* What is Culture?

- **Culture** is defined broadly as the learned norms, values, knowledge, artifacts, language and symbols that are constantly communicated among people who share a common way of life.

- Culture includes our beliefs about what is important in life, and it shapes our interpretations of what events mean. It also encompasses common, trivial, everyday habits that we take for granted and hardly notice.

- Sociologists study the entire range of culture; both “elite” and popular. They may look at cultural objects and activities (such as books, paintings, museums and concerts) that are related to cultural values, beliefs, symbols, and knowledge, or they may explore the cultural dimensions of other phenomena such as elections, schools, jobs, and even aging.)

- The sociology of culture shows that our hopes and fears, our likes and dislikes, our beliefs and habits, are very much social creations, strongly influenced by the time and place in which we live.
* What is Culture?

• This is not to say that culture dictates thought and behavior, in fact there is still a great deal of room for action, that also in turn helps to define culture.

• Culture is something that people develop and use. By creating and expressing the elements of our culture, and by living them to day to day, we are constantly communicating to each other an understanding of our social world. In the process, there is also room for reshaping culture, for adapting it to meet new demands and situations.

• As a result, culture is never static. It is constantly changing.

• Culture is one of sociology’s five key concepts, but it also intricately intertwined with the other four concepts. For example, some groups exercise power by controlling the definitions of what counts as elite culture, how various cultural values, such as achievement, individualism and community are functionally integrated into American society, and how the existence of different cultural groups creates the challenge of achieving cultural integration while respecting diversity.
*What is Culture?*

- We will see how language helps to make *social action* possible, and how new aspects of culture are produced through social action. We will also see how culture is shaped by *social structure*, for example, American culture is currently being shaped by the presence of large number of Latino immigrants, increased technology, and by the aging of the baby boomers.

- At the same time, we will note how culture affects social structure by influencing which group boundaries are maintained, for example, by shaping the rates at which members of different ethnic groups intermarry.

- People use the cultural “tool kit” of the knowledge, language, symbols of all kinds, values, norms, and **artifacts** (the physical objects that people make,) both to maintain and change their way of life.
What is Culture?

- Material and Non Material Culture

  - Sociologists commonly distinguish between two aspects of culture, the material and non material.

  - **Material Culture** is made up of all of the physical objects or artifacts that people make and attach meaning to, such as books, clothing, schools, churches, and guided missiles, to name a few.

  - Natural objects, such as boulders and stones, are not part of material culture, but how people see and use them are shaped by culture.

  - **Non Material Culture** consists of human creations that are not embodied in physical objects, such as values, norms, knowledge, systems of government, the languages we speak, and so on.

  - The line between material and non material culture is never sharply defined, as our non material cultural value of individualism helps explain the American love of cars, compared to other cultures, because the ability to get up and go where you want expresses your personal freedom, and individualism.
* What is Culture?

• Values

• A **value** is a general idea that people share about what is good or bad, desirable, or undesirable. The values that people have tend to color their overall way of life, and they transcend any one particular situation.

• Thus, to say that a value of a culture is competition, we would see that value applicable not just in sports, but business, family relationships, politics, the classroom and even their social lives.

• Sometimes values reinforce one another. For example, if a culture values material comfort, they would most likely value the success that comes with affording that material comfort.

• Other values can oftentimes not be as compatible. For example, valuing both conformity and individuality.

• How do people live with these contradictions? Often by applying different values in different situations. Using the example above, conformity is important in the workplace, but individuality is important in social situations.
* What is Culture?

• Values

• When values are repeatedly in sharp conflict, and reconciliation is difficult, pressure for social change may build. The civil rights movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s focused national attention on the conflict between the values of “freedom and justice for all” and racial segregation. When protestors confronted segregationists and were treated violently in full view of the media, it forced many to confront the reality and just their values.

• When many people express their individuality in less strict dress codes, including wearing ties in the office place, it forces employers, in order to attract top talent, the opportunity to express more individuality in the work place, and so a change in corporate values occurs where the tie everyday in the work place is no longer as necessary.

• These examples should demonstrate that values are not static, and like all aspects of culture, values undergo change.
*What is Culture?

- Norms

  - Values provide the framework within which people in a society develop norms of behavior. A **norm** is a specific guideline for action; it is a rule that says how people should behave in particular situations.

  - Sometimes norms are made explicit, as in written laws or biblical commandments. But more often, norms are unspoken customs that people implicitly know and follow. For example, when someone gives you a gift you do not particularly like, or have a use for, you do not say, “This is the worst gift I have ever gotten.” Rather, you make such an excuse as “I already have one of these” or “Thank you very much.” No one has ever explicitly told you about this social convention, it is a norm that you implicitly grasped in the process of learning your culture.

  - Like values, norms can vary greatly from society to society. Polite and appropriate behavior in one society may be disgraceful in another.
* What is Culture?

• Norms

• For example, among the Ila speaking peoples of central Africa, young girls are given houses of their own at harvest time where they may play at being wife with boys of their choice. It is said that among these people virginity does not exist beyond the age of ten. In contrast, among the Tepoztlan Indians of Mexico, a girl’s life becomes “crabbed, cribbed, confined” from the time of her first menstruation. A girls is not to speak to or encourage boys in the least way. To do so would be to court disgrace, to show oneself to be crazy.

