Learning Objectives

4.1 Define culture.
4.2 Identify the basic elements of culture.
4.3 Discuss cultural differences.
4.4 Describe global culture, consumer culture, and cybertulture.
A Reflection of U.S. Culture

On his 1957 album, Birth of the Cool, famous jazz musician Miles Davis defined the meaning of “cool” for a generation. To Davis, being cool meant being as calm and steady as cool water. However, long before Davis defined it, being cool meant many different things to many different people. We can be sure that it will come to mean many other things in the future. Whatever it means specifically, being cool will remain important to people, especially young people, long into the future.

For decades smoking cigarettes was seen as a cool thing to do. Smoking was depicted in this way in the movies, in advertising, and elsewhere. However, with the avalanche of negative health information associated with smoking, many have come to see smoking cigarettes as a decidedly uncool, if not a stupid, thing to do. However, a recent New York Times article, “The Juul Is Too Cool,” makes it clear that a relatively new high-tech form of smoking, Juuling (a form of vaping), has, fueled by social media, grown greatly in popularity. Vaping was introduced in 2004, and now almost 11 million adult Americans vape. It has come to be considered cool among college, high school, and middle school students. One high school class president said, explicitly, that “vaping is cool.” Ironically, Juuling was first developed as a method to help wean people from smoking (cigarettes), although over half of those who now vape also smoke cigarettes. Juuling delivers nicotine (which is not a carcinogen), but not the carcinogens associated with cigarette smoking. However, there is a fear that Juuling could lead to an increase in cigarette smoking and therefore to the health risks associated with it.

While they do not look like cigarettes, Juuls have replaceable pods with tobacco. Juuls are easy to get in local stores or online. They take many forms, but the most attractive are those that are small, easily concealed, might look like USB drives, and are rechargeable. They produce an aerosol with a variety of flavors and aromas (e.g., of mango). They create little smoke. All of this makes it easy for Juuls to be used by teenagers in their parents’ home or in class. This is the case even though it is illegal to sell vaping devices to anyone under 21 years of age. Some vaping products are designed to appeal to teenagers by looking like juice boxes and candy with such names as “One Mad Hit Juice Box” and “Vape Heads Sour Smurf Sauce.”

Efforts are underway to better control the Juuling and vaping industries, especially the distribution of these technologies to those under 21. A major impediment to these control efforts is the positive feeling associated with Juuling: “I took a sharp experimental inhalation and nearly jumped. It felt as if a tiny ghost had rushed out of the vaporizer and slapped me on the back of my throat” (Tolentino 2018, 36). Nevertheless, in late 2018 Juul, under great pressure from the government and public opinion, announced that it would suspend the retail sale of most of its flavored e-cigarette pods and cease promoting them on social media.

In the unlikely event that efforts at controlling Juuling are successful, there will be yet other things and behaviors that teenagers—and others—will come to consider cool.

Juuling is just the most recent form of smoking, and more generally of being cool, that has played a central role in American culture for a century or more.

A Definition of Culture

Culture encompasses the ideas, values, practices, and material objects that allow a group of people, even an entire society, to carry out their collective lives in relative order and harmony. There are innumerable ideas, values, practices, and material objects associated with most cultures. As a result, no one individual can possibly know them all or what they all mean. But people must know at least the most basic and important elements of their culture. Knowledge of a shared culture leads people to behave in similar ways and to adopt a similar way of looking at the world. However, it is important to remember that there are differences within, as well as between, cultures. This point was reflected in the early 2015 murderous attacks in Paris by Islamic radicals on such cultural symbols as a French humor magazine and a kosher supermarket. There are profound differences in France today among French, Muslim, and Jewish cultures.

Closer to home, consider the cultures of the Bloods and the Crips, two street gangs with origins in Los Angeles in the early 1970s but now existing nationwide (Bichler et al. 2017; Covey 2015; Deutsch 2014). Members of the two gangs distinguish themselves from each other in a variety of ways but most notably by their defining colors—red for Bloods and blue for Crips. These colors and other symbols are very meaningful to gang members, helping them mark territories, easily identify friends and foes, and signify their values. The symbols—and their meanings—have been created by the group itself and passed down from one gang member to another. Symbols like these may also be passed along from a gang in one locale to those situated elsewhere. Some Mexican American gangs—for example, La Gran Raza and La Gran Familia—have adopted ideas and objects, as well as names, such as La Eme and Nuestra Familia, from predecessors in Mexico or gangs formed in U.S. prisons.

