2.6 Critique culture as limiting or expanding human freedom.
the **Power of Society**

to guide our attitudes on social issues such as abortion

Survey Question: “Please tell me whether you think abortion can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between.”

Source: Inglehart et al. (2012)

Is how we feel about abortion as “personal” an opinion as we may think? If we compare the attitudes of people around the world, we see remarkable variation from country to country. People living in Sweden, for example, claim that abortion is almost always justified; people living in Jordan, by contrast, almost never support this procedure. For people living in Canada, abortion is an issue on which public opinion is fairly evenly divided. By making such global comparisons, we see that society guides people’s attitudes on various issues, which is part of the way of life we call culture.
Chapter Overview

This chapter focuses on the concept of “culture,” which refers to a society’s entire way of life. Notice that the root of the word culture is the same as that of the word cultivate, suggesting that people living together actually “grow” their way of life over time.

Ernst & Young (E&Y), one of Canada’s largest corporate finance firms, pays a lot of attention to cultural diversity these days. The company employs more than 3000 full-time people at 14 offices across Canada, with just less than half of its employees located at its headquarters in the hub of Toronto’s financial district. With a population of almost 5 million, Toronto is the fifth largest and most ethnically diverse city in North America. Vancouver is equally diverse. Nearly 40 percent of Vancouver’s current population is of visible minority background, with immigrants of Chinese, Indian, and Filipino origin making up the three most numerous groups. Given these population statistics, it is no wonder that E&Y offices in these two cities are strong supporters of the firm’s diversity initiatives. Driven by a corporate value statement calling for an “inclusive and flexible environment,” over the past few years E&Y has hosted a series of ethnic diversity networking events in Toronto, Vancouver, and other Canadian cities where it has branch offices. The company has a full-time director of leadership and manager of diversity with responsibilities ranging from benchmarking the company’s progress in diversifying its workforce and clientele to changing corporate culture to creating a truly inclusive environment (Workplace Diversity Update, 2004). In 2011, E&Y was selected as one of Canada’s “Best Diversity Employers,” with 30.6 percent of its employees and 28 percent of its managers of visible minority background (http://www.canadastop100.com/diversity/).

What has been the result of this diversity initiative? A substantial increase in its share of business is with local ethnic groups. Italian, Chinese, South Asian, and Portuguese native-language speakers spend more than $25.1 million annually in the Greater Toronto Area alone. Any company would do well to follow Ernst & Young’s lead.

Canada prides itself on being a multicultural nation. Cultural diversity reflects this country’s long history of receiving immigrants from all over the world. The ways of life found around the world differ not only in terms of languages and forms of dress but also in terms of preferred foods, musical tastes, family patterns, and beliefs about right and wrong. Some of the world’s people have many children, while others have few; some honour the elderly, while others seem to glorify youth. Some societies are peaceful and others are warlike, and they embrace thousands of different religious beliefs and ideas about what is polite and rude, beautiful and ugly, pleasant and repulsive. This amazing human capacity for so many different ways of life is a matter of human culture.

What Is Culture?

2.1 Explain the development of culture as a human strategy for survival.

Anatomically modern humans appeared 200,000 to 100,000 years ago. Evidence suggests that what we call “culture,” however, first appeared in the Middle Stone Age about 40,000 years ago. Culture is the ways of thinking, the ways of acting, and the material objects that together form a people’s way of life. Culture includes what we think, how we act, and what we own. Culture is both our link to the past and our guide to the future.

To understand all that culture is, we must consider both thoughts and things. Nonmaterial culture is the ideas created by members of a society; ideas that range from art to Zen. Material culture, by contrast, is the physical things created by members of a society, everything from armchairs to zippers.

Culture shapes not only what we do but also what we think and how we feel—elements of what we commonly, but wrongly, describe as...
“human nature.” The warlike Yanomamö of the Brazilian rain forest have been described by Western anthropologists as “aggressive,” while halfway around the world the Semai of Malaysia have been depicted as “peaceful.” The cultures of Canada and Japan both stress achievement and hard work, but many members of Canadian society value individualism more than the Japanese, who value collective harmony.

Given the extent of cultural differences in the world and people’s tendency to view their own way of life as “natural,” it is no wonder that travellers often find themselves feeling uneasy as they enter an unfamiliar culture. This uneasiness is culture shock, personal disorientation when experiencing an unfamiliar way of life. People can experience culture shock right here in Canada when, say, Jamaican Canadians explore an Iranian neighbourhood in Montreal, university students from Kingston venture into the Mennonite countryside in Southern Ontario, or Vancouverites travel through a small native community in Northern British Columbia. But culture shock is most intense when we travel abroad: The Thinking Globally box on page xx tells the story of a researcher making his first visit to the home of the Yanomamö living in the Amazon region of South America.

Thinking Globally

Confronting the Yanomamö: The Experience of Culture Shock

A small aluminum motorboat chugged steadily along the muddy Orinoco River, deep within South America’s vast tropical rain forest. The anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon was nearing the end of a three-day journey to his home territory of the Yanomamö, one of the most technologically simple societies on Earth.

Some 12 000 Yanomamö live in villages scattered along the border of Venezuela and Brazil. Their way of life could not be more different from our own. The Yanomamö wear little clothing and live without electricity, automobiles, cell phones, or other conveniences most people in Canada take for granted. Their traditional weapon, used for hunting and warfare, is the bow and arrow. Since most of the Yanomamö knew little about the outside world, Chagnon would be as strange to them as they would be to him.

By 2:00 in the afternoon, Chagnon had almost reached his destination. The heat and humidity were becoming unbearable. He was soaked with perspiration, and his face and hands swelled from the bites of gnats swarming around him. But he hardly noticed, so excited was he that in just a few moments, he would be face to face with people unlike any he had ever known.

Chagnon’s heart pounded as the boat slid onto the riverbank. He and his guide climbed from the boat and headed toward the sounds of a nearby village, pushing their way through the dense undergrowth. Chagnon describes what happened next:

I looked up and gasped when I saw a dozen burly, naked, sweaty, hideous men staring at us down the shafts of their drawn arrows! Immense wads of green tobacco were stuck between their lower teeth and lips, making them look even more hideous, and strands of dark green slime dripped or hung from their nostrils—strands so long that they clung to their [chests] or drizzled down their chins.

My next discovery was that there were a dozen or so vicious, underfed dogs snapping at my legs, circling me as if I were to be their next meal. I just stood there holding my notebook, helpless, and pathetic. Then the stench of the decaying vegetation and filth hit me and I almost got sick. I was horrified. What kind of welcome was this for the person who came here to live with you and learn your way of life, to become friends with you? (Chagnon, 1992:11–12)

Fortunately for Chagnon, the Yanomamö villagers recognized his guide and lowered their weapons. Though reassured that he would survive the afternoon, Chagnon was still shaken by his inability to make any sense of the people surrounding him.

What Do You Think?

1. Can you think of an experience of your own similar to the one described here? Explain what happened.
2. Do you think you ever caused culture shock in others? What did you learn from this experience?
3. Why is it difficult for people who live within different cultural systems to interact without discomfort? At the same time, are there benefits gained from doing so?
No particular way of life is “natural” to humanity, even though most people around the world view their own behaviour that way. The co-operative spirit that comes naturally in small communities high in the Andes Mountains of Peru is very different from the competitive living that comes naturally to many people in, say, Regina or Halifax. Such variations come from the fact that as human beings, we join together to create our own way of life. Every other animal, from ants to zebras, behaves very much the same all around the world because behaviour is guided by instincts, biological programming over which the species has no control. A few animals—notably chimpanzees and related primates—have the capacity for limited culture, as researchers have noted by observing them using tools and teaching simple skills to their offspring. But the creative power of humans is far greater than that of any other form of life and has resulted in countless ways of “being human.” In short, only humans rely on culture rather than
Culture and Human Intelligence

Scientists tell us that our planet is 4.5 billion years old (see the timeline in MySocLab). Life appeared about 1 billion years later. Fast-forward another 2 to 3 billion years, and we find dinosaurs ruling Earth. It was after these giant creatures disappeared, some 65 million years ago, that our history took a crucial turn with the appearance of the animals we call primates.

The importance of primates is that they have the largest brains relative to body size of all living creatures. About 12 million years ago, primates began to evolve along two different lines, setting humans apart from the great apes, our closest relatives. Some 5 million years ago, our distant human ancestors climbed down from the trees of Central Africa to move about in the tall grasses. There, walking upright, they learned the advantages of hunting in groups and made use of fire, tools, and weapons; built simple shelters; and fashioned basic clothing. These Stone Age achievements may seem modest, but they mark the point at which our ancestors set off on a distinct evolutionary course, making culture their primary strategy for survival. By about 250 000 years ago, our species, Homo sapiens (Latin for “intelligent person”), had finally emerged. Humans continued to evolve so that by about 40 000 years ago, people who looked more or less like us roamed the planet. With larger brains, these “modern” Homo sapiens developed culture rapidly, as the wide range of tools and cave art that have survived from this period suggests.

About 12 000 years ago, the founding of permanent settlements and the creation of specialized occupations in the Middle East (today’s Iraq and Egypt) marked the “birth of civilization.” About this point, the biological forces we call instincts had mostly disappeared, replaced by a more efficient survival scheme: fashioning the natural environment for ourselves. Ever since, humans have made and remade their world in countless ways, resulting in today’s fascinating cultural diversity.

Culture, Nation, and Society

The term “culture” calls to mind other similar terms, such as “nation” and “society,” although each has a slightly different meaning. Culture refers to a shared way of life. A nation is a political entity, a territory with designated borders, such as Canada, Japan, Peru, or Zimbabwe. Society refers to people who interact in a defined territory and share a culture.

Canada, then, is both a nation and a society. But many nations, including Canada, are multicultural; that is, their people follow various ways of life that blend (and sometimes clash).

How Many Cultures?

How many cultures are there in Canada? One indicator of culture is language; the Canada 2011 Census lists more than 200 nonofficial mother tongues spoken in this country, most of which were brought by immigrants from nations around the world (Statistics Canada, 2012a). The census also recorded 60 Aboriginal languages, with the most popular being Cree languages, Ojibway, Innu/Montagnais, and Ojii-Cree (Statistics Canada, 2012b).