• Norms also vary from group to group within a single society. For example, dating norms amongst teenagers and college students are different.

• Norms, like values also vary over time, and seldom remain the same indefinitely. Look, for example, at the norms regarding smoking through the past five decades.
According to repeated nationwide surveys,

More Doctors Smoke CAMELS
than any other cigarette!

Doctors in every branch of medicine were asked, "What cigarette do you smoke?" The brand named most was Camel!

The doctors' choice is America's choice!

You'll enjoy Camels for the same reasons so many doctors enjoy them. Camels have cool, cool mildness, pack after pack, and a flavor unmatched by any other cigarette.

Make this sensible test: Smoke only Camels for 30 days and see how well Camels please your taste, how well they suit your throat as your steady smoke. You'll see how enjoyable a cigarette can be!

For 30 days, test Camels in your "T-Zone" (T for Throat, T for Taste).

A Gift of Pleasure

My spirit—the spirit of Christmas—giving in abroad in the land. A gift that expresses that spirit, and brings pleasure to every home, both great and small. In rare indeed. Such a gift, my friend, is LUCKY STRIKE.

Santa Claus
* What is Culture?

- Norms

- Most norms are situational; that is they apply to specific circumstances and settings. For instance, we employ the norm of shaking hands upon meeting or leaving someone, not midway through a conversation (unless perhaps we are concluding an agreement.)

- Part of the process of acquiring culture is learning exactly when each of the norms that are a part of that culture is expected of us.

- Much of the time, people follow norms more or less automatically. Alternatives never occur to them. This is particularly true of unspoken norms that seem self evident, such as answering a person who addresses you.

- People conform because it seems right, because to violate the norm would damage their self image or hurt their conscience, and because they want approval, and fear ridicule, ostracism and punishment.
* What is Culture?

- Norms

  - Of course people do not automatically follow a norm. It depends on the particular person and the particular norm. For example, there are many Americans who do not wear seat belts in automobiles, even though this has become the norm in our society.

  - It is important to understand the difference between norms and values. Consider a man at a baseball game who when he hears the national anthem playing stands facing the flag, and removes his hat placing it over his heart. He is following the norms that proscribe that behavior, but if you ask him why he is doing it he will state that “it is proper to show respect to the flag.” Here the man is assessing his behavior according to a broad abstract value; patriotism.

  - Norms, therefore, can be defined as the rules that govern behavior in particular contexts, while values are the broad, internalized standards against which we evaluate behavior.
* What is Culture?

- Norms

  - Norms vary in the importance that people assign to them and in the ways they react to violations. **Folkways** are norms that are simply everyday habits and convention. People obey them without giving them much thought. For example, we cover our mouths when we yawn, or eat dessert at the end of the meal, rather than at the beginning, because these are American folkways.

  - People who violate folkways may be labeled as eccentrics or slobs, but as a rule they are tolerated.

  - In contrast, violations of mores provoke intense reactions. **Mores** are the norms people consider to be vital to their well being and their most cherished values. Examples are the prohibitions against incest, cannibalism, and sexual abuse of children.

  - People who violate mores are considered to be unfit for society and may be ostracized, beaten, locked up in a prison or mental institution, exiled, or even executed.
* What is Culture?

• Norms

• Some norms are formalized into **laws**, which are rules enacted by a political body and enforced by the power of the state. Whereas folkways and mores are typically enforced by the collective and spontaneous actions of the members of the community, laws are enforced by the police, the military, or some other specialized organization.

• Laws may formalize some folkways (as some traffic regulations do), or back up mores (as laws against murder do). Political authorities may also try to introduce new norms by enacting laws such as those governing the disposal of toxic wastes, or extending civil rights to various minorities, and even regulating what is good to eat and drink.

• In general, the laws that are the most difficult to enforce are those that are not grounded in folkways or mores, such as laws against drinking before the age of 21.
* What is Culture?

- Symbols

- In addition to giving us guidelines for behavior and ideas about what is “good” and “right,” culture also gives us notions about what things in our world mean. These meanings may involve symbols, or objects, gestures, sounds, or images that represent something other than themselves.

- Geometrically, for example, a cross is merely two intersecting lines, but for Christians a cross symbolizes sacrifice, pain, suffering, faith and the hope of salvation.

- Words, too, are symbols with meanings that people share. The word green for example is just a string of sounds with no inherent meaning, but for speakers of English these sounds symbolize a certain family of colors.

- As these examples illustrate, symbols do not necessarily look like, sound like, or otherwise resemble what they stand for. It is a given that symbols may sometimes derive their meaning partly from their inherent qualities (a lion symbolizing a powerful empire, for instance.) But the meaning given to symbols is frequently quite arbitrary, simply a matter of tradition and consensus.
*What is Culture?*

- Symbols

- That is why in different cultures, different symbols are often used to represent the same concept. In some societies, for instance, black is the color of mourning, while in others white or red suggest grief. There is nothing about these colors that dictates their meaning. The meaning is arbitrarily assigned.

- When meanings are arbitrarily assigned to symbols, those meanings can more easily be changed. For example, in England the index and middle fingers held in a “V” with the palm facing inward is considered a rude insult. Winston Churchill turned the same gesture with the palm outward, and it became the symbol for victory. College students in the 1960’s made it a symbol for peace.

