CHAPTER 2
CULTURE

BRIEF CHAPTER OUTLINE

CULTURE AS PROBLEM SOLVING
THE ORIGINS AND COMPONENTS OF CULTURE
    Abstraction: Creating Symbols
    Cooperation: Creating Norms and Values
    Production: Creating Material and Nonmaterial Culture
    Language and the Sapir-Whorf Thesis
CULTURE AS FREEDOM AND CONSTRAINT
    A Functionalist Analysis of Culture: Culture and Ethnocentrism
CULTURE AS FREEDOM
    Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Production
    Cultural Diversity
    Multiculturalism
    A Conflict Analysis of Culture: The Rights Revolution
    From Diversity to Globalization
    Postmodernism
        Blending Cultures
        Erosion of Authority
        Erosion of Core Values
CULTURE AS CONSTRAINT
    Cultural Lag
    Rationalization
    Consumerism
    From Counterculture to Subculture: The Case of Hip-Hop

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Culture is the sum of shared ideas, practices, and material objects to solve real-life problems, to adapt to, and thrive in, their environments. The term culture has a broad meaning within sociology, incorporating what is considered high culture, as well as mass or popular culture.

Because they can create culture, humans have been able to adapt to their environments through **abstraction**, **cooperation,** and **production**. Shared **norms** and **values** are aspects of **nonmaterial culture** that enable cooperation. **Production** enables humans to extract more from nature and to create **material culture**.

Language is an important element of culture. The **Sapir-Whorf thesis** states that: 1) humans experience certain things in their environment and form concepts about those things; 2) humans then develop language to express their concepts; 3) language then influences how humans see the

world.

Ethnocentrism, the tendency to judge other cultures exclusively by the standards of one's own culture, can impair sociological analysis. The functionalist perspective highlights how cultural practices may have unintended and non-obvious consequences that make social order possible. Understanding cultural practices within their own context, without imposing one's own standards, is essential to a sociological understanding of culture.

Culture has two faces. Culture increases our freedom, while it also constrains us. Humans are not passive recipients of culture. Instead, they may choose how culture affects them. Choices are increased by the existence of **cultural diversity**. In politics and education, **multiculturalism** emphasizes the historical and current existence of a variety of cultures and perspectives. Multiculturalism is valued as a means of promoting **cultural relativism**, which is the opposite of ethnocentrism.

The **rights revolution** is at the root of cultural diversity and multiculturalism. Previously excluded groups have fought and won struggles for equal rights.

Preliterate tribal societies are not culturally diverse. Diversity and multiculturalism are found in complex industrialized societies, and increasing **globalization.** The extreme cultural fragmentation and reconfiguration brought about through globalization suggests a new stage in cultural development that has been termed **postmodernism**.

Culture can also constrain us. When material cultural change outpaces nonmaterial cultural change, this results in **cultural lag** that can restrict individual freedom.

Weber used the term **rationalization** to refer to the application of the most efficient means for achieving goals, and the corresponding consequences. The regulation of time is one example of how rationalization has a constraining effect.

Consumerism results in a tendency for individuals to become identified by the goods and services that they purchase. This is another constraining aspect of culture.

Groups found within a particular culture that have distinctive traits are called **subcultures**. **Countercultures** are subversive subcultures.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES
After reading Chapter 2, students should be able to:

1. Define culture and its main functions.

2. Explain how culture helps humans adapt and thrive in their environments.

3. Recognize how culture can make people freer.

4. Analyze the ways in which culture is becoming more diverse, multicultural, and globalized.

5. Recognize how culture can place limits on people's freedom.

KEY TERMS (with corresponding page number)

abstraction (30)
consumerism (44)
cooperation (30)
countercultures (44)
cultural lag (41)
cultural relativism (36)
culture (30)
ethnocentrism (32)
high culture (29)
language (31)
mass culture (29)
material culture (31)
multiculturalism (35)

nonmaterial culture (31)
norms (30)
popular culture (29)
postmodernism (39)
production (31)
rationalization (43)
rights revolution (36)
rites of passage (38)
Sapir-Whorf thesis (31)
society (29)
subculture (44)
symbols (30)
values (30)