Globally, experts document almost 7000 languages, suggesting the existence of as many distinct cultures. Yet with the number of languages spoken around the world declining, roughly half of those 7000 languages now are spoken by fewer than 10 000 people. Experts expect that the coming decades may see the disappearance of hundreds of these languages, and perhaps half the world’s languages may even disappear before the end of this century (Crystal, 2010). Languages on the endangered list include Han (spoken in northwestern Canada), Gullah, Pennsylvania German, and Pawnee (all spoken in the United States), Oro (spoken in the Amazon region of Brazil), Sardinian (spoken on the European island of Sardinia), Aramaic (in the Middle East), Nu Shu (a language spoken in southern China that is the only one known to be used exclusively by women), and Wakka Wakka as well as several other Aboriginal tongues spoken in Australia. As you might expect, when a language is becoming extinct, the last people to speak it are the oldest members of a society. What accounts for the worldwide
A decline in the number of spoken languages? The main reason is globalization itself, including high-technology communication, increasing international migration, and the expanding worldwide economy (UNESCO, 2001; Barovick, 2002; Hayden, 2003; Lewis, 2009).

The Elements of Culture

Identify the elements of culture.

Although cultures vary greatly, they all have common elements, including symbols, language, values, and norms. We begin our discussion with the one that is the basis for all the others: symbols.

Symbols

Like all creatures, humans use their senses to experience the surrounding world, but unlike others, we also try to give the world meaning. Humans transform the elements of the world into symbols. A symbol is anything that carries a particular meaning recognized by people who share a culture. A word, a whistle, a wall covered with graffiti, a flashing red light, a raised fist—all serve as symbols. We can see the human capacity to create and manipulate symbols reflected in the very different meanings associated with the simple act of winking an eye, which can convey interest, understanding, or insult.

Societies create new symbols all the time. “Cyber-symbols,” such as emoticons, have developed along with our increasing use of computers for communication.

We are so dependent on our culture’s symbols that we take them for granted. However, we become keenly aware of the importance of a symbol when someone uses it in an unconventional way, as when a person burns, or turns upside down, a Canadian flag during a political demonstration. Entering an unfamiliar culture also reminds us of the power of symbols; culture shock is really the inability to “read” meaning in strange surroundings. Not understanding the symbols of a culture leaves a person feeling lost and isolated, unsure of how to act, and sometimes frightened.

Culture shock is a two-way process. On one hand, travellers experience culture shock when encountering people whose way of life is different. For example, North Americans who consider dogs beloved household pets might be put off by the Masai of eastern Africa, who ignore dogs and never feed them. The same travellers might be horrified to find that in parts of Indonesia and the People’s Republic of China, people roast dogs for dinner.

On the other hand, a traveller may inflict culture shock on local people by acting in ways that offend them. A Canadian who asks for steak in an Indian restaurant may unknowingly offend Hindus, who consider cows sacred and never to be eaten. Global travel provides almost endless opportunities for this kind of misunderstanding.

Symbolic meanings also vary within a single society. To some people in Canada, a fur coat represents a prized symbol of success, but to others it represents the inhumane treatment of animals. By ordering all Canadian flags to be removed from provincial government buildings in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2004, the then premier, Danny Williams, gained support from some people who saw the flag as a symbol of federal oppression rather than national pride.

Language

An illness in infancy left Helen Keller (1880–1968) blind and deaf. Without these two senses, she was cut off from the symbolic world, and her social development was greatly limited. Only when her teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan, broke through Keller’s isolation using sign language did Helen Keller begin to realize her human potential. This remarkable woman, who later became a famous educator herself, recalls the moment she first understood the concept of language:

People throughout the world communicate not just with spoken words but also with bodily gestures. Because gestures vary from culture to culture, they can occasionally be the cause of misunderstandings. For instance, the commonplace “thumbs up” gesture we use to express “Good job!” can get a person from Canada into trouble in Greece, Iran, and a number of other countries, where people take it to mean “Up yours!”
We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the smell of honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water, and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand, she spelled into the other the word “water,” first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul; gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! (Keller, 1903:24)

Language, the key to the world of culture, is a system of symbols that allows people to communicate with one another. Humans have created many alphabets to express the hundreds of languages we speak. Several examples are shown in Figure 2–1. Even rules for writing differ: Most people in Western societies write from left to right, but people in northern Africa and western Asia write from right to left, and people in eastern Asia write from top to bottom. Global Map 2–1 on page XX shows where we find the three most widely spoken languages: English, Chinese, and Spanish.

Language not only allows communication but is also the key to cultural transmission, the process by which one generation passes culture to the next. Just as our bodies contain the genes of our ancestors, our culture contains countless symbols of those who came before us. Language is the key that unlocks centuries of accumulated wisdom.

Throughout human history, every society has transmitted culture by using speech, a process sociologists call the “oral cultural tradition.” Some 5000 years ago, humans invented writing, although at that time only a privileged few learned to read and write. Not until the twentieth century did high-income nations boast of nearly universal literacy. Still, by some estimates about 1 in 6 of Canadian adults are functionally illiterate, unable to read and write on a level that is required to meet regular needs. In low-income countries of the world, at least one-third of adults are illiterate (Bailey, Tuinman & Jones, 2012; World Bank, 2012).

Language skills may link us with the past, but they also spark the human imagination to connect symbols in new ways, creating an almost limitless range of future possibilities. Language sets humans apart as the only creatures who are self-conscious, aware of our limitations and ultimate mortality, yet able to dream and to hope for a future better than the present.

**Does Language Shape Reality?**

Does someone who speaks Cree, the language spoken by Aboriginal people who originated from the James Bay area of Canada, experience the world differently from other Canadians who think in, say, English or French? Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf claimed that the answer is yes, since each language has its own distinctive symbols that serve as the building blocks of reality (Sapir, 1929, 1949; Whorf, 1956, orig. 1941). Further, they noted that each language has words or expressions not found in any other symbolic system. Finally, all languages fuse symbols with distinctive emotions so that, as multilingual people know, a single idea may “feel” different when spoken in Hindi rather than in Persian or Dutch.

Formally, the Sapir-Whorf thesis holds that people see and understand the world through the cultural lens of language. In the decades since Sapir and Whorf published their work, however, scholars have taken issue with this proposition. Some critics argue that although we do fashion reality out of our symbols, evidence does not support the notion that language determines reality in the

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**Language**

- a system of symbols that allows people to communicate with one another

**Cultural transmission**

- the process by which one generation passes culture to the next

**Sapir-Whorf thesis**

- the idea that people see and understand the world through the cultural lens of language
Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 2-1  Language in Global Perspective

Chinese

Chinese (including Mandarin, Cantonese, and dozens of other dialects) is the native tongue of one-fifth of the world’s people, almost all of whom live in Asia. Although all Chinese people read and write with the same characters, they use several dozen dialects. The “official” dialect, taught in schools throughout the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Taiwan, is Mandarin (the dialect of Beijing, China’s capital). Cantonese, the language of Canton, is the second most common Chinese dialect; it differs in sound from Mandarin roughly the way French differs from Spanish.

Spanish

Spanish is the native language of about 6 percent of humanity. The largest concentration of Spanish speakers is in Latin America and, of course, Spain. Spanish is also the second most widely spoken language in the world and in the United States.

English

English is the native tongue or official language in several world regions, spoken by approximately 5 percent of humanity, and has become the third most popular language in the world.

Sources: Lewis (2009); European Union (2012); Lewis, Simons & Fennig (2015)
way Sapir and Whorf claimed. For example, we know that children understand the idea of “family” long before they learn that word; similarly, adults can imagine new ideas or things before naming them (Kay & Kempton, 1984; Pinker, 1994).

**Values and Beliefs**

While in urban centres throughout Canada middle-class parents teach their children values such as hard work, competition, and respect for authority, First Nations families who live in remote communities teach traditional activities like hunting and trapping, sharing, and respect for elders (Sawchuck, 2011). In applauding such characteristics, we are supporting certain **values**, culturally defined standards that people use to decide what is desirable, good, and beautiful and that serve as broad guidelines for social living. People who share a culture use values to make choices about how to live.

Values are broad principles that support **beliefs**, specific thoughts or ideas that people hold to be true. In other words, values are abstract standards of goodness, and beliefs are particular matters that people accept as true or false. For example, surveys show that most Canadian adults agree that their country should provide equal opportunities to all groups, including women and men (Adams, 1997). Yet, in reality, the proportion of women in the House of Commons was only 22.1 percent in 2011, though this number has been increasing ever so slowly in the last decade (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011).

**Key Values of Canadian Culture**

Canada is a country of native peoples and immigrants from many different countries. Its complex demographic makeup and vast geography mean that few values command the support of everyone. Even so, a number of dominant values have emerged. Surveys conducted by social researchers (Environics Research Group, 2011a; Environics Research Group, 2011b; Nanos, 2007) identify a number of them.

1. **Democracy and human rights.** Canadians believe that all citizens ought to enjoy democratic rights.
2. **Healthcare and the social safety net.** People in Canada value social programs and services. Many feel that Canada has one of the best health care systems in the world, and that it should continue to be available equally to all.
3. **Support for environment.** The environment is part of Canada’s national identity. Across the country, people express support for actions that address climate change, with 74 percent of Canadians favouring government setting limits on carbon dioxide emissions.
4. **Importance of gender and racial equality.** The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enshrines gender and racial equality, while Canadians continue to see themselves as a multicultural nation in terms of policy, demographics, and ideals.
5. **Value of immigration.** It is often said that Canada is “a country of immigrants.” While this is not true for the Indigenous people who have resided here for at least 12,000 years, Canadians today recognize the positive role that immigration plays in the country’s economic and social life.

How does the popularity of the television show *Canadian Idol* illustrate some of the key values of Canadian culture listed here?
6. **Support for diversity.** Support for the country’s many diversities—religious, linguistic, sexual, and ethnic—is a central value. In 2005 Canada became the first country in the Americas (and fourth in the world) to legalize gay marriage. Currently, 62 percent of Canadians back the inclusion of gay rights in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

7. **Free market and property rights.** At the same time as they value social programs, Canadians also profess a respect for property and for the capitalist system. Individual success is often measured in terms of material comfort and wealth. Competition and individualism are championed as the basis of prosperity.