- Even when people think they assign the same meaning to a symbol, their meanings may in fact be somewhat different. For instance, in the United States a gold band worn on the third finger of someone’s left hand symbolizes that he or she is married. To some, this suggests that the person has made an exclusive, lifelong commitment. To others, it means a commitment to stay together for as long as it works out. Thus, each of us brings our own interpretations to the cultural meanings of symbols.
* What is Culture?

- Language

  - A **language** is a system of verbal and, in many cases, written symbols with rules about how these symbols can be strung together to convey more complex meanings.

  - It is impossible to overstate the importance of language in the development, elaboration, and transmission of culture. Language enables people to store meanings and experiences and to pass this heritage on to new generations.

  - Through language, we were able to learn about and from the experiences of others. In addition, language enables us to transcend the here and now, preserving the past and imagining the future. It also makes possible the complex formulation of complex plans and ideas.

  - Some sociologists focus on the structure of language. These researchers analyze how language is put together; how it is built up from smaller speech sounds into words, and from words into meaningful phrases and sentences. Such analysis shows that the structure of language is an essential factor in conveying meaning.
What is Culture?

- Language
  - We cannot arbitrarily rearrange the sounds in a word, or the words in a sentence and create a statement that another person is likely to comprehend. Languages have rules of grammar and syntax that must be followed if we want to be understood.
  - Moreover, words often take their meaning from a structure of opposites. We understand white partly through contrast to black, male to female, short to tall, and so on.
  - But words simply name things, to communicate we must master the structure of language, which allows us to communicate in meaningful ways.
  - Other sociologists look at the role of language in social action, focusing on how people use language to coordinate their activities and to create and confirm social understandings.
* What is Culture?

• Language

• One discovery is that people seem to change their patterns of speech as social contexts change. For example, a woman asking her son to mow the lawn might give a direct order, “Mow the lawn!” but use indirect phrasing when addressing her husband, “Isn’t it your turn to mow the lawn?” Such indirect phrasing is considered more polite and therefore more appropriate between adults of equal status.

• A frequent mistake that people make in learning to speak a new language is to overlook cultural conventions about how that language should be used in different social contexts. Thus, Germans sometimes sound domineering when they speak English because their native language encourages more direct phrasing of requests and complaints than English does.

• When people use aspects of language to interpret a situation, they are employing language as a kind of social marker. A social marker is any pattern of behavior that provides indications about who people are, what groups they belong to, and what their understanding of a situation is. In other words, it identifies where a person or group fits into a social structure.
* What is Culture?

- Language

- Imagine for instance that after a week in a new job you are asked to attend a staff meeting. Having no idea what staff meetings entail, you approach the meeting in a cautious, exploratory manner, searching for clues about how you should act. Among these would be linguistic clues. Do the participants at the meeting use formal language? Do they follow a fairly rigid format of who speaks when and for how long, or are their interactions more loosely structured, as in casual conversations? Such clues would give you a good idea about what kind of meeting this is.

- Pronunciation, word choice, tone of voice and grammar would alert you to the status of the people at the meeting. A person in authority usually conveys dominance, phrasing things in an assertive manner, “I need that information by Tuesday.” A subordinate is likely to adopt more tentative style of speaking, liberally sprinkled with linguistic “hedges” (umm, it seems to me, maybe, like, you know”) and rising intonations at the end of declarative statements (as in answering “Thursday?” to a question about when a report will be ready.)

- Often, without even realizing it, we categorize people on the basis of these speech patterns. Thus, to a large extent, a person’s social identity is established and maintained through the patterns of language that he or she uses.
* What is Culture?

- Knowledge

- **Knowledge** is the body of facts, beliefs and practical skills that people accumulate over time. It consists partly of procedural information, such as how to drive a car or operate a computer. It also consists of information about people, places and events. Often we have knowledge about things that we cannot verify ourselves, but we accept as “truths.” However, one person’s “true” knowledge may be another person’s mere “belief.” Witness the debates between evolutionists and creationists as an example.

- Modern society is accumulating knowledge at an incredibly rapid rate. Technological advantages in the storage of and accessibility to knowledge make it more rapidly and widely available to people through devices like iPads and smart phones.

- Some sociologists have even proposed what is possibly a new theory of power because of these advances which basically posits that “he who controls the information,” or controls the access to this accumulate knowledge will have the power, and some go even further stating that this control is central to an information based society such as ours.
* What is Culture?

• Integration and Diversity

• Imagine that this is the early twentieth century and you are a teacher in a school in New York. Whom would you see around you? Some Irish kids, some Italians, maybe some Armenians, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, African Americans? How do you reach all of these different languages and cultures to facilitate learning when you do not have the time to teach each one individually in their own way?

• There are social forces that would state that assimilation is the way to go about this task. Assimilation is merely the process by which newcomers to America, as well as other “outsiders,” give up their culturally distinct beliefs, values and customs and take on those of the dominant culture.

• The opposite viewpoint would acknowledge that there is a tendency to preserve cultural diversity, to keep one’s own personal heritage alive and to respect the rights of others to do so. This is known as multiculturalism.
*What is Culture?

- Integration and Diversity
  
  - The tension between assimilation and multiculturalism is evident in many schools and other public institutions throughout the United States. How much multiculturalism is good for society versus how much we want people to identify and share the common culture of America is an ongoing, and often heated argument.