In contrast, for those who are not members of the group, an idea, a value, a practice, or an object may have little meaning, may mean something completely different, or may even have no meaning at all. For example, to members of the general public, a spray-painted gang tag may just be a scribble defacing neighborhood property. A person wearing a red shirt is simply wearing a red shirt.
The existence of a culture and common knowledge of it are so important that newcomers to any group, especially children, are taught its basic elements early. They then expand on that knowledge as they mature and become more integral members of the group.

At the same time, culture is constantly being affected by changes both internal and external to the group. Among the internal changes are the average age of the population within that group. Depending on whether the average age increases or decreases, a culture will need to reflect the needs and interests of either younger or older people. For example, in the United States and other aging societies, television programs and the advertisements associated with them are more oriented to older people than is the case in societies with increasing numbers of younger people (Carter and Vega 2011). A good example of this is the great popularity, especially among older viewers, of CBS’s NCIS. On the other hand, television certainly cannot and does not ignore its younger audience. The great popularity and cultural influence of Fox’s Empire is indicative of that.

Similarly, cultures need to adapt to other changes, such as a group’s gender composition. For example, today there are more female gang members in general, and this is also true of the membership of the Bloods and the Crips (Goldman, Giles, and Hogg 2014). As a result of this shift, a gang’s culture needs to change to deal with things such as the tasks to be allotted to female members (e.g., carrying concealed weapons) and, more specifically, to those who are pregnant or have young children.

Technological innovations are among the external changes likely to alter a group’s culture significantly. For example, with the growth of smartphone use, texting has become wildly popular as a communication method (including among street gang members), and cell phone conversations have become proportionally less common. Thus, not only newcomers to the group but also those who have participated for years must constantly learn new aspects of culture (e.g., gang members using prepaid “burner” cell phones that are difficult or impossible to trace) and perhaps unlearn others (using traditional cell phones) that are no longer considered desirable.

The near ubiquity of the smartphone has created a whole new set of realities for which clear and firm cultural rules are not yet in place. There are few rules about texting, and those few that do exist are notoriously difficult to monitor and police, especially in settings such as classrooms (Pettijohn et al. 2015). In addition, long, loud, and frequent phone conversations are not a problem in the privacy of one’s home, but they may be a problem in public areas where there is an expectation of quietude, such as at a nice restaurant. I (the senior author) found out for myself how rude a cell phone conversation may be perceived to be, and the consequences of such a perception, on a train trip between New York and Washington, D.C. Amtrak now has “quiet cars” for those who do not want to be plagued by the cell phone conversations of strangers. I found myself in one of those cars, but I didn’t know the rules of phone behavior in such a car. Soon after the trip began, my wife called, and we began a conversation. Almost immediately, a man sitting a few rows in front of me jumped up and glared at me angrily, while another passenger gently tugged on my sleeve and pointed to the “quiet car” sign. I now understood its meaning and said good-bye to my wife. This illustrates the power of culture and also how we learn about new cultural elements and developments, sometimes the hard way. I no longer need to be reminded of the rules of, and what is expected of me in, a quiet car—and in most other social settings.

While I was gently sanctioned for violating the culture of the quiet car, such sanctions can sometimes be much more extreme. Violence is not the norm, but it is not unheard of, as in the case of Curtis Reeves, who shot and killed a man in a movie theater for texting (his babysitter) during the previews (the movie hadn’t even started; Buie 2014).