DETAILED CHAPTER OUTLINE

I.   CULTURE AS PROBLEM SOLVING
     A. **Culture** broadly defined refers to all the ideas, practices, and material objects that people create to deal with real-life problems.
        1. Cultures enable people to adapt to and thrive in their environments.
            a. **High culture** is culture consumed by upper classes.
            b. **Popular or Mass culture** is culture consumed by all classes.
     B. Shared culture is *socially* transmitted. **Society** is a number of people who interact, usually in a defined territory, and share a culture.
II. THE ORIGINS AND COMPONENTS OF CULTURE
     A. Abstraction: Creating Symbols
        1. **Abstraction** refers to the capacity to create **symbols,** a type of idea that refers to things that carry particular meanings (i.e. languages, mathematical notations, and signs).
     B. Cooperation: Creating Norms and Values
        1. **Cooperation** is the capacity to create a complex social life by establishing **norms**, or generally accepted ways of doing things, and **values**, or ideas about what is right and wrong, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, and the like.
     C. Production: Creating Material and Nonmaterial Culture
        1. **Production** involves making and using tools and techniques, or **material culture**, to improve our ability to take what we want from nature.

2. **Nonmaterial culture** is composed of symbols, norms, and other nontangible elements of culture.

D. Language and the Sapir-Whorf Thesis
  1. A **language** is a system of symbols strung together to communicate thought.
  2. The Sapir-Whorf thesis argues there is a connection between experience, thought, and language so that language influences perception and shapes how people think.

III. CULTURE AS FREEDOM AND CONSTRAINT
  A. A Functionalist Analysis of Culture: Culture and Ethnocentrism
    1. Culture is often invisible, because people tend to take their own culture for granted. Yet people tend to be startled when confronted by other cultures which may seem odd, even inferior, compared with their own.
    2. **Ethnocentrism** is judging another culture exclusively by the standards of one's own culture (i.e. Western views of cow worship among Hindu peasants in India).
      a. Ethnocentrism impairs sociological analysis. If you refrain from taking your own culture for granted and ethnocentrism, you will have taken the important first steps towards a sociological understanding of culture.

IV. CULTURE AS FREEDOM
  A. Two faces of culture: culture provides us with an opportunity to exercise our *freedom*; culture also *constrains* us.
  B. Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Production
    1. Culture is like an *independent* variable. People do not just accept culture passively (as was argued by many sociologists prior to the 1960s).
      a. We actively produce and interpret culture, creatively fashioning it to suit our own needs.
  C. Cultural Diversity
    1. American society, like most societies in the world, is undergoing rapid cultural diversification.
  D. Multiculturalism
    1. Advocates of **multiculturalism** argue that the curricula of America's public schools and colleges should present a more balanced picture of American history, culture, and society that reflects the country's ethnic and racial diversity and recognizes the equality of all cultures.
    2. Critics are there are least three potential negative outcomes of multiculturalism:
      a. multicultural education allegedly distracts students from essential subjects;
      b. multicultural education causes political disunity, and may result in more interethnic and interracial conflict;
      c. multiculturalism encourages the growth of **cultural relativism**, which is the belief that all cultures and all cultural practices have equal value. This criticism lies in the assumption that some cultures oppose the most deeply held values of most Americans.
  E. A Conflict Analysis of Culture: The Rights Revolution
    1. The process by which socially excluded groups have struggled to win equal rights under the law and in practice is referred to as the **rights revolution**.
    2. Emerging with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights following WWII in 1948, the rights revolution was in full swing by the 1960s.

     3. The rights revolution has diversified and fragmented American culture by legitimizing the grievances of groups that were formerly excluded from full social participation and renewing their pride in their identity and heritage.

  F. From Diversity to Globalization

     1. In contrast to preindustrial tribal cultures which were homogeneous, preindustrial Western Europe and North America were culturally fragmented by artistic, religious, scientific, and political forces.

     2. Industrialization further fragmented culture, as the variety of occupational roles grew and new political and intellectual movements evolved.

     3. In the postindustrial era, cultural fragmentation is quickening in pace due to **globalization**, the process by which formerly separate economies, states, and cultures are being tied together.

     4. Emerging with the expansion of international trade and investment, and furthered by migration and sustained contact among different racial and ethnic groups, globalization has resulted in the growth of transnational organizations and the globalization of mass media.

  G. Postmodernism

     1. Some sociologists believe that culture has been fragmented and reconfigured to the extent that a new term is necessary to describe contemporary society.

     2. Modernism, the last half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, was characterized by the belief in the inevitability of progress, respect for authority, and consensus around core values.

     3. **Postmodernism** refers to the current period, following modernism, characterized by:

        a. Blending cultures; an eclectic mixing of elements from different times and places.

        b. The erosion of authority; decline in confidence in traditional authority such as government and other major institutions.

        c. Instability of core American values; a lack of consensus around core values.

V. CULTURE AS CONSTRAINT

  A. Cultural Lag

     1. When material culture changes more rapidly than the corresponding nonmaterial culture, this is termed cultural lag.

     2. In the U.S., high levels of religiosity and adherence to traditional values constrains acceptance of changing norms and new technologies.