  - One result of assimilation is **cultural integration**, that is the degree to which a culture is a functionally integrated system, so that all the parts fit together well. On another level, the elements of culture are functionally integrated with *other* facets of society, such as social structure and power relations.

  - When people have a well integrated culture, there are few contradictions in the way they think and act. Their religious, economic and family lives are all in harmony. Simply by following established traditions, they can carry on the business of living with minimal inner conflict.
*What is Culture*

- Integration and Diversity

- Yet highly integrated cultures are extremely vulnerable to change of any sort. Take for example the Australian aborigines whose culture was centered around the making of, and trade of, complex stone, carved, implements. When the Europeans introduced steel, this interrelationship revolving around the ceremonial exchange of carved stone tools came to a halt, and these people lost a great deal of their traditional culture in exchange for the convenience of western technology.

- Most cultures are more loosely integrated than the aborigines, particularly large, diverse societies like our own, that include people from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds. American culture is more loosely integrated than a country like Japan which discourages immigration and preserves traditions despite its many economic ties with the rest of the world.

- Intermediate in this is a country like England, who has experienced some immigration, more than Japan, but not on a scale like America. They are less culturally diverse than America, but more so than Japan.
* What is Culture?

- Integration and Diversity
  - Of course, immigration is not the only source of diversity; people of similar ethnic backgrounds may choose different lifestyles. Cultural integration, then is always a matter of degree. To some extent, it depends on how diverse or homogenous a society has been throughout its history. Diversity may reduce cultural integration, but it can also be a source of creativity and freedom of choice.

- There are two main reasons that some societies remain culturally diverse over long periods of time. One is that cultural minorities do not want to assimilate into the dominant culture, or the set of norms, values, traditions and outlooks that are treated as normal for the society as a whole. They value their separate beliefs, customs, and cultural identities.

- These minorities want to retain their group boundaries, while enjoying free and equal participation in politics and the economy. This goal is aided by laws that protect minorities from discrimination.
What is Culture?

Integration and Diversity

In other cases, however, cultural diversity endures because the dominant groups in society seek to maintain their power and privilege by keeping certain minority groups separate and unequal.

Sometimes this is done by limiting contact between the majority and minority, as in racial segregation in the early to mid 20th century southern United States. The result is a society with enclaves of cultural minorities that are denied equal access to economic and political life.

Very often both of these reasons for enduring cultural diversity coexist. Members of the dominant culture limit chances for assimilation, but at the same time members of cultural minorities don’t wish to lose their distinctive identities by assimilating completely.
* What is Culture?

- Subcultures and Countercultures

  - The distinctive norms, values, knowledge, language and symbols that members of a cultural minority share, and that they use to distinguish themselves from the dominant culture, constitute a subculture.

  - For a sub culture to exist, people must identify with the subcultural group, although they may have other identifications too, and be a part of many subcultures. Many of these will interact to converge and form distinctive subcultures that are major sociological forces.

  - For example, the series *Star Trek* had a following of devoted fans who formed a subculture in which people learned the Klingon language, dressed as the characters, and met in conventions. Many of these same individuals also belonged to a subculture of computer gamers, who would chat on line, develop code for gaming, and meet at gaming and electronic conventions. These two subcultures overlapped so much that today we consider it almost one subculture, the techno geek, as exemplified in the series *The Big Bang Theory.*
* What is Culture?

- Subcultures and Countercultures

  - In addition to identification, members of a sub culture must also have the opportunity for communicating with one another, both directly (face to face) and indirectly (through mass media). This makes subcultures the product of symbolic interaction.

  - In the process of interacting with one another, members of subcultures not only identify with their own groups, they also deidentify with the dominant culture (the culture whose members wield power and influence, not necessarily the numerical majority). For instance, from the point of view of homosexuals, the dominant culture in America, and the one they feel to be outside of, is a heterosexual culture. Similarly, from the point of view of atheists, the dominant culture is religious, for African-Americans it is white Europeans, and from the point of view of someone who is homeless and unemployed the dominant culture is middle class and financially well off.

  - The dominant American culture then, is a mix of various elements. Many Americans share it in some ways, but not in others.
**What is Culture?**

- **Subcultures and Countercultures**

  - Ethnicity is a major source of subcultural identification in the United States. Jews, African-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and many other ethnic groups think of themselves as having customs, language, beliefs, and values distinctive in many ways from those of the dominant culture.

  - Religious affiliation is another major source of subcultural identity. Roman Catholics, Muslims, Pentecostals, Baptists, Mennonites, and many other religious groups think of themselves as having customs, language, beliefs, and values distinctive in many ways from those of the dominant culture.

  - Ethnic and religious groups, however, are not the only source of subculture. Subcultures also form out of occupational groups, socioeconomic groups, age groups, and so on. Adolescents, for example, are active creators of subcultures revolving around music, dance, dating, and the shared experience of not quite being adults, but no longer children either.
* What is Culture?

- Subcultures and Countercultures

  - Similarly, medical students share common experiences, goals, and problems, and hence a common viewpoint. Subcultures typically arise when people in similar circumstances find themselves isolated from the mainstream world. They may be isolated physically, such as inmates in a prison, soldiers on a military base, or poor people in a ghetto, or isolated by what they do or think, that is, by their shared worlds of meanings.