A more formal set of rules, even laws in some places (e.g., Georgia), limiting or banning drivers from talking and texting on handheld cell phones have been developed. It has become apparent—both from insurance company statistics and from experimental research—that using a handheld cell phone while driving increases the risk of accidents (Horrey and Wickens 2006). One recent study found that almost a quarter of automobile crashes in the United States involved the use of mobile phones while driving (Kunkle 2017). A very active media campaign has developed—and has been promoted by Oprah Winfrey, among others—to discourage people from using handheld cell phones while driving. As shown in Figure 4.1, many states have enacted laws against the practice, and some safety advocates are pressing for a similar federal law. If both campaigns succeed, using a handheld cell phone while driving will no longer be culturally acceptable and will in fact become illegal across the nation.
Although we generally accept and learn the various components of culture, sometimes we refuse to comply with, or even accept, them. For example, many continue to talk and text on cell phones while driving even though they know it is illegal and the larger culture and legal system are increasingly characterized by negative views on such behaviors. To take a different example, premarital and extramarital sexual relationships continue to be disapproved of by traditional American culture, but many people have come to reject these ideas and to engage increasingly in these behaviors (on premarital sex, see Elias, Fullerton, and Simpson 2015). Indeed, it could be argued that both these forms of sexual behavior have come to be widely tolerated; premarital sex in particular has become an accepted part of the culture.

**The Basic Elements of Culture**

As pointed out earlier, every group and society has a culture. Culture surrounds such diverse social phenomena as athletics, cooking, funeral ceremonies, courtship, medicine, marriage, sexual restrictions and taboos, bodily adornment, calendars, dancing, games, greetings, hairstyles, personal names, religion, and myths. However, the specific content of each of these domains, and many more, varies from culture to culture. Cultures differ from one another mainly because each represents a unique mix of values, norms, objects, and language inherited from the past, derived from other groups, and created anew by each group.

**Values**

The broadest element of culture is found in values, the general and abstract standards defining what a group or society as a whole considers good, desirable, right, or important. Values express the ideals of society, as well as of groups of every size.

In his classic work *Democracy in America* ([1835–1840] 1969), the French scholar Alexis de Tocqueville detailed what he perceived to be America’s values. Among the things Americans valued in the early nineteenth century were...
democracy, equality, individualism, “taste for physical comfort,” spirituality, and economic prosperity. Although Tocqueville wrote about his impressions of the United States almost 200 years ago, the vast majority of Americans today would accept most, if not all, of the values he described (L. Crothers 2018).

Indeed, Americans find these values so natural that they expect them to be accepted in other cultures around the world. However, this expectation has had some disappointing, even disastrous, consequences for the United States. For example, when the United States undertook invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, one of the objectives was the creation of democratic regimes in those societies. The assumption was that Iraqis and Afghans wanted the same kind of democracy as the one that exists in the United States. But creating democracies in those countries has proven to be extremely difficult for a variety of reasons, including the fact that their cultures lack a tradition of democratic government. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to impose a value, such as the value of democracy, on a society where it does not already exist, or where it exists in a very different form. The terrorism that continues to exist, especially in Afghanistan (Packer 2016), makes it seem even less likely that Afghanistan will become a functioning democracy any time soon.

Researchers using data collected through the World Values Survey (WVS) have found support for the idea that democracy is a hard, if not impossible, sell in many parts of the world (Welzel and Inglehart 2009). As you may recall from Chapter 3, the WVS has gathered data from a variety of countries around the world on individual views on topics such as gender equality, tolerance for abortion, homosexuality, divorce, desire for autonomy over authority (for example, obedience and faith), and democratic participation over security. Respondents in countries where personal freedom is not valued highly—such as Pakistan, Jordan, Afghanistan, and Nigeria—tend to think of antidemocratic authoritarian regimes as being democratic. The data also show that citizens in these countries have little knowledge of the meaning of liberal democracy. There is little chance that American-style democracy will succeed in these countries.

Of course, there are many other reasons democracy has a difficult time succeeding in some countries. Among other things, before democracy can be established, people need to have enough to eat, to feel safe, to be able to get an education, and to trust the government. Unfortunately, many, if not all, of these needs are not being met in many parts of the world.

**Norms**

Norms are the informal rules that guide what people do and how they live. Norms tell us what we should and should not do in a given situation. Many norms are informal. That is, they are not formally codified, not written down in any place. Laws are norms that have been codified. They are written down and formally enforced through institutions such as the state. Rules prohibiting speaking and texting on handheld cell phones while driving are examples of how informal norms can come to be codified into laws.