**Values: Often in Harmony, Sometimes in Conflict**

Looking over the list above, we see that these dominant cultural values are often difficult to realize. For example, recent federal governments have tended to present an image of Canada as “one” nation bound together by shared values, traditions, and beliefs, yet simultaneously promote fiscal responsibility over public funding of social programs. Results of a 2013 study by the Broadbent Institute indicate that many Canadians do not necessarily agree with this government sentiment. Over two-thirds (70 percent) of Canadians polled “said they’d prefer a government that is more robust in the services,” and 60 percent stated that they “would be ‘willing’ or ‘very willing’ to pay higher taxes if it meant that the money would go to fund social programs such as health care” (Broadbent Institute, 2013).

Such conflicts in values inevitably cause strain, leading to awkward balancing acts in the beliefs and actions of many Canadians. Some may decide that one value is more important than another, while others may simply learn to live with inconsistencies. While Canadians appear to be more liberal overall in their attitudes about moral issues, there remain notable differences, including along regional lines (Angus Reid Public Opinion, 2007). This was confirmed in a 2011 survey showing that British Columbia has the lowest percentage of people in Canada—just 17 percent compared to 36 percent in the rest of western Canada—who believe that all the poor have to do to improve their lives is “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps” (Todd, 2011).

**Values: Change Over Time**

Like all elements of culture, values change over time. A century ago, people in Canada openly valued colonialism, industry, white immigration, male leadership, and hard work. Today, however, we question the legacy these values have had on Indigenous people, the environment, racial minorities, women, and workers. While patterns of Canada’s colonial past persist—as is evident in the reservation system and treaty negotiations—the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in 2008, signals some willingness to re-evaluate what was once a deeply entrenched support for colonialism. Changing Canadians’ cultural values of colonialism is not, however, a straightforward process: Amid calls for respect for Aboriginal title, equitable partnerships with Aboriginal people in resource and energy projects, and greater protection for Aboriginal languages and culture, a number of Canadians still harbour anti-Aboriginal sentiments. The Canadian government, although expressing a need to re-establish the relationship between the Crown and Aboriginal peoples, continues a non-consultative and, what some observers describe as, antagonistic approach (APTN National News, 2012; Bennett, 2013).

**Values: A Global Perspective**

Values vary from culture to culture around the world. In general, the values that are important in higher-income countries differ somewhat from those common in lower-income countries. Because lower-income nations contain populations that are vulnerable, people in these countries develop cultures that value survival. This means that people place a great deal of importance on physical safety and economic security. They worry about having enough to eat and a safe place to sleep at night. Lower-income nations also tend to be traditional, with values that celebrate the past and emphasize the importance of family and religious beliefs. These nations, in which men have most of the power, typically discourage or forbid practices such as divorce and abortion.
People in higher-income countries develop cultures that value individualism and self-expression. These countries are rich enough that most of their people take survival for granted, focusing their attention instead on which “lifestyle” they prefer and how to achieve the greatest personal happiness. In addition, these countries tend to be secular-rational, placing less emphasis on family ties and religious beliefs and more emphasis on people thinking for themselves and being tolerant of others who differ from them. In higher-income countries, too, women have social standing more equal to men and there is widespread support for practices such as divorce and abortion (Inglehart et al., 2012). Figure 2–2 shows how selected countries of the world compare in terms of their cultural values.

Norms

Middle-class Canadians are reluctant to reveal to others the size of their paycheque, while people in China tend to share such “personal” information eagerly. Both patterns illustrate the operation of norms, rules and expectations by which a society guides the behaviour of its members. In everyday life, people respond to each other with sanctions, rewards or punishments that encourage conformity to cultural norms.

Folkways, Mores, and Laws

People pay less attention to folkways, norms for routine or casual interaction. Examples include ideas about appropriate greetings and proper dress. A man who does not wear a tie to a formal dinner party may raise eyebrows for violating folkways or “etiquette.” If, however, he were to...
arrive at the dinner party wearing only a tie, he would violate cultural mores and invite a more serious response.

Sociologist William Graham Sumner (1959, orig. 1906) coined the term mores (pronounced “MORE-ayz”) to refer to norms that are widely observed and have great moral significance. In short, folkways draw a line between polite and rude behaviour, and mores distinguish between right and wrong. Certain mores include taboos, such as our society’s insistence that adults not engage in sexual relations with children.

Finally, other kinds of norms are laws, systems of rules recognized and enforced by governing institutions. In complex societies, laws are associated with formal legal systems, such as the Criminal Code of Canada. Because they are codified, laws are the most well-defined norms. Laws, however, can also exist in stateless Aboriginal cultures which without writing anything down maintain laws on the basis of custom and tradition.

Social Control

Folkways, mores, and laws are the basic rules of everyday life. Although we sometimes resist pressure to conform, we can see that norms make our dealings with others more orderly and predictable. Observing or breaking the rules of social life prompts a response from others in the form of either reward or punishment. Sanctions—whether an approving smile or a raised eyebrow—operate as a system of social control, attempts by society to regulate people’s thoughts and behaviour.

As we learn cultural norms, we gain the capacity to evaluate our own behaviour. Doing wrong (say, downloading a term paper from the internet) can cause both shame (the painful sense that others disapprove of our actions) and guilt (a negative judgment we make of ourselves). Of all living things, only cultural creatures can experience shame and guilt. This is probably what Mark Twain had in mind when he remarked that people “are the only animals that blush—or need to.”

Ideal and Real Culture

Values and norms do not describe actual behaviour so much as they suggest how we should behave. We must remember that ideal culture always differs from real culture, which is what actually occurs in everyday life. To illustrate, the Canadian Automobile Association’s Traffic Safety Culture survey reveals that 98 percent of Canadians find drinking and driving “socially unacceptable” (2010). This is not surprising given strong advocacy campaigns that alert us to the dangers of driving under the influence. However, while condemning drunk driving, 27 percent of those questioned admitted to driving while under the influence “at least once” in the past year (Canadian Automobile Association, 2010). But a culture’s moral standards are important all the same, calling to mind the old saying, “Do as I say, not as I do.”

Technology and Culture

In addition to symbolic elements such as values and norms, every culture includes a wide range of physical human creations called artifacts. The Chinese eat with chopsticks rather than knives and forks, the Japanese place mats rather than rugs on the floor, and many men and women in India prefer flowing robes to the close-fitting clothing common in Canada. The material culture of a people can seem as strange to outsiders as their language, values, and norms.

A society’s artifacts partly reflect underlying cultural values. The warlike Yanomamö carefully craft their weapons and prize the poison tips on their arrows. By contrast, our society’s
emphasis on individualism and independence helps explain our high regard for the automobile: In 2009, Canadians owned about 560 cars per 1000 residents—near the top per capita of any country. Even in an age of high gasoline prices, many of these automobiles are the large sport utility vehicles that we might expect rugged, individualistic people to choose.

In addition to expressing values, material culture also reflects a society’s level of technology, knowledge that people use to make a way of life in their surroundings. The more complex a society’s technology, the easier it is for members of that society to shape the world for themselves.

Gerhard Lenski argued that a society’s level of technology is crucial in determining what cultural ideas and artifacts emerge or are even possible (Nolan & Lenski, 2010). He pointed to the importance of socio-cultural evolution—the historical changes in culture brought about by new technology—which unfolds in terms of four major levels of development: hunting and gathering, horticulture and pastoralism, agriculture, and industry.

**Hunting and Gathering**

The oldest and most basic way of living is hunting and gathering, the use of simple tools to hunt animals and gather vegetation for food. From the time of our earliest ancestors 3 million years ago until about 1800, most people in the world lived as hunters and gatherers. Today, however, this technology supports only a few societies, including the Kaska Aboriginals of northwestern Canada, the Pygmies of Central Africa, the Khoisan of southwestern Africa, the Aborigines of Australia, and the Semai of Malaysia. Typically, hunters and gatherers spend most of their time searching for game and edible plants. Their societies are small, generally with several dozen people living in a nomadic, family-like group, moving on as they deplete an area’s vegetation or follow migratory animals.

Everyone helps search for food, with the very young and the very old doing what they can. Women usually gather vegetation—the primary food source for these peoples—while men do most of the hunting. Because the tasks they perform are of equal value, the two sexes are regarded as having about the same social importance (Leacock, 1978).

Hunters and gatherers do not have formal leaders. They may look to one person as a shaman, or priest, but holding such a position does not excuse the person from the daily work of finding food. Overall, hunting and gathering is a simple and egalitarian way of life.

Limited technology leaves hunters and gatherers vulnerable to the forces of nature. Storms and droughts can easily destroy their food supply, and they have few effective ways to respond to accidents or disease. Looking back at these societies, we see that many died in childhood, and only half lived to the age of 20.

Standards of beauty—including the colour and design of everyday surroundings—vary significantly from one culture to another. This Ndebele couple in South Africa dresses in the same bright colours they use to decorate their home. Members of North American and European societies, by contrast, make far less use of bright colours and intricate detail, so their housing and clothing appear much more subdued.

What would it be like to live in a society with simple technology? That’s the premise of the television show Survivor. What advantages do societies with simple technology afford their members? What disadvantages do you see?
As people with powerful technology steadily close in on them, hunting and gathering societies are vanishing. Fortunately, studying their way of life has provided us with valuable information about our socio-cultural history and our fundamental ties to the natural environment.

Horticulture and Pastoralism

Horticulture, the use of hand tools to raise crops, appeared around 10,000 years ago. The hoe and the digging stick (used to punch holes in the ground for planting seeds) first turned up in fertile regions of the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and by 6000 years ago, these tools were in use from Western Europe to China. Central and South Americans also learned to cultivate plants, but rocky soil and mountainous land forced members of many societies to continue to hunt and gather even as they adopted this new technology (Fisher, 1979; Chagnon, 1992).

In especially dry regions, societies turned not to raising crops but to pastoralism, the domestication of animals. Throughout the Americas, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, many societies combine horticulture and pastoralism.