  - Tensions often develop between members of the dominant culture and one or more subcultures, especially subcultures that directly oppose dominant norms and values. Members of the dominant group usually refer to these subcultures as **deviant**. Examples are a drug subculture, a homosexual subculture, or an inner city gang subculture.

  - Of course, from the point of view of those who participate in in these subcultures they are not deviant in the sense of being morally bad or wrong, they are simply outside the mainstream of American life.
What is Culture?

• Subcultures and Countercultures

• Sometimes subcultures develop that are not just distinct from the dominant culture, but that are oriented towards challenging that culture or deliberately trying to change it. These are called countercultures. A good example is the student counterculture of the 1960’s. Its members actively rejected the hard work-success ethic, the materialistic focus, the deferred gratification, and the sexually restrictive morality of the “establishment.”

• One can see a similar counterculture in the “Occupy” movement, or in the homosexual community today. Of course, countercultures are not the only kinds of subcultures that can bring about change in the dominant culture. Pizza and tacos have found their way from ethnic minority subcultures to become widely accepted elements of mainstream American culture, and these are just two small examples of how subcultures can quietly change the face of a dominant culture.

• Much depends on how open members of the dominant culture are to new customs and ideas. One of the important features of American culture has long been its tolerance- even sometimes its celebration- of subcultural diversity.
* What is Culture?

• Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

• When members of a dominant culture become suspicious of subcultures and seek to isolate or assimilate them, it is often because the members of the dominant culture are making value judgments about the beliefs and practices of the subordinate groups. For example, most Americans view Muslim beliefs about the role and dress of women as degrading to that sex, while Muslims see American mainstream women as shameless objects of sex pruriently placing their bodies on display.

• This tendency to view one’s own cultural patterns as good and right, and those of others as strange, or even immoral, is called **ethnocentrism**.

• For most people, culture operates outside of awareness. Their own customs, beliefs, and values are so deeply ingrained that they consider these learned elements of culture part of “human nature.” Such ethnocentric attitudes promote group solidarity and loyalty, improve morale, encourage conformity, and foster nationalism and patriotism.
* What is Culture?

• Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

• At the same time, however, ethnocentric sentiments increase hostility towards outsiders, foster conflict among groups, engender racism, and intensify resistance to change. Although ethnocentrism is a source of unity and stability within groups, it is also a source of misunderstanding and friction between groups.

• Social scientists contend that in order to understand a culture fully, we must do more than just try to suspend our ethnocentrism. We must also strive to consider the elements of that culture on their own terms, in their own setting, and in light of the social forces that impinge on the people who have created and use those cultural traditions. This perspective is called cultural relativism.

• Cultural Relativism stresses that any element of culture is meaningful in relation to a particular time, place, and set of circumstances. If we try to analyze that element outside the cultural context in which it evolved, we will probably distort its meaning.
* What is Culture?

- Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

- For example, to westerners the Hindu ban on slaughtering cattle and eating meat may seem absurd, particularly in India where so many people go hungry. This view ignores not only the religious view of cattle to Hindus, but also the functional integration of this reverence for cattle with other aspects of Indian life and with certain material benefits.

- In fact, live cattle do more to support life than they would if sliced into steaks. Cattle consume food that is inedible to humans. Oxen pull plows, cows give milk, and cattle dung provides fertilizer and fuel. In context the “sacred cow” makes sense.

- Social scientists adopt cultural relativism when studying the customs of people in societies different from their own, but this is a matter of understanding and not necessarily of approval. To some extent, we can separate our attempt to understand another culture from our evaluation of it.
What is Culture?

- Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

  - However, in some instances, this is very difficult, particularly in an ethical consideration, and determining what is right and wrong between cultures. Going back to Indian and Hindu traditions, is the practice of Sati, and bride burning wrong? It is a common practice that is related to religious principles, and societal practice.

  - Sati is the Hindu practice of a recent widow throwing herself on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. Bride burning is an act wherein the dowry of a bride has not been sufficient for the husband, and in order to collect a new dowry, he must either renegotiate with his in-laws, or kill his present wife in order to remarry and collect a new dowry.

  - Given that many westerners would look on these act as barbarism, murder, and wrong, how do we attempt to enforce these morals on a culture that would otherwise accept these as the common practice, without forcing our culture on them, and being ethnocentric and culturally irrelativist?
What is Culture?

- Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

- The tension between cultural relativism on the one hand and ethnocentrism on the other is closely tied to the tension between assimilation and cultural diversity. Cultural relativism encourages tolerance for the beliefs and customs of different subcultures, thereby allowing diversity, whereas ethnocentrism encourages dominant groups to impose their norms and values on others, thereby fostering assimilation.

- Few culturally heterogeneous societies can afford to be totally ethnocentric or totally tolerant toward all subcultural differences. There must be a middle ground as tolerance of differences must coexist with some shared elements of culture, which give rise to a reasonable amount of cultural integration.
*What is Culture?*

- The Production of Culture

  - Cultural innovations are shaped by a variety of decisions about what is desirable and good. The production of culture is always a social process, and cultural innovators always act within a social context.

  - Sociologists do not view culture as spontaneous or “given,” but as the product of social action. Fashion for example does begin as someone’s idea, but then after the design is created, it is displayed at fashion shows for store buyers, who pick and choose amongst the hundreds of designs which their stores will sell. Then, once they have made their purchases, they present these to the public for sale, and individual purchases guide which become popular and define our culture.