You are expected to follow norms and obey laws, but the consequences of failing to do so are usually very different in the two cases. If you violate the law against homicide, you can expect to be arrested, incarcerated, and perhaps even executed. But if you fail to follow the norm of using utensils to eat your dinner and use your fingers instead, you can expect merely a few raised eyebrows and a tsk-tsk or two from your dinner companions. However, reactions to violating norms are not always so gentle. For example, a gang member’s violation of a norm against fleeing a fight with another gang may lead to physical violence, death, and other not-so-subtle outcomes.

Norms are reinforced through sanctions, which can take the form of punishments (negative sanctions) or rewards (positive sanctions). In general, when norms have been violated, punishments are used, while rewards are employed when norms have been followed. For example, dinner companions might frown when you eat with your hands and grin approvingly when you use the right utensils. Gang members would be likely to disapprove of those who flee and approve of those who stay and fight. Children who bring home report cards with lots of As and Bs may be praised, while those whose report cards are dominated by lower grades may get stern lectures from their parents. In other words, sanctions may be applied when norms are observed as well as when they are violated. Sometimes either positive or negative sanctions are enough to enforce norms. However, enforcement is generally more effective when positive and negative sanctions are used in tandem—when both the “carrot” (reward) and the “stick” (punishment) are applied. Most people follow norms primarily because sanctions are associated with them.
For a good example of the differences between laws and the various types of norms, consider the situations you may encounter if you travel by airplane. First, if you want to get through airport security with a minimum of hassle, you need to observe laws regarding the belongings you can carry onto the airplane and the things you must and must not say and do. There are warning signs about the laws posted in the immediate vicinity of the security checkpoint.

Norms of air travel include the following:

- Don’t block the aisles when you are entering or leaving the airplane.
- Limit your carry-ons to what realistically fits through the aisle and in the overhead compartments.
- Don’t hog the armrests.
- Don’t encroach on seats on either side of you.
- Don’t talk to the people beside you if they are busily working on their laptops or trying to sleep.
- Don’t linger in the lavatory too long—others may be waiting—and don’t leave behind a total mess.
- Don’t get angry at flight attendants. It’s generally not their fault—whatever the problem is—and in any case they can make your life miserable for the remainder of the flight.
- If traveling with a baby, use the restroom for diaper changes—not the seat next to you.
- When it’s time to deplane, wait your turn and allow people seated ahead of you to get off first.

Once on the plane, you are still subject to various laws, such as those against smoking or carrying weapons on board. In addition, you are subject to a long list of norms, although there are no signs listing or explaining them or orientation sessions devoted to them. Nevertheless, you probably know some or all of these norms, such as not intruding too much on your neighbor’s space. There are more serious informal rules against things like drinking too much alcohol and wandering around the plane, disturbing other travelers. These unwritten norms, and many more, are part of the culture of airplane travel. While you and your fellow passengers know most, if not all, of them, the norms are nevertheless frequently violated. However, it is a reflection of the power of culture that you likely know when you are violating the norms as well as when others are doing so.

Not all norms are the same, are equally important, or carry with them the same penalties if violated. On the one hand, there are folkways, or relatively unimportant norms. Whether they are observed or violated, they carry with them few if any sanctions (Sumner [1906] 1940). Not intruding on the space of the passenger sitting next to you on a plane is an example of a folkway. To take another example from a different setting, many college classes have norms against texting during lectures, but those norms are frequently violated. When students’ violations are detected by alert instructors, the negative sanctions, such as being asked to stop or to leave the room for the rest of class, are generally mild.

In contrast, mores (pronounced MOR-ays) are more important norms whose violation is likely to be met with severe negative sanctions. Airplane passengers who are belligerent toward other passengers or crew members are violating mores and may be forcibly ejected from the plane. Also violating mores (as well as campus rules) are students who use their smartphones to cheat on college exams. If their actions are witnessed or discovered, they may be subjected to severe negative sanctions, such as failing a class or even being expelled from school. While a clear distinction is often made between folkways and mores, in fact they exist along a continuum; it is often hard to distinguish where folkways end and mores begin.

For a good example of the differences between laws and the various types of norms, consider the situations you may encounter at Walmart. There are laws against shoplifting, there are mores against damaging store displays, and folkways exist about lining up and waiting your turn to check out.

**Material Culture**

Values and norms exist within the realm of ideas (see the following section for a related definition and discussion of symbolic, or nonmaterial, culture). However, culture also takes material—that is, tangible—forms. Material culture...
encompasses all the artifacts, the “stuff,” that are part of culture and in which culture is reflected or manifested. A wide range of things can be included under the heading of material culture, including this book, the clothes we wear, the homes we live in, our computers and smartphones, the toys children play with, and even the weapons used by our military.

Culture shapes such objects. For instance, the value that Americans place on economic prosperity is reflected in such material objects as games like Monopoly. This game was first patented in the mid-1930s, and its icon is a well-dressed, economically successful tycoon with a monocle, named Rich Uncle Pennybags. The goal of the game is to accumulate the most property and money. There are now online versions of Monopoly, as well as countless editions of the game specially designed around various cities, sports teams, television programs, and hobbies (including a version for fashion-minded girls). There are now also non-material games (such as Fortnite and Pokémon Go) that are not only enjoyed by millions of people online but are also played by thousands in material sports arenas for millions of dollars in real and material prize money (Wingfield 2014b, 2014c).

Material culture also shapes the larger culture in various ways. For example, when playing Monopoly, children are learning about, helping support, and furthering a culture that values wealth and material success. To take a different example, the centuries-old American value of individual freedom and individualism has been greatly enhanced by the widespread adoption of such material objects as the automobile, the single-family home, and the smartphone. The last, for example, gives us highly individualized and mobile access to the vast world available on the phone and the internet.

Material culture exists not only in these individual objects but also in the relationships among various objects (Baudrillard 1968, 1996). For example, each brand of beer has meaning in part because of its place in the larger system of beer brands. Budweiser has its place in a system that includes lower-status, lower-priced beers (Pabst Blue Ribbon, for example) as well as much higher-status, higher-priced beers (such as some microbrews and elite beers like Chimay). Budweiser and, indeed, all beer brands derive their meaning, at least in part, from their positions within the more general system of beers.

Symbolic Culture and Language

Symbolic culture includes the nonmaterial, intangible aspects of culture. In fact, we have already discussed two key forms of symbolic culture—values and norms. However, there is no clear line between material and nonmaterial culture. Most, if not all, material phenomena have symbolic aspects, and various aspects of symbolic culture are manifest in material objects. Our symbolic culture is manifest when we buy American-made rather than Japanese or Korean automobiles in a show of patriotism, purchase the latest iPhone as soon as it is released to denote our technological sophistication, or choose cloth diapers over disposables as a symbol of our commitment to “green” parenting.

One important aspect of symbolic culture is language, a set of meaningful symbols that enables communication. Language, especially in its written form, allows for the storage and development of culture. Cultures with largely oral traditions do manage to accumulate culture and transmit it from one generation or group to another, but written language is a far more effective way of retaining and expanding on a culture.

Perhaps more important, language facilitates communication within a culture. Our words reflect the way in which we think about and see the world. They also shape and influence culture. Suppose a time traveler from the 1950s arrived at a modern-day supermarket to buy something to eat for breakfast. Kellogg’s Frosted Flakes, with its sprinkling of sugar, was a noteworthy innovation in the 1950s. However, our time traveler would be bewildered by cereals with brand names such as Froot Loops, Fruity Pebbles, Count Chocula, Franken Berry, Lucky Charms, and so on. The exotic and varied cereals we have now would be considered a marvel by someone from the 1950s. The point, however, is that having names for many kinds of cereals allows consumers to make much finer distinctions about breakfast and to communicate more precisely what it is they wish to eat.

The contemporary world has given us a wealth of new words. For example, in the digital era, e-mail and advertisers have given us the word spam for the one-time avalanche (now greatly reduced) of unwanted messages. In the world of social networking, Twitter has given us the word hashtag to describe a label that helps us in searching tweets. The term trolls refers to those who seek to instigate arguments on social media forums. The consumption-oriented nature of our society has also led to the creation of many new words, a large number of them brand names. For example, the now nearly extinct iPod was the leading portable music device for some time; it led to the development of iTunes. The iPhone is the leading smartphone (another new word), and it has replaced the iPod as well as led to a booming industry in apps (applications) of all sorts. Similarly, globalization has led to new words, including globalization itself, which was virtually unused prior to 1990 (Ritzer