Growing plants and raising animals allows societies to feed hundreds of members. Pastoral peoples remain nomadic, but horticulturalists make permanent settlements. In a horticultural society, a material surplus means that not everyone has to produce food; some people are free to make crafts, become traders, or serve as full-time priests. Compared with hunters and gatherers, pastoral and horticultural societies are more unequal, with some families operating as a ruling elite and men increasing their power at the expense of women.

Because hunters and gatherers have little control over nature, they generally believe that the world is inhabited by spirits. As they gain the power to raise plants and animals, however, people come to believe in one God as the creator of the world. The pastoral roots of Judaism and Christianity are evident in the term “pastor” and the common view of God as a “shepherd” who stands watch over all.

Agriculture

Around 5000 years ago, technological advances led to agriculture, large-scale cultivation using plows harnessed to animals or more powerful energy sources. Agrarian technology first appeared in the Middle East and gradually spread throughout the world. The invention of the animal-drawn plow, the wheel, writing, numbers, and new metals changed societies so much that historians call this era the “dawn of civilization.”

By turning the soil, plows allow land to be farmed for centuries, so agrarian people can live in permanent settlements. With large food surpluses that can be transported by animal-powered wagons, populations grow into the millions. As members of agrarian societies become more and more specialized in their work, credit, and later on money, is used as a form of common exchange, replacing the earlier system of barter. Although the development of agrarian technology expands human choices and fuels urban growth, it also makes social life more individualistic and impersonal.

Agriculture also brings about a dramatic increase in social inequality. Most people live as serfs or slaves, but a few elites are freed from labour to cultivate a “refined” way of life based on the study of philosophy, art, and literature. At all levels, men gain pronounced power over women.

People with only simple technology live much the same the world over, with minor differences caused by regional variations in climate. But agrarian technology gives people enough control over the world that cultural diversity dramatically increases (Nolan & Lenski, 2010).

Industry

Industrialization occurred as societies replaced the muscles of animals and humans with new forms of power. Formally, industry is the production of goods using advanced sources of energy to drive large machinery. The introduction of steam power, starting in England about 1775, greatly boosted productivity and transformed culture in the process.
Agrarian people work in or near their homes, but most people in industrial societies work in large factories under the supervision of strangers. In this way, industrialization pushes aside the traditional cultural values that guided family-centred agrarian life for centuries.

Industry also made the world seem smaller. In the nineteenth century, railroads and steamships carried people across land and sea faster and farther than ever before. In the twentieth century, this process continued with the invention of the automobile, the airplane, radio, television, and computers.

Industrial technology also raises living standards and extends the human life span. Schooling becomes the rule because industrial jobs demand more and more skills. In addition, industrial societies reduce economic inequality and steadily extend political rights.

It is easy to see industrial societies as “more advanced” than those relying on simpler technology. After all, industry raises living standards and stretches life expectancy to the seventies and beyond—about twice that of the Yanomamö. But as industry intensifies individualism and expands personal freedom, it weakens human community. Industry also has led people to abuse the natural environment, which threatens us all. And although advanced technology gives us labour-saving machines and miraculous forms of medical treatment, it also contributes to unhealthy levels of stress and has created weapons capable of destroying in a flash everything that our species has achieved.

Post-industrial Information Technology
Going beyond the four categories discussed by Lenski, we see that many industrial societies, including Canada, have now entered a post-industrial era in which more and more economic production makes use of new information technology. Post-industrialism refers to the production of information using computer technology. Production in industrial societies centres on factories that make things, but post-industrial production centres on computers and other electronic devices that create, process, store, and apply ideas and information.

The emergence of an information economy changes the skills that define a way of life. No longer are mechanical abilities the only key to success. People find that they must learn to work with symbols by speaking, writing, computing, and creating images and sounds. One result of this change is that our society now has the capacity to create symbolic culture on an unprecedented scale as people work with computers to generate new words, music, and images.

Cultural Diversity: Many Ways of Life in One World

Discuss the components of cultural diversity.

Take a stroll down Queen Street in Toronto or through Vancouver’s Gastown and it will soon become obvious to you that Canada is a culturally diverse society. Compared to a country like Japan, whose historic isolation makes it the most monocultural of all high-income nations, immigration over the past century and a half has turned Canada into one of the most multicultural of all high-income countries.

In 1901, 12.8 percent of the population were born outside of Canada. More than 75 percent of these people were born in Europe and almost 60 percent came from the United Kingdom. By
2001, the percentage of the population born outside of Canada had increased to 18.4 percent and more than half of these people were born outside of Europe. By 2006, there was a further increase to just under 20 percent. This diverging immigration is also reflected in the much greater diversity in the background of Canadians today (see Table 11–1 on page XXX for details of the ethnic diversity in Canada in 2006). Statistics Canada predicts that if this trend continues, between 25 and 28 percent of the Canadian population could be foreign-born by 2031 (Statistics Canada, 2011). To understand the reality of life in Canada, we must move beyond shared cultural patterns to consider the importance of cultural diversity.

High Culture and Popular Culture

Cultural diversity involves not just immigration but also social class. In fact, in everyday talk, we usually use the term “culture” to mean art forms such as classical literature, music, dance, and painting. We describe people who regularly attend the opera or the theatre as “cultured,” because we think that they appreciate the “finer things in life.”

We speak less kindly of ordinary people, assuming that everyday culture is somehow less worthy. We are tempted to judge the music of Handel as “more cultured” than hip-hop, couscous as better than cornbread, horse polo as more polished than hockey.

These differences arise because many cultural patterns are readily available to only some members of a society. Sociologists use the term high culture to refer to cultural patterns that distinguish a society’s elite and popular culture to designate cultural patterns that are widespread among a society’s population.

Common sense may suggest that high culture is superior to popular culture, but sociologists are uneasy with such judgments for two reasons. First, neither elites nor ordinary people share all of the same tastes and interests; people in both categories differ in many ways. Second, do we praise high culture because it is inherently better than popular culture or simply because its supporters have more money, power, and prestige? For example, there is no difference at all between a violin and a fiddle; however, we name the instrument a violin when it is used to produce classical music typically enjoyed by a person of higher position and we call it a fiddle when the musician plays country, folk, or bluegrass tunes appreciated by people with lower social standing.

We should also remember that Canadian culture is made up of the life patterns of all people who reside here. What’s more, this national culture is being created all the time—not just by people whose names are familiar to all of us, but also by countless people including those living in some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the country. The Thinking About Diversity box on page XX provides a case in point.

Subculture

The term subculture refers to cultural patterns that set apart some segment of a society’s population. People who ride “chopper” motorcycles, people who enjoy hip-hop music and fashion, Vancouver Eastside drug users, jazz musicians, Calgary cowboys, skateboarders, and West Coast wilderness campers—all display subcultural patterns.

It is easy but often inaccurate to place people in some subcultural category because almost everyone participates in many subcultures without necessarily having much commitment.
to any one of them. In some cases, however, cultural differences can set people apart from one another with tragic results. Consider the former nation of Yugoslavia in southeastern Europe. The 1990s civil war there was fuelled by those who emphasized extreme ethnic and national differences. This one small country made use of two alphabets, embraced three major religions, spoke four major languages, was home to five major nationalities, was divided into six separate political republics, and absorbed the cultural influences of seven surrounding countries. The cultural conflict that plunged this nation into civil war shows that subcultures are a source not only of pleasing variety but also of tension and even violence.

Many people view Canada as a “mosaic” in which many nationalities make up the Canadian cultural identity. But how accurate is this image? Some authors writing on the country’s two dominant groups, English-speaking and French-speaking, maintain that Canadians make up “two solitudes” (Rocher, 1990), as is evident in the lack of formal and informal interaction among the French-speaking and English-speaking intellectual elites within the Royal Society of Canada (Ogmundson & McLaughlin, 1994).

Others argue that subcultures involve not just difference but also hierarchy. Too often what we view as “dominant” or “mainstream” culture are patterns favoured by powerful segments of the population, while what we view as “subculture” are, in fact, the patterns of less-advantaged people, such as high school dropouts (Tanner, Krahm, & Hartnagel, 1995) or youth who belong to the electronic dance music culture, which includes raving, clubbing, and partying (Riley, Griffin, & Morey, 2010). Hence, sociologist John Porter (1965) characterized Canada as a “vertical mosaic,” in which a privileged male elite consists overwhelmingly of people of British origin (Bell & Tepperman, 1979; Reitz, 1980). While researchers disagree on the extent to which Canada is a closed society that has marginalized some groups at the expense of others (Beaman & Beyer, 2008; Curtis, Grab, & Guppy, 1999), why is it that the cultural patterns of rich skiers in Whistler, for example, tend to seem like less of a “subculture” than the cultural patterns of street youth in the urban core of our cities (Baron, 2004; Benoit, Jansson, Hallgrimsdottir, & Roth, 2008)? Why do those who alter their bodies through cosmetic surgery seem like less of a subculture than those who tattoo themselves (Atkinson, 2003; Yamada, 2008)? Some sociologists therefore prefer to level the playing field of society by emphasizing multiculturalism.

**Multiculturalism**

**Multiculturalism** is a perspective recognizing the cultural diversity of Canada and promoting equal standing for all cultural traditions. Multiculturalism represents a sharp change from the past, when our society did not recognize the cultural mosaic. Today, we spiritedly debate how to balance a celebration of cultural differences with our shared value of equality.

Multiculturalists point out that, from the outset, the European immigrants to the so-called New World (of course, “new” only to those who came from abroad) exploited the various Aboriginal cultures; some First Nations peoples were decimated, while others were severely reduced in numbers and marginalized on reserves (Dickason, 1992). After Confederation in 1867, people of British origin gained the top political positions in the country,
Thinking About Diversity: Race, Class, and Gender

Popular Culture Born in the Inner City: The DJ Scene and Hip-Hop Music

Aaron Jerald (AJ) O’Bryant probably never thought he would help change American and, relatedly, Canadian culture. In 1960, he was born into a social world where the odds were stacked against him. His family, living in the United States, resided in a low-income, African-American neighbourhood on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Orphaned at 13, he moved in with his grandmother, who lived in the South Bronx, close to an intersection that was a known gathering point for local gang members.