  - The fate of a cultural innovations is determined partly by the degree to which it conforms to shared ideas and expectations that are part of existing culture. Take for instance the trend in the 80’s of some men wearing mesh tanktops. Men in our culture do not typically wear clothing that exposes skin, so, as sad as it may seem, the mesh tanktop never really took off in the dominant culture.
* What is Culture?

• The Production of Culture

• The success of a cultural innovation is also affected by the social structure and especially power relationships in society. Of special importance are those who have a hand in disseminating new ideas. Such people are called cultural gatekeepers.

• Gatekeepers decide which of a huge number of proposed cultural innovations will end up getting widespread exposure through traditional distribution channels. Traditionally, people’s cultural preferences are partly a result of what they are repeatedly exposed to. When cultural gatekeepers barrage us with certain kinds of products, we are apt to decide that these are in fact the products we like best.

• Often then, our role of “consumers” of culture is simply to decide among the relatively small number of new cultural items that gatekeepers choose for our consideration. Moreover, personal tastes are influenced by such social factors as time, place and social class.
What is Culture?

The Production of Culture

Electronic media have had a great impact on Western culture, dramatically increasing the speed of and range of communication. From the emergent dominance of American pop culture, seen in such exports that are then reimported back as K-Pop (“Gangnam Style”), to the ability to see events and people all over the world live and instantaneously through the internet.

This has led to the globalization of culture at an unprecedented scale in our history, and an increased worry and fear regarding the homogenization of culture throughout the world, eliminating the distinctiveness of world cultures, and the ability to blend and learn from the culture of others.
* Cultural Deviance

- Yesterday, Tyler walked into the 24-hour convenience store and robbed the cashier.

- Anna received a ticket for driving ten miles faster than the speed limit.

- Gretchen, who was just married, decided to keep her maiden name instead of taking her husband's surname.

- Of these three individuals, which would you label as a 'deviant?'

- Would it surprise you that all three would actually be considered deviants in our society?

- **Deviance** is defined as any action that is perceived as violating a society's or group's cultural norm.
  
  - Norms dictate what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behavior across cultures.

  - One category of deviance is crime, which occurs when someone violates a society's formal laws.


* Cultural Deviance

• Criminal deviance spans a wide range of behavior, from minor traffic violations to arson to murder.

• Our previous examples of Tyler robbing a convenience store and Anna driving over the speed limit both fit into this category.

• However, laws make up only one piece of a complex system of countless rules - formal, informal, written, implied, etc. - to which we are expected to conform.

• Any act of nonconformity to these rules is considered deviant.

  • For example, something as simple as wearing sweat pants to work is an act of nonconformity to a (usually) informal rule/expectation, and it makes that someone a deviant.

  • Small deviant acts like this are very common. How many people do you know (including yourself) that have forgotten to return a library book on time, ran a red light, or played hooky from work or school?
*Cultural Deviance*

- Nonconformity isn't always a negative instance of rule breaking.
  - We can also include behaviors that fall into the category of 'overachievement' as deviant.

- What deviant actions - negative or positive - have in common is that they are different from the norm.
  - Gretchen is clearly not performing an act of criminal deviance by choosing to keep her maiden name.
  - However, taking the husband's surname is a norm in our society.
  - Because she violated that norm, she is still performing a deviant act.

- The concept of deviance is complex because norms vary across cultures, and what one group or society considers deviant, may not be considered deviant in another group or society.

- Sociologists study patterns of deviance and how they differ between cultures.
Two of the most prominent sociological theories of deviance are Emile Durkheim's deviance theory and Robert Merton's strain theory.

Let's look at the unique perspective of each theory.

First, in Durkheim's deviance theory, he argued not only that deviance is a natural and necessary part of society but that it's actually impossible not to have deviance in a functional society.

He used a monastery as an illustration: to outsiders, monks are extremely peaceful and therefore live in a near-Utopian society.

However, even there, deviance still occurs. It may be as seemingly innocent (to us) as missing morning prayer, but in their society, this deviant behavior goes against the rules they have created to bring order to their society.

Breaking one results in negative social reactions.

Since deviance can severely disrupt social order, it may seem like a paradox that it can actually be a good thing in society.
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• However, according to Durkheim, deviance performs four essential functions.

  • First, it affirms cultural norms and values. Seeing someone suffer or be punished for a deviant act reinforces what society sees as acceptable or unacceptable behavior.

  • Second, deviance clarifies moral boundaries and teaches us right from wrong.

  • Third, it brings people together. People become united in their shared response to deviance, like when people across the U.S. united in shock and grief after the attacks of September 11.

  • Finally, according to Durkheim, the fourth function of deviance is that it encourages social change. American history is full of individuals who pushed society's moral boundaries and promoted social change, like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.
* Cultural Deviance

- One example of how deviance can promote social change is the fact that Gretchen keeping her maiden name is not as much of a 'big deal' as it used to be.

- In the past, women who did not take their husband's surname after marriage were considered scandalous.

- Keeping their maiden names greatly contradicted an important norm in society.

- Over time, however, as society reevaluated the rights of women, this norm became less important.

- Although the number of women who keep their maiden names is still very low, those who choose to do so today are no longer shunned from society.