  B. Rationalization

     1. According to Max Weber, **rationalization** refers to the application of the most efficient means to achieve given goals, and the unintended, negative consequences of doing so.

     2. Weber predicted that rationalization would ultimately trap us in structures of our own creation. Constructions of time are an example of his predicted "iron cage" of rationality.

  C. Consumerism

     1. **Consumerism** is the tendency to define ourselves in terms of the goods we purchase. (i.e. the style of clothing and shoes you wear, and the display of clothing labels according to hip apparel advertisements).

     2. We can choose to purchase items that define us as members of a particular

> **subculture**, adherents of a set of distinctive values, norms, and practices within a larger culture.
> 3. Consumerism, and the negative consequences of higher debt and needing to work more, is virtually compulsory in the U.S., thus creating another constraint on individual freedom.
> D. From Counterculture to Subculture: The Case of Hip-Hop
> 1. Countercultures are subversive subcultures that oppose dominant values and seek to replace them.
> 2. Consumerism is remarkably effective at taming countercultures. An example of this is the way in which hip-hop, a countercultural music form, has become virtually mainstream in American society.

ESSAY/ DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explain the role of culture in human adaptation to their environment. Why have the cultural practices of creating symbols, making tools, and cooperating enabled humans to thrive?

2. Describe the relationship between subculture, counterculture, and culture.

3. What do you think causes some societies to be seemingly more ethnocentric than others? Why do some fear the perspective of cultural relativism? What type of threat does it pose, and for whom, do you think?

4. Think about when you were a child. When did you first become aware that you were suppose to act and dress in a certain way because you are male or female? Who gave you these cultural messages?

5. Discuss the ways that culture both enables and constrains opportunities to exercise personal freedom. Give examples of each.

6. What is multiculturalism? What are the arguments in favor of, and critical of, multiculturalism in education?

7. If "hard-core" neo-Nazis direct their hostility toward homosexuals, immigrants, people of color, and Jews, do you think there is any reason for individuals who fit none of these categories to take an active stand against these countercultural groups? Why or why not?

8. Describe the factors that have influenced the globalization of culture.

LECTURE SUGGESTIONS

1. Use Horace Miner's classic article on the *Nacerima* to engage students in a discussion of American culture. The article is available various places online, or part or all of it could be

read in class. Ask students to respond to the culture described, and to make comparisons with their own culture.

2. Use cellular phone use, including texting and surfing the Internet, to illustrate the concept of cultural lag. Ask students to describe what they perceive as the "rules" for the various types of uses for cell phones. Is there a general consensus for what the proper etiquette is? Generally, not everyone agrees about where it is appropriate and inappropriate to answer calls, send texts, or access the Internet. This is an example of nonmaterial culture not keeping pace with material culture.

3. The text describes culture as the means for humans to adapt to their environments. However, cultural practices may be maladaptive, and various practices may seem in contradiction to each other (e.g. recycling and driving everywhere). Prepare a brief lecture demonstrating that culture may be maladaptive, as well as adaptive, and that every culture has norms for behavior that may seem in contradiction to each other.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. Go to your local grocery store to investigate the availability of foods from different cultures. As you walk the aisles pay attention to which ethnicities are singled out for "ethnic foods," and which are not. In sections that seem specific to a particular ethnicity, note any cultural stereotyping and ethnic-specific themes. Describe what foods are most commonly available, and explain why you believe some groups are more represented than others. What types of "ethnic" foods are not considered specific to a particular ethnicity? (e.g. pasta)

2. Divide the class into small groups. Ask each group to discuss and describe an example from their own experience for a set of concepts from the chapter. For example, students may identify examples of symbols, norms and values, cultural lag, consumerism, and rationalization from their own experience.

3. Locate a recent copy of the *New York Times* and of the *National Enquirer*. Compare and contrast the content of the different papers. Do you think these papers have the same readership? How are the papers marketed? Does this suggest differences in the subcultures the readers of each belong to?

MEDIA SUGGESTIONS

Full-length Videos

A World of Love: Cultural Differences in Courtship, Love, and Marriage, 40 min, 2003, looks at cross-cultural differences and similarities in the area of love. Available from the University of California Extension Center for Media and Independent Learning.

America 1900, 3 hours, 1998, discusses American culture in the early 1900s. Available from Public Broadcasting Services (PBS).

FAT, 60 min., 1998, looks at the influence of cultural ideals on being fat. Available from Public Broadcasting Services (PBS).