In the 1970s, the South Bronx was brewing with social problems. As factories closed, the area lost thousands of good-paying manufacturing jobs, and unemployment and poverty were on the rise. Drug use, crime, and violence became part of everyday life.

Not surprisingly, AJ entered his teenage years thinking that violence was the way to express his frustration. He got into fights on the streets and at school, to the point of being expelled for throwing another student through a window. His grandmother enrolled him at a local school for “at-risk” young people, but he found little to like in the classroom. Within a few years, he dropped out of school and began selling drugs, which earned him fast cash as he tried to stay one step ahead of the police.

Like young people everywhere, AJ wanted to earn the respect of others. He also had a love for music. As the new “DJ” scene emerged in New York City in the mid-1970s, AJ was captivated by Afrika Bambaataa, Grandmaster Flowers, and Pete “DJ” Jones. Perhaps most of all, he idolized a young DJ named Kool Herc. AJ remembers the first time he saw Herc. “People in the Bronx were saying ‘Yo, there’s this dude named Herc, and this dude is crazy.’ He was at the park on Sedgewick Avenue. So the next thing is I’m sitting there watching this dude and he’s drawing a crowd.” AJ was hooked on this music scene and wanted to be part of it.

AJ didn’t know the first thing about DJing, but he hung out with other DJs. They became skilled at operating a turntable and playing records, figuring out which records to play and what part of records people wanted to hear, and they developed a whole set of rules and conventions that would define the new DJ scene.

In the summer of 1977, AJ did his first public performance in the local park. Although people from around New York had come to see the main act, a well-known DJ named Lovebug Star Ski, there were also many people from AJ’s community who showed up to see him. He knew he was starting to make it as a DJ, and as his reputation spread, AJ lost interest in drug dealing. He was becoming a local hero. AJ explains, “The guys who own the stores close by the park would bring me beer or whatever I wanted for doing my music because it attracted lots of people and made money for them.”

AJ’s reputation grew as he took part in “battles,” competitions between DJs not unlike the competitions for respect in gang culture. In a battle, DJs would each play for an hour, switching back and forth. The DJ who succeeded in working the crowd into a frenzy was the winner.

AJ’s big break came as the result of a challenge to battle a DJ named Flash, the star of the South Bronx DJ scene, and to do it in Flash’s territory. At first, AJ refused, thinking he could never hope to sway Flash’s own neighbourhood crowd. But his mentor, Lovebug Star Ski, insisted, and AJ agreed.

The night of the battle, more than 500 people packed the Dixie Club in Flash’s neighbourhood. Even before the competition started, there were rowdy cheers for Flash. Seeing Flash haul in some new and expensive equipment further intimidated AJ as he began his set. He started with “Groove to Get Down” by T-Connection, “Catch a Groove” by Juice, and “Funky Granny” by Kool & The Gang—rhythms that were funky and new to most of the audience. As he moved from one record to the next, the crowd began to groove with him. Then AJ pulled off a wild moment when Lovebug Star Ski jumped up onto the stage to rhyme with AJ’s music. The crowd lost their minds.

Flash followed with his own set and he did his usual amazing work. The crowd cheered for their local DJ, but everyone knew that both men had put on very impressive performances. AJ had made it in the larger South Bronx DJ scene, a feat that would lead to opportunities that no doubt saved him from the dangerous social world of drugs and gangs that surrounded him.

AJ and many other young people like him did not make headlines in the New York papers. But they created a style of musical performance—DJing—that is now popular on campuses across Canada and the United States. And the musical style that emerged from that movement—hip-hop or rap music—has become the most popular type of music among this country’s young people.

What Do You Think?

1. Is the DJ scene part of popular culture or high culture? Why?
2. What does this story tell us about who creates new cultural patterns?
3. Can you think of other cultural patterns that were born among low-income people?

Source: Ewoodzie (forthcoming).
viewing those of other backgrounds (Aboriginal peoples, the French, Southern and Eastern Europeans, the Chinese, and so on) as being of “lower stock.” As Porter (1965:62) states,

After all, Canada was a British creation, though indifferently conceived by British statesmen of the day. In the first decades of Canada’s existence, who would have doubted that the British were destined to an uninterrupted epoch of imperial splendour? Although the French participated in Confederation, Canada’s political and economic leaders were British and were prepared to create a British North America. Born British subjects, they intended to die as such.

As a result of this hierarchy, Canadian historians have tended to focus on the descendants of the English and other Northern Europeans, describing historical events from their point of view. And historians have tended to push to the margins the perspectives and accomplishments of Aboriginals and Canadians of African, Asian, and Latin American descent. Multiculturalists condemn this singular pattern as Eurocentrism, the dominance of European (especially English) cultural patterns. Molefi Kete Asante, a leading advocate of multiculturalism, argues that like “the 15th-century Europeans who could not cease believing that the Earth was the centre of the universe, many today find it difficult to cease viewing European culture as the centre of the social universe” (1988:7).

Few Canadians would deny that our way of life has wide-ranging roots. But multiculturalism is controversial because it asks us to rethink norms and values that form the core of the dominant culture. One currently contested issue surrounds language. In 1969, the Official Languages Act made both French and English the official languages of Canada—and so the country became officially bilingual. However, many tensions remain over the actual implementation of Canada’s language policy.

Another controversy centres on how Canadian schools should teach culture. Proponents defend multiculturalism, first, as a strategy to present a more accurate picture of Canada’s past. Proposed educational reforms seek, for example, to tone down the simplistic praise commonly directed at Christopher Columbus and other European explorers by acknowledging the tragic impact of the European conquest on the Aboriginal peoples of this hemisphere. Moreover, a multicultural approach recognizes the achievements of many women and men whose cultural backgrounds have, up till now, confined them to the sidelines of history.

Second, proponents claim, multiculturalism enables students to grasp Canada’s even more diverse present. The 2011 census shows that in Toronto immigrants make up a great proportion of the total population (46 percent) (Statistics Canada, 2013), leading the United Nations to call it “one of the world’s most diverse cities” (UNESCO, 2014). Notably, other Canadian cities with substantial immigrant populations are Vancouver (40 percent), Calgary (26.2 percent) and Montreal (22.6 percent) (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Third, proponents assert, multiculturalism can strengthen the academic achievement of Canada’s Aboriginal and visible minority children, who may find little personal relevance in Eurocentric education (Adams, 2007; Banting, Courchene, & Seidle, 2007; Ghosh, 1996). National Map 2–1 takes a closer look at language diversity in different parts of Canada.

Fourth and finally, proponents of multiculturalism consider it needed preparation for living in a world in which nations are increasingly interdependent. Multiculturalism, in short, teaches global connectedness.

Although multiculturalism has found favour in recent years, it has drawn criticism too. It is worth noting that such criticism is not unified and that conservative as well as radical voices identify various flaws in multiculturalism. Conservative critics of multiculturalism point to its tendency to encourage divisiveness rather than unity by encouraging people to identify with only their own category rather than the nation as a whole. As William Gairdner sees it, the multicultural act “was the first step, not toward, but away from Canadian unity in a name of a self-contradictory policy that has made us a more race-conscious, race-sensitive, and culturally divided people than ever before” (2010).

Moreover, conservative critics contend that multiculturalism erodes any claim of universal truth by evaluating ideas according to the race of those who present them. Our common
Seeing Ourselves

Forty-three percent of the 173,000 people who live in Richmond speak neither English nor French at home. About 10 people out of the more than 500 who live in Akulivik speak English or French at home. Ten people out of 18,500 who live in the town of L’Islet speak English at home. Everyone else speaks French.

The map shows that the percentage of households that speak nonofficial languages at home varies greatly across Canada. The largest number of Canadians who speak a language other than French or English live in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, with Toronto the leader. Somewhat surprising is the level of relative language homogeneity in large parts of southern Quebec. What is the cause of this? What other trends do you see?

Source: Calculated based on Statistics Canada (2007).

humanity, in other words, dissolves into an “Aboriginal experience,” “Chinese experience,” “European experience,” and so on. Weary of such divisiveness, such critics decry Toronto’s new Africentric and Aboriginal educational programs—programs in which some students complete Ontario’s regular curriculum while integrating lessons from either African or Aboriginal cultures—for promoting segregation.

On the other hand, some of those who employ a gender and race-conflict perspective doubt that multiculturalism actually benefits minorities. The feminist sociologist Sarita Srivastava observes that multiculturalism produces and reproduces stereotypes. She argues that multiculturalism prefers to take the 3-D approach of celebrating “dance, dress, and dining” while “[failing] to take account the multiple dimensions of racial and social inequality” (Srivastava, 2007). Rather than eliminating racism, multiculturalism reduces culture to caricature by portraying
“non-Europeans the world over into pre-modern, traditional, or even downright savage peoples, while equating Europeans with modernity, progress, and civilization” (Bannerji, 2000).

For these critics, multiculturalism de-politicizes the problem of racism by taking the focus off of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, and recasting it instead as a problem of intolerant individual attitudes that can be remedied with more folk festivals. The policy of multiculturalism is therefore not so much an expression of goodwill guided by the value of racial equality as it is an attempt by Anglo-Canada to create and manage different identities while preserving its dominant institutions and way of life (Day, 2000).

**Counterculture**

Cultural diversity also includes outright rejection of conventional ideas or behaviour. **Counterculture** refers to *cultural patterns that strongly oppose those widely accepted within a society.*

During the 1960s, for example, a youth-oriented counterculture rejected mainstream culture as overly competitive, self-centred, and materialistic. Instead, hippies and other counterculturalists favoured a collective and co-operative lifestyle in which “being” was more important than “doing” and the capacity for personal growth—or “expanded consciousness”—was prized over material possessions like homes and cars. Such differences led some people to “drop out” of the larger society and join countercultural communities.

Countercultures are still flourishing. The Occupy movement, which emerged with the occupation of New York City’s financial district in 2011, shares many countercultural features. Just as the 60s hippy counterculture was based on the social unrest of the civil rights, women’s, and anti-war movements, so too does the Occupy movement exist as a movement of movements, growing into, as sociologist Heather Gautney notes, such “localized acts of occupation, like Occupy our Homes, Occupy Colleges, or Occupy High (schools)” (2010). Decrying the influence of corporations on political life, the growing income gap between the “1 percent” and “99 percent,” rising tuition fees, lack of affordable housing, and police brutality, the Occupy movement seems to be questioning the desirability of the American Dream itself. And it is doing so through the clever countercultural use of slogans, visual arts, and social media, as well as a leaderless brand of activism that favors a collective decision-making method known as General Assemblies.