- The other sociological theory of deviance we'll discuss is Merton's strain theory.
* Cultural Deviance

- Although Merton agreed that some deviance is necessary for a society to function, he argued that the culture and structure of society itself pressures individuals to be criminally deviant.

- In other words, because of certain cultural values and goals, those who lack the opportunity to legitimately meet those goals feel strained. They are pressured to use unconventional means, such as criminal deviance, to meet those goals, instead.

- Merton used the 'American Dream' as an example: the philosophy behind the 'American Dream' is that anyone, regardless of social status and background, can achieve financial success through hard work and determination.

- In reality, not everyone is able to become wealthy. Those who do not have the opportunity to become wealthy feel a strain in not living up to society's expectations.

- As a result, some choose to use whatever means necessary - including criminally deviant acts - to still meet their financial goals.
Cultural Deviance

- Think about Tyler, again. What was the reason he robbed the convenience store? Perhaps he wants to go to college but can't afford it.

  - Going to college is a norm in our society, so he would feel pressured to find a way to attend.

  - According to Merton, if Tyler couldn't find legitimate means to make enough money, he would feel enough pressure by the social norm of attending college to find a way, even if that meant stealing.

- **Labeling theory** proposes deviance is socially constructed through reaction instead of action.

  - In other words, according to this theory, no behavior is inherently deviant on its own. Instead, it's the reaction to the behavior that makes it deviant or not.

  - Labeling theory helps to explain why a behavior is considered negatively deviant to some people, groups, and cultures but positively deviant to others.
* Cultural Deviance

- For example, think about fictional vigilantes, like Robin Hood and Batman.
  - Batman is labeled in different ways depending on the public's reaction to his escapades.
  - Some people have a negative reaction and label him as a criminal.
  - Others have a positive reaction and label him as a hero.
  - Different reactions are typically based on group or cultural norms and values.
- Another example is when a person is responsible for the death of another.
  - When are they labeled as a 'murderer' or a 'killer'?
  - The reaction to death sometimes depends on the circumstances.
*Cultural Deviance*

- The person responsible will be viewed differently depending on the reason, whether it's murder, war, self-defense, or an accident.

- Primary vs. Secondary Deviance

  - Studies related to labeling theory have also explained how being labeled as deviant can have long-term consequences for a person's social identity.

    - Consider **primary deviance**, which is an initial violation of a social norm - about which no inference is made regarding a person's character.

    - Primary deviance includes minor deviant acts that just about everyone does once or twice, like playing hooky from school or work.

    - These behaviors have little reaction from others and therefore, have little effect on a person's self-concept.
On the other hand, secondary deviance is when a person repeatedly violates a social norm, which leads others to make assumptions about that person and assign a label to him or her.

- Some examples of labels are 'criminal,' 'psycho,' 'addict,' and 'delinquent.'

- Secondary deviance gets such a strong reaction from others that the individual is typically shunned and excluded from certain social groups.
  - For example, the dynamic between nerds and jocks is portrayed in popular culture all the time.
  - Typically, there is someone who is intelligent but socially awkward and becomes labeled as a 'nerd.'
  - Once labeled, that person is considered unpopular and shunned by the popular 'jocks.'
* Cultural Deviance

- Stigma

  - Once a person has been labeled by others through secondary deviance, it is common for that person to incorporate that label into his or her own self-concept.

  - They develop a stigma, or a powerfully negative label that greatly changes a person's self-concept and social identity.

    - Someone in high school that has been labeled as a nerd, for example, may begin to think of himself or herself as a loser due to other people's opinions and treatment.

    - Someone who has been stigmatized usually has lower self-esteem and may even behave more deviantly as a result of the negative label.

    - The stigmatized person may find it easier to come to terms with the label rather than fight it.
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- Retrospective and Projective Labeling

- The consequences of being stigmatized can be far-reaching.

- A stigma operates as a master status, overpowering other aspects of social identity.

- Unfortunately, once people stigmatize an individual, they have a difficult time changing their opinions of the labeled person, even if the label is proven to be untrue.

- They may also engage in **retrospective labeling**, interpreting someone's past in light of some present deviance.
  
  - For example, people would likely discuss the past of someone who is labeled a 'murderer.'
  
  - They might say something like, 'He was always a violent boy.' Even if that person was no more violent than his peers, people would re-label the actions of his youth in light of his current label.
* Cultural Deviance

- Similarly, people may engage in **projective labeling** of a stigmatized person.

  - Projective labeling is using a deviant identity to predict future action.

  - For example, imagine that Batman is no longer considered a hero by anyone - instead, everyone thinks he is a dangerous criminal.

  - The people might say something like, 'One of these days he's going to destroy the entire city.' They are projecting by imagining what he might do in the future.

- Again, the consequences of labeling can be very significant. One sociologist, Travis Hirschi, proposed that every individual is tempted to engage in at least some deviant behavior, but the thought of likely social consequences is enough to stop them from committing deviant acts.

- This is known as **control theory**.
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- Society controls criminal behavior to a certain extent. The majority of people control themselves because of anticipation of the consequences of their behavior and the reactions of family and friends.

- On the other hand, individuals who feel they have little to lose and aren't afraid of being negatively labeled are more likely to become criminally deviant.

- Social Conflict Theory

  - What social patterns exist between social classes and what problems are caused by the conflict between them?