A Flea Market Documentary, 60 min., 2001, looks at the consumerism of the flea market. Available from Public Broadcasting Services (PBS).

For Which It Stands, 25 min, 2002, discusses the flag as a symbol of American culture. Available from the University of California Extension Center for Media and Independent Learning.

Culture Shock, 2 hours, 1999, explores the controversial culture of art in history and censorship. Available from Public Broadcasting Services (PBS).

The 50 Years War: Israel and The Arabs, 5 hours, 1998, examines the clash of Arab-Israeli cultures over a fifty-year period. Available from Public Broadcasting Services (PBS).

Postville: When Cultures Collide, 60 min., 2001, shows the consequences of two different cultures clashing, Lutheran Postville Iowa and Hasidic Jewish from New York City. Available from Public Broadcasting Services (PBS).

Secrets of Lost Empires, 5 hours, compares our present culture to ancient cultures. Available from Public Broadcasting Services (PBS).

Shorts

Cathedrals of Consumption, Wadsworth Video
George Ritzer discusses how the expanding role of the consumer and the new "religion of consumption" is increasingly transforming American society.
Discussion questions: What are some examples of "cathedrals of consumption"? Beyond just consumption, what other functions do these structures provide in our culture? How have the "cathedrals of consumption" changed our society?

Culture Shock, Wadsworth Video
The familiar expression "a fish out of water" serves as an analogy to explain the sociological concept of culture shock and the human tendency to take for granted one's cultural environment.
Discussion questions: How does culture shock affect an individual? Why is the expression "A fish out of water" descriptive of culture shock? Give some examples of culture shock.

Changing Work Culture in Japan
BBC 2012, Video   4:21

Amish get Bargain Health Care
ABC 2007, Video

INTERNET EXERCISES

Read an article titled *Jihad vs. McWorld* at: theatlantic.com/politics/foreign/barberf.htm, written by Benjamin R. Barber. It discusses how the global culture is becoming more homogeneous. What points does Barber make to support his hypothesis? How does this relate to material covered in Chapter 2?

Visit the web site of the Popular Culture Association: http://www.pcaaca.org/ Find the discussion of definitions of popular culture, and why a precise definition is hard to pin down. You can also research the history of the popular culture movement. Review the subject areas to learn about the scope of scholarship on popular culture.

Check out the Overcoming Consumerism web site: http://www.verdant.net/ for ideas on how to avoid consumerism, how to consume responsibly, and how to reduce and recycle. The web site is an interesting look into alternatives to corporate products and advertising. Read the site for suggestions for how to change purchasing habits. As you read the site, consider how you would describe or characterize the philosophy of the group members. What do you think is their overall goal? How realistic is it, in your opinion (support your ideas with sound reasoning).

SUGGESTED RESOURCES FOR INSTRUCTORS

Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steve M. Tipton. 1985. *Habits of the Heart.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Billson, J.M. 1995. *Keepers of the Culture: The Power of Tradition on Women's Lives*, New York: Lexington Books.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. *Fieldwork in Culture*. Boulder, CO: Roman and Littlefield Publishers.

Campbell, Neil and Alasdair Kean. 1998. *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Culture*. New York: Routledge Press.

Cantor, Norman F. 1997. *The American Century: Varieties of Culture in Modern Times*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Hall, Edward T. and Mildred Reed Hall. 1990. *Understanding Cultural Differences*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Kabagarama, Daisy. 1993. *Breaking the Ice: A Guide to Understanding People from Other Cultures*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Kimmel, Michael. 1997. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: The Free Press.

McGuigan, Jim. 1996. *Culture and the Public Sphere*. New York: Routledge.

Reynolds, Sana, Deborah Valentine, and Mary Munter. 2011. *Guide to cross-cultural communication*. 2nd ed. Boston: Prentice Hall.

Romaine, Suzanne. 1994. *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguisitcs*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Samovar, Larry A. and Richard E. Porter. *Communication Between Cultures* (5/e). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Solomon, Norman. 1999. *The Habits of Highly Deceptive Media: Decoding Spin and Lies in Mainstream News.* Common Courage Press.

Young, K. (ed.). 1993. *Bodylore.* Memphis: University of Tennessee Press.

Zellner, William W., William M. Kephart. 2001. *Extraordinary groups: an examination of unconventional lifestyles*. 7th ed. New York: St. Martin's Press.

SUGGESTIONS FROM COURSEREADER

To view and assign CourseReader articles, please visit www.cengage.com/login.

Hostetler, John A. - "The Amish: A Small Society"

Kantrowitz, Barbara - "In Search of the Sacred"

Snow, David A. and Anderson, Leon - "The Subculture of Street Life"