**Cultural Change**

Perhaps the most basic human truth of this world is that “all things shall pass.” Even the dinosaurs, which thrived on this planet for 160 million years, exist today only as fossils. Will humanity survive for millions of years to come? All we can say with certainty is that given our reliance on culture, for as long as we survive, the human record will show continuous change.

Figure 2–3 on page XX shows that the living arrangements of young Canadian adults aged 18 to 34 have changed in the few years between 1981 and 2001 (Clark, 2007). These changes are remarkable: Only half as many people in this age group were married and had children in 2001 as compared to 1981. Conversely, there was a 30 percent increase in the proportion who were living with their parents. Some attitudes have changed only slightly: Today, as a generation ago, most women and men look forward to raising a family. Yet raising a family today is an experience quite different from raising one in earlier times. The important point is that change in one dimension of a cultural system usually sparks changes in other dimensions. For example, women’s rising participation in post-secondary education and the labour force has paralleled changing family patterns, including first marriage at a later age, a rising divorce rate, increased cohabitation, and a growing number of children being raised in single-parent households (Balakrishnan, Lapiere-Adancy, & Krotki, 1993; Benoit & Hallgrimsdottir, 2011; Wu, 1999). Such connections illustrate the principle of **cultural integration**, the close relationships among various elements of a cultural system.

Some elements of culture change faster than others. William Ogburn (1964) observed that technology moves quickly, generating new elements of material culture (such as test-tube babies) faster than nonmaterial culture (such as ideas about parenthood) can keep up with
cultural lag the fact that some cultural elements change more quickly than others, disrupting a cultural system

CHAPTER 2 Culture

them. Ogburn called this inconsistency cultural lag, the fact that some cultural elements change more quickly than others, disrupting a cultural system. For example, in a world in which it is possible for a woman to give birth to a child by using another woman’s egg, which has been fertilized in a laboratory with the sperm of a total stranger, how are we to apply traditional ideas about motherhood and fatherhood?

Causes of Cultural Change

Cultural changes are set in motion in three ways. The first is invention, the process of creating new cultural elements. Invention has given us the telephone (1876), the airplane (1903), and the computer (late 1940s); each of these elements of material culture has had a tremendous impact on our way of life. The same is true of the minimum wage and women’s shelters, each an important element of nonmaterial culture. The process of invention goes on constantly, as indicated by the thousands of applications submitted every year to the Canadian Intellectual Property Office.

Discovery, a second cause of cultural change, involves recognizing and understanding more fully something already in existence—perhaps a distant star or the foods of another culture or women’s athletic ability. Many discoveries result from painstaking scientific research, and others happen by a stroke of luck, as in 1898, when Marie Curie unintentionally left a rock on a piece of photographic paper, noticed that emissions from the rock had exposed the paper, and thus discovered radium.

The third cause of cultural change is diffusion, the spread of cultural traits from one society to another. Because new information technology sends information around the globe in seconds, cultural diffusion has never been greater than it is today.

Certainly, Canadian society has contributed many significant cultural elements to the world, including the renowned classical music of pianist Glenn Gould and the popular novels

Diversity Snapshot


Some of the decline in the married population is explained by the increase in common-law relationships. Nevertheless, there is a sharp increase in the proportion of young Canadians who live with their parents. What do you think are the causes for these changes?

Source: Clark (2007).
We in Canada think of childhood as a time of innocence and freedom from adult burdens like regular work. In poor countries throughout the world, however, families depend on income earned by children. So what people in one society think of as right and natural, people elsewhere find puzzling and even immoral. Perhaps the Chinese philosopher Confucius had it right when he noted that “all people are the same; it’s only their habits that are different.”

Just about every imaginable idea or behaviour is commonplace somewhere in the world, and this variation from culture to culture causes travellers both excitement and, at times, distress. The Australians flip light switches down to turn them on; North Americans flip them up. The British drive on the left side of the road; North Americans drive on the right side. The Japanese name city blocks; North Americans name streets. Egyptians stand very close to others in conversation; North Americans are used to maintaining several feet of “personal space.” Bathrooms lack toilet paper in much of rural Morocco, causing considerable discomfort for North Americans, who recoil at the thought of using the left hand for bathroom hygiene, as the Moroccans do.

Given that a particular culture is the basis for each person’s reality, it is no wonder that people everywhere exhibit ethnocentrism, the practice of judging another culture by the standards of one’s own culture. Some degree of ethnocentrism is necessary for people to be emotionally attached to their way of life. But ethnocentrism also generates misunderstanding and sometimes even leads to conflict. Take the annual dog meat festival in Yulin, China, which has seen international opposition to its summer solstice celebration. A petition against the festival, which was started in Elliot Lake, Ontario, has reached over 4.2 million signatures as of July 2015. As residents of Yulin, however, point out, how is the eating of dog meat any different than the Western practice of eating the flesh of cows, chickens, or pigs (Qin, 2015)? Is it not a measure of ethnocentrism to object to crispy skin dog meat but not rare cow steak?

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In the 1950s, rock-and-roll emerged as a major part of North American popular culture. Before then, mainstream “pop” music was aimed at white adults. Songs were written by professional composers, recorded by long-established record labels, and performed by well-known artists such as Perry Como, Eddie Fisher, Doris Day, and Patti Page. Just about every big-name performer was white.

At that time, the United States was rigidly segregated racially, which created differences in the cultures of white people and black people. In the subcultural world of African Americans, music had sounds and rhythms reflecting jazz, gospel singing, and rhythm and blues. These musical styles were created by African-American composers and performers working with black-owned record companies broadcast on radio to an almost entirely black audience.

Class, too, divided the musical world of the 1950s, even among whites. A second musical subculture was country and western, a musical style popular among poorer whites, especially people living in the South. Like rhythm and blues, country and western music had its own composers and performers, its own record labels, and its own radio stations.

“Crossover” music was rare, meaning that very few performers or songs moved from one musical world to gain popularity in another. But this musical segregation began to break down around 1955 with the birth of rock-and-roll. Rock was a new mix of older musical patterns, blending mainstream pop with country and western and, especially, rhythm and blues.

As rock-and-roll drew together musical traditions, it soon divided society in a new way—by age. Rock was the first music clearly linked to the emergence of a youth culture—rock was all the rage among teenagers but was little appreciated by their parents. Rockers took a rebellious stand against “adult” culture, looked like what parents might have called “juvenile delinquents,” and claimed to be “cool,” an idea that most parents did not even understand.

Young people idolized performers sporting sideburns, turned-up collars, and black leather jackets. By 1956, the unquestioned star of rock-and-roll was a poor white southern boy from Tupelo, Mississippi, named Elvis Aron Presley. With rural roots, Elvis Presley knew country and western music, and after moving to Memphis, Tennessee, he learned black gospel and rhythm and blues.

Presley became the first superstar of rock-and-roll not just because he had talent but also because he had great crossover power. With early hits including “Hound Dog” (a rhythm and blues song originally recorded by Big Mama Thornton) and “Blue Suede Shoes” (written by country and western star Carl Perkins), Presley broke down many of the musical walls based on race and class.

By the end of the 1950s, popular music developed in many new directions, creating soft rock (Ricky Nelson, Pat Boone), rockabilly (Johnny Cash), and dozens of doo-wop groups, both black and white. By the 1960s rock-and-roll became an international phenomenon, including a substantial following in Canada, but until the 1960s and the development of rock music nearly all of its stars were from the United States. Certain Canadian pop performers of the 1950s and early 1960s—among them the Crew-Cuts, Paul Anka, and Ronnie Hawkins—were seen as “rock-and-roll” stars. Rock music also expanded further, including folk music (the Kingston Trio; Peter, Paul, and Mary; Bob Dylan), surf music (the Beach Boys, Jan and Dean), and the “British invasion” led by the Beatles.

Starting on the clean-cut, pop side of rock, the Beatles soon shared the spotlight with another British band proud of its “delinquent” clothing and street fighter looks—the Rolling Stones. By now, music was a huge business. The first Canadian rock band to reach international fame, The Guess Who, released the song “American Woman” in 1970. Also, “folk rock” became a niche with bands like the Byrds, the Mamas and the Papas, Simon and Garfunkel, and Crosby, Stills, and Nash. In addition, “Motown” (named after the “motor city,” Detroit) and “soul” music launched the careers of dozens of African-American stars, including James Brown, Aretha Franklin, the Four Tops, the Temptations, and Diana Ross and the Supremes.

On the West Coast, San Francisco developed political rock music performed by Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead, and Janis Joplin. West Coast spin-off styles included “acid rock,” influenced by drug use, performed by the Doors and Jimi Hendrix. The jazz influence returned as “jazz rock” and was played by U.S. based groups such as Chicago and Blood, Sweat, and Tears, and the Canadian band Lighthouse.

This brief look at the birth of rock-and-roll shows the power of race and class to shape subcultural patterns. It also shows that the production of culture became a megabusiness. Most of all, it shows us that culture does not stand still but is a living process, changing, adapting, and reinventing itself over time.

What Do You Think?

1. The American way of life shaped rock-and-roll. In what ways did the emergence of rock-and-roll change Canadian culture?
2. Throughout this period of musical change, most musical performers were men. What does this tell us about gender and music? Is today’s popular music still dominated by men?
3. Can you carry on the story of musical change to the present? (Think of disco, heavy metal, punk rock, rap, and hip-hop.)

Members of every cultural system tend to prefer what they know and are wary about what is different. The ancient Romans took this view of difference to an extreme, using the same word for both “stranger” and “enemy.” Even language is culturally biased. Centuries ago, people in Europe and North America referred to China as the “Far East.” But this term, unknown to the Chinese, is an ethnocentric expression for a region that is far to the east of us. The Chinese name for their country translates as “Central Kingdom,” suggesting that they, like us, see their own society as the centre of the world. The map shown on the right challenges the ethnocentrism of many Canadians by presenting a “down under” view of the Western Hemisphere.

The alternative to ethnocentrism is **cultural relativism**, the practice of judging a culture by its own standards. Cultural relativism can be difficult for travellers to adopt: It requires not only openness to unfamiliar values and norms but also the ability to put aside cultural standards we have known all our lives. Even so, as people of the world come into increasing contact with one another, the importance of understanding other cultures becomes ever greater.

As the opening to this chapter explained, businesses in Canada are learning the value of marketing to a culturally diverse population. Similarly, businesses are learning that success in the global economy depends on awareness of cultural patterns around the world. IBM, for example, now provides technical support for its products using websites in 33 languages (IBM, 2012).

This trend is a change from the past, when many corporations used marketing strategies that lacked sensitivity to cultural diversity. Coors’s phrase “Turn It Loose” startled Spanish-speaking customers by proclaiming that the beer would cause diarrhea. Braniff Airlines translated its slogan “Fly in Leather” so carelessly into Spanish that it read “Fly Naked.” Similarly, Eastern Airlines’ slogan “We Earn Our Wings Every Day” became “We Fly Daily to Heaven.” (Helin, 1992).

But cultural relativism introduces problems of its own. If almost any kind of behaviour is the norm somewhere in the world, does that mean everything is equally right? Does the fact that some Indian and Moroccan families benefit from having their children work long hours justify child labour? Enlightenment philosophers thought that since we are all members of a single species, surely there must be some universal standards of proper conduct. But what are they? And in trying to develop them, how can we avoid imposing our own standards on others? There are no simple answers to these questions. But when confronting an unfamiliar cultural practice, it is best to resist making judgments before grasping what people in that culture understand the issue to be. Remember also to think about your own way of life as others might see it. After all, what we gain most from studying others is better insight into ourselves.

### A Global Culture?

Today more than ever, we can observe many of the same cultural practices the world over. Walking the streets of Seoul, South Korea; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Chennai, India; Cairo, Egypt; or Casablanca, Morocco, we see people wearing jeans, hear familiar music, and read ads for many of the same products we use at home. Are we witnessing the birth of a single global culture?

Societies now have more contact with one another than ever before, thanks to the flow of goods, information, and people:

1. **Global economy: The flow of goods.** International trade has never been greater. The global economy has spread many of the same consumer goods—from cars and TV shows to music and fashions—throughout the world.

2. **Global communications: The flow of information.** The internet and satellite-assisted communications enable people to experience events taking place thousands of miles away, often as they happen. Cell phone communication instantly links people all over the world.
around the world, just as new technology enables text messages written in one language to be delivered in another. In addition, although less than one-third of internet users speak English as their first language, most of the world’s Web pages are written in English. This fact helps explain why, as we saw in Global Map 2–1 on page XX, English is rapidly emerging as the preferred second language around the world.

3. Global migration: The flow of people. Knowing about the rest of the world motivates people to move to where they imagine life will be better. In addition, today’s transportation technology, especially air travel, makes relocating easier than ever before. As a result, in most countries, significant numbers of people were born elsewhere, including, as Chapter 15 (“Population, Urbanization, and Environment”) shows, 20.6 percent of Canada’s population.

These global links help make the cultures of the world more similar. Even so, there are three important limitations to the global culture thesis. First, the flow of information, goods, and people is uneven in different parts of the world. Generally speaking, urban areas (centres of commerce, communication, and people) have stronger ties to one another, while many rural villages remain isolated. In addition, the greater economic and military power of North America and Western Europe means that these regions influence the rest of the world more than the rest of the world influences them.

Second, the global culture thesis assumes that people everywhere are able to afford various new goods and services. As Chapter 9 (“Global Stratification”) explains, in reality, desperate poverty in much of the world deprives people of even the basic necessities of a safe and secure life.

Third, although many cultural practices are now found in countries throughout the world, people everywhere do not attach the same meanings to them. Do children in Tokyo draw the same lessons from reading the Harry Potter books as children in Calgary or Winnipeg do? Similarly, we enjoy foods from around the world while knowing little about the lives of the people who created them. In short, people everywhere still see the world through their own cultural lenses.

### Theoretical Analysis of Culture

#### 2.5 Apply sociology’s macro-level theories to gain greater understanding of culture.

Sociologists investigate how culture helps us make sense of ourselves and the surrounding world. Here we will examine several macro-level theoretical approaches to understanding culture. A micro-level approach to the personal experience of culture, which emphasizes how individuals not only conform to cultural patterns but also create new patterns in their everyday lives, is the focus of Chapter 4 (“Social Interaction in Everyday Life”).

### The Functions of Culture: Structural-Functional Theory

The structural-functional approach explains culture as a complex strategy for meeting human needs. Borrowing from the philosophical doctrine of idealism, this approach considers values the core of a culture (Parsons, 1966; Williams, 1970). In other words, cultural values direct our lives, give meaning to what we do, and bind people together. Countless other cultural traits have various functions that support the operation of society.

Thinking functionally helps us to understand unfamiliar ways of life. Consider the Old Order Mennonite farmer in Southern Ontario plowing hundreds of acres with a team of horses. His farming methods may violate the Canadian cultural value of efficiency, but from the Amish point of view, hard work functions to develop the discipline necessary for a highly religious way of life. Long days of working together not only make the Amish self-sufficient but also strengthen family ties and unify local communities.

Of course, Amish practices have dysfunctions as well. The hard work and strict religious discipline are too demanding for some, who end up leaving the community. Then, too, strong religious beliefs sometimes prevent compromise; slight differences in religious practices have caused the Amish to divide into different communities (Kraybill, 1989, 1994). This is not unlike the situation found in tightly controlled Mennonite communities in Manitoba, as Miriam Toews chronicled in her award-winning novel *A Complicated Kindness* (Toews, 2005).
If cultures are strategies for meeting human needs, we would expect to find many common patterns around the world. **Cultural universals** are *traits that are part of every known culture*. Comparing hundreds of cultures, George Murdock (1945) identified dozens of cultural universals. One common element is the family, which functions everywhere to control sexual reproduction and to oversee the care of children. Funeral rites, too, are found everywhere, because all human communities cope with the reality of death. Jokes are another cultural universal, serving as a safe means of releasing social tensions.

**EVALUATE** The strength of structural-functional theory is that it shows how culture operates to meet human needs. Yet by emphasizing a society’s dominant cultural patterns, this approach largely ignores the cultural diversity that exists in many societies, including our own. Also, because this approach emphasizes cultural stability, it downplays the importance of change. In short, cultural systems are not as stable or a matter of as much agreement as structural-functional theory leads us to believe. The Applying Theory table on this page summarizes this theoretical approach’s main lessons about culture and contrasts this information with what we learn from two other approaches that we consider next.

**CHECK YOUR LEARNING** In Canada, what are some of the functions of sports, Canada Day celebrations, and Thanksgiving?

**Inequality and Culture: Social-Conflict Theory**

The social-conflict approach stresses the link between culture and inequality. Any cultural trait, from this point of view, benefits some members of society at the expense of others.

Why do certain values dominate a society in the first place? Many conflict theorists, especially Marxists, argue that culture is shaped by a society’s system of economic production. “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being,” Karl Marx proclaimed; “it is their social being that determines their consciousness” (Marx & Engels, 1978:4, orig. 1859). Social-conflict theory, then, is rooted in the philosophical doctrine of **materialism**, which holds that a society’s system of material production (such as Canada’s own capitalist economy) has a powerful effect on the rest of a culture. This materialist approach contrasts with the idealist leanings of structural functionalism.

Social-conflict analysis ties Canada’s dominant cultural values of competitiveness and material success to the country’s capitalist economy, which serves the interests of the nation’s wealthy elite. The culture of capitalism teaches us to think that rich and powerful people work harder or longer than others and therefore deserve their wealth and privileges. It also encourages us to view capitalism as somehow “natural,” discouraging us from trying to reduce economic inequality.

Eventually, however, the strains of inequality erupt into movements for social change. Two historical examples are the civil rights movement and the women’s movement. A more recent example is the Occupy Wall Street movement, which has focused on our society’s increasing economic inequality. All these movements seek greater equality, and all have encountered opposition from defenders of the status quo.

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**Applying Theory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Structural-Functional Theory</th>
<th>Social-Conflict and Feminist Theories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the level of analysis?</strong></td>
<td>Macro-level</td>
<td>Macro-level</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What is culture?</strong></td>
<td>Culture is a system of behaviour by which members of societies co-operate to meet their needs.</td>
<td>Culture is a system that benefits some people and disadvantages others.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What is the foundation of culture?</strong></td>
<td>Cultural patterns are rooted in a society’s core values and beliefs.</td>
<td>Marx claimed that cultural patterns are rooted in a society’s system of economic production. Feminist theory says cultural conflict is rooted in gender.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What core questions does the approach ask?</strong></td>
<td>How does a cultural pattern help society operate? What cultural patterns are found in all societies?</td>
<td>How does a cultural pattern benefit some people and harm others? How does a cultural pattern support social inequality?</td>
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Gender and Culture: Feminist Theory

As Marx saw it, culture is rooted in economic production. Therefore, our society’s culture largely reflects the capitalist economic system. Feminists agree with Marx’s claim that culture is an arena of conflict, but they see this conflict as being rooted in gender.

Gender refers to the personal traits and social positions that members of a society attach to being female or male. From a feminist point of view, gender is a crucial dimension of social inequality, a topic that Chapter 10 (“Gender Stratification”) examines in detail. As that chapter explains, men have greater access to the workforce than women do and so men earn more income. Men also have greater power in our national political system; for example, no woman has yet been elected as a Prime Minister of Canada. In addition, on the level of everyday experience, men exercise the most power in the typical household.

Feminists claim that our culture is “gendered.” This means that our way of life reflects the ways in which our society defines what is male as more important than what is female. This inequality is evident in the language we use. We tend to say “man and wife,” a phrase used in traditional wedding vows; we almost never hear the phrase “woman and husband.” Similarly, the masculine word “king” conveys power and prestige, with a meaning that is almost entirely positive. The comparable feminine word “queen” has a range of meanings, some of which are negative.

Not only does our culture define what is masculine as dominant in relation to what is feminine, but also our way of life defines this male domination as “natural.” Such a system of beliefs serves to justify gender inequality by claiming it cannot be changed.

In short, cultural patterns reflect and support gender inequality. Cultural patterns also perpetuate this inequality to the extent that they carry it forward into the future.

EVALUATE The social-conflict approach suggests that cultural systems do not address human needs equally, allowing some people to dominate others. Marx focused on economic inequality and analyzed culture as an expression of capitalism. Feminists focus on gender and understand culture as a reflection of male domination. All these dimensions of inequality are “built into” our way of life. At the same time, such inequality also generates pressure toward change. Yet by stressing the divisiveness of culture, this approach understates ways in which cultural patterns integrate members of a society. Thus we should consider both social-conflict and structural-functional insights for a fuller understanding of culture.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING How might a social-conflict analysis of university and college fraternities and sororities differ from a structural-functional analysis?

Culture and Human Freedom

2.6 Critique culture as limiting or expanding human freedom.

This chapter leads us to ask an important question: To what extent are human beings, as cultural creatures, free? Does culture bind us to each other and to the past? Or does culture enhance our capacity for individual thought and independent choice?

Culture as Constraint

As symbolic creatures, humans cannot live without culture. But the capacity for culture does have some drawbacks. We may be the only animal to name ourselves, but living in a symbolic world means that we are also the only creatures who experience alienation. In addition, culture is largely a matter of habit, which limits our choices and drives us to repeat troubling patterns, such as racial prejudice and sex discrimination, in each new generation.

Our society’s emphasis on competitive achievement urges us toward excellence, yet this same pattern also isolates us from one another. Material things comfort us in some ways but divert us from the security and satisfaction that come from close relationships and spiritual strength.
Culture as Freedom

For better or worse, human beings are cultural creatures, just as ants and elephants are prisoners of their biology. But there is a crucial difference. Biological instincts create a ready-made world; culture forces us to make choices as we make and remake a world for ourselves. No better evidence of this freedom exists than the cultural diversity of our own society and the even greater human diversity found around the world.

Learning more about this cultural diversity is one goal shared by sociologists. The Thinking Globally box offers some contrasts between the cultures of Canada and the United States. Wherever we may live, the better we understand the workings of the surrounding culture, the better prepared we are to use the freedom it offers us.

Thinking Globally

Canada and the United States: Two National Cultures or One?

Canada and the United States are two of the largest high-income nations in the world, and they share a common border of about 6400 kilometres. But do they share the same culture? One important point to make right away is that both nations are multicultural. Not only do both countries have hundreds of Aboriginal societies, but immigration has also brought people from all over the world to both Canada and the United States. In both countries, most early immigrants came from Europe, but in recent years most immigrants have come from nations in Asia and Latin America. Vancouver, for example, has a Chinese community about the same size as the Latino community in Los Angeles.

Canada differs from the United States in one important respect—historically, Canada has had two dominant cultures: French (about 16 percent of the population) and British (roughly 36 percent). Almost one-third of people in Quebec (where French is the official language) and New Brunswick (which is officially bilingual) claim some French ancestry.

Are the dominant values of Canada much the same as those of the United States? Seymour Martin Lipset (1985) finds that they differ to some degree. The United States declared its independence from Great Britain in 1776; Canada did not formally separate from Great Britain until 1982, and the British monarch is still Canada’s official head of state. Thus, Lipset continues, the dominant culture of Canada lies between the culture of the United States and that of Great Britain.

The culture of the United States is more individualistic, and Canada’s is more collective. In the United States, individualism is seen in the historical importance of the cowboy, a self-sufficient loner, and even outlaws such as Jesse James and Billy the Kid are regarded as heroes because they challenged authority. In Canada, it is the Mountie—Canada’s well-known police officer on horseback—who is looked on with great respect. Canada’s greater emphasis on collective life is also evident in stronger labour unions: Canadian workers are almost three times as likely to be members of a union as workers in the United States (Steyn, 2008).

Politically, people in the United States tend to think that individuals should do things for themselves. In Canada, much as in Great Britain, there is a strong sense that government should look after the interests of everyone. The U.S. Constitution emphasizes the importance of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (words that place importance on the individual), while Canadian society is based on “peace, order, and good government” (words that place importance on the government; Steyn, 2008). One clear result of this difference today is that Canada has a much broader social welfare system (including universal health care) than the United States (which has only recently introduced a limited system of public health care). It also helps explain the fact that about one-third of all households in the United States own one or more guns, and the idea that individuals are entitled to own a gun, although controversial, is widespread. In Canada, by contrast, few households have a gun and the government restricts gun ownership, as in Great Britain.

What Do You Think?

1. Why do you think some Canadians feel that their way of life is overshadowed by that of the United States?
2. Ask your American friends to name Canada’s capital city. Are you surprised by how few know the answer? Why or why not?
3. Why do many people in the United States not know very much about either Canada or Mexico, countries with which they share long borders?
What clues do we have to a society’s cultural values?

The values of any society—that is, what that society thinks is important—are reflected in various aspects of everyday life, including the things people have and the ways they behave. An interesting way to “read” a culture’s values is to look at the “superheroes” who are celebrated. Take a look at the characters in the two photos below; in each case, describe what makes the character special and what each character represents in cultural terms.

A long-time superhero important to North American culture is Spider-Man. In all three Spider-Man movies, Peter Parker (who transforms into Spider-Man when he confronts evil) is secretly in love with Mary Jane Watson, but—in true superhero style—he does not allow himself to follow his heart.
Captain Canuck is a Canadian comic book superhero who first appeared in the mid-1970s. The original story featured Canadian secret agent Tim Evans, who had special powers because of his contact with extraterrestrials and controlled the world from his location in Canada. Later appearances by Captain Canuck saw him fighting a global conspiracy and taking on the biker gang Unholy Avengers.

**HINT** Superman (as well as Spider-Man and Captain Canuck) define North American society as good; after all, Superman and Captain Canuck fight for “truth, justice, and the North American way.” Many superheroes have stories that draw on popular figures in Western cultural history, including religious figures such as Moses and Jesus: They have mysterious origins (we never really know their true families), they are “tested” through great moral challenges, and they finally succeed in overcoming all obstacles. (Today’s superheroes, however, are likely to win the day using force and often violence.) Having a “secret identity” means that superheroes can lead ordinary lives (and means that we ordinary people can imagine being superheroes). But to keep their focus on fighting evil, superheroes must place their work ahead of any romantic interests (“Work comes first!”).
What Is Culture?

2.1 Explain the development of culture as a human strategy for survival. (pages XX–XX)

Culture is a way of life.
• Culture is shared by members of a society.
• Culture shapes how we act, think, and feel.

Culture is a human trait.
• Although several species display a limited capacity for culture, only human beings rely on culture for survival.

Culture is a product of evolution.
• As the human brain evolved, culture replaced biological instincts as our species’ primary strategy for survival.

We experience culture shock when we enter an unfamiliar culture and are not able to “read” meaning in our new surroundings. We create culture shock for others when we act in ways they do not understand.

The Elements of Culture

2.2 Identify common elements of culture. (pages XX–XX)

Culture relies on symbols in the form of words, gestures, and actions to express meaning.
• The fact that different meanings can come to be associated with the same symbol (for example, a wink of an eye) shows the human capacity to create and manipulate symbols.
• Societies create new symbols all the time (for example, new computer technology has sparked the creation of new cyber-symbols).

Language is the symbolic system by which people in a culture communicate with one another.
• People use language—both spoken and written—to transmit culture from one generation to the next.
• Because every culture is different, each language has words or expressions not found in any other language.

Values are abstract standards of what ought to be (for example, equality of opportunity).
• Values can sometimes be in conflict with one another.
• Lower-income countries have cultures that value survival; higher-income countries have cultures that value individualism and self-expression.

Beliefs are specific statements that people who share a culture hold to be true (for example, “A qualified woman could be elected president”).

Norms, rules that guide human behaviour, are of two types:
• mores (e.g., sexual taboos), which have great moral significance
• folkways (e.g., greetings or dining etiquette), which are matters of everyday politeness
Technology and Culture

2.3 Analyze how a society's level of technology shapes its culture (pages XX–XX)

Culture is shaped by technology. We understand technological development in terms of stages of socio-cultural evolution:
• hunting and gathering
• horticulture and pastoralism
• agriculture
• industry
• post-industrial information technology

Cultural Diversity

2.4 Discuss dimensions of cultural difference and cultural change. (pages XX–XX)

We live in a culturally diverse society.
• This diversity is due to Canada's history of immigration.
• Diversity reflects regional differences, and also differences in social class that set off high culture (available only to elites) from popular culture (available to average people).

Subculture is based on differences in interests and life experiences.
• Hip-hop fans and jocks are two examples of youth subcultures in Canada.

Multiculturalism is an effort to enhance appreciation of cultural diversity.
• Multiculturalism developed in reaction to the "melting pot" idea, which was thought to result in minorities losing their identity as they adopted mainstream cultural patterns.

Counterculture is strongly at odds with conventional ways of life.
• The Occupy movement which questions the influence and desirability of corporations is an example of a counterculture.

Cultural change results from
• invention (e.g., the telephone and the computer)
• discovery (e.g., the recognition that women are capable of political leadership)
• diffusion (e.g., the growing popularity of various ethnic foods and musical styles)

Cultural lag results when some parts of a cultural system change faster than others.

Ethnocentrism links people to their society but can cause misunderstanding and conflict between societies.

Cultural relativism is increasingly important as people of the world come into more contact with each other.

Theories of Culture

2.5 Apply sociology's macro-level theories to gain greater understanding of culture. (pages XX–XX)

Structural-functional theory views culture as a relatively stable system built on core values. All cultural patterns play some part in the ongoing operation of society.

Social-conflict theory sees culture as a dynamic arena of inequality and conflict. Cultural patterns benefit some categories of people more than others.

Feminist theory highlights how culture is “gendered,” dividing activities between the sexes in ways that give men greater power and privileges than women have.

Culture and Human Freedom

2.6 Critique culture as limiting or expanding human freedom. (pages XX–XX)

• Culture can limit the choices we make.
• As cultural creatures, we have the capacity to shape and reshape our world to meet our needs and pursue our dreams.