  - How does social class affect deviance?

  - These are questions asked by sociologists when considering the social conflict theory.

  - **Social conflict theory** is all about inequality in society. It proposes that laws and norms reflect the interests of powerful members of society.
**Cultural Deviance**

- In other words, social order is maintained through competition and conflict, and the 'winners' - those with the most power and the greatest economic and social resources - benefit by taking advantage of the 'losers.'

- Deviance and Power
  
  - First, the theory suggests that who or what is labeled as deviant depends on who has the most power.
  
  - The relatively small 'power elite' in our society are much less likely to carry the stigma of deviance than anyone else.
  
  - Even if they are suspected of deviant behavior, the powerful have the resources to resist deviant labels.

  - Consider a scenario where a rich CEO of a company and a struggling factory worker both commit the same crime.

  - We'll say that they were both caught in possession of illegal drugs.
* Cultural Deviance

- Which person do you imagine will be more severely punished?
  - It's likely that the CEO has the resources to get off lightly or at least to keep it quiet.
  - The factory worker, on the other hand, is likely to receive full punishment and have his criminal deviance advertised.

- White-Collar vs. Blue-Collar Crime
  - The comparison of these two individuals leads us into a discussion about white-collar versus blue-collar crime.
  - These types of criminal deviance get their names from the traditional dress of the person committing that style of crime.
    - White-collar refers to the traditional button-up dress shirts worn by powerful businessmen, usually paired with a tie.
    - Blue-collar refers to the uniforms worn by average workmen in factories and shops.
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- So, as the name suggests, **white-collar crime** is committed by people of high social positions, frequently as part of their jobs.
  - White-collar crimes typically don't involve violence; instead, they are generally money-related and include embezzlement, business fraud, bribery, and similar crimes.
  - Many of these crimes go unknown to the public.
- **Blue-collar crime** is committed by the average working American.
  - Blue-collar crimes range from violent law-breaking to thievery and are sometimes committed as a way to improve living conditions.
  - They are usually highly visual and are more likely to attract police to the scene.
- Again, social conflict theory is all about inequality, so one of the most important differences between these two types of crime is the fact that the punishment for committing them is disproportionate.
* Cultural Deviance

- For example, a more likely criminal scenario involving our factory worker and CEO would involve the factory worker vandalizing a local business and the CEO committing serious fraud to avoid giving up part of his wealth.
  
  - The factory worker committing vandalism has committed a blue-collar crime.
  
  - If caught, he would be fined and probably arrested, possibly even spending several months in prison.
  
  - The CEO committing fraud has committed a white-collar crime.
  
  - Even if someone calls him into question or he is caught, he would likely only receive a slap on the wrist.
  
  - A government study found that, as of 2009, those actually convicted of fraud were punished with a fine yet ended up paying less than 10% of what they owed by hiding some of their assets.
* Cultural Deviance

• Corporate vs. Organized Crime

  • There are two other types of crime that run parallel to white-collar and blue-collar crime but are committed by entire organizations instead of just individuals.

    • **Corporate crime** refers to illegal action by a company or by someone acting on its behalf.

      • It ranges from knowingly selling faulty or unsafe products to purposely polluting the environment.

      • Parallel to white-collar crime, most cases of corporate crime receive little to no punishment and many are never even known to the public.

    • There is also **organized crime**, which refers to illegal goods or services being provided by a business or group of people.

      • It includes selling illegal drugs, fencing stolen items, loan sharking, and more.
* Cultural Deviance

- Most people would probably associate organized crime with the mafia.
  - While the mafia is a good example, they are not the only criminal organizations.
  - Organizations that commit organized crime differ from other businesses in their heavy regular involvement in illegal activities and their almost routine use of bribery and violence.
  - Parallel to blue-collar crime, those who have fewer legitimate opportunities are more likely to participate in this type of crime, and for those who are caught, punishment can be severe.

- Let's use our CEO and factory worker again as examples.
  - The CEO is head of a company that frequently dumps hazardous waste into a nearby lake.
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- This example of corporate crime is usually punished through fines and/or restitution.

- If incarceration is involved, sentences typically involve 12 months or less.

- The factory worker is employed by a business that is being extorted by a gang that demands money from the company for 'protection.'

- This is a common example of organized crime, where the gang forces someone to do business with them.

- Members of criminal organizations that are convicted can receive severe punishment, spending many years in prison.
* Cultural Deviance*

- Deviance and Capitalism
  
  - Beyond criminal deviance, social conflict theory also suggests that anyone who interferes with the operation of capitalism is likely to be labeled as deviant.
  
  - Remember, deviance includes not just criminal behavior but also any behavior that goes against social norms.
  
  - Capitalism is based on individual productive labor and private control of wealth.
  
  - Therefore, many people think anyone who does not work is somehow deviant, even if that person is incapable of working.
  
  - They also look down on anyone - particularly the poor - who threatens or steals the property of others (especially the rich).
  
  - Capitalism also depends on respect for authority figures and structure, so anyone who resists authority or challenges the status quo is likely to be considered deviant.
* Cultural Deviance

- Deviance and Capitalism

  - For example, imagine environmentalists protesting outside of a factory.

  - Throughout history, protestors have been considered deviant (even if only mildly deviant) because they fight against the status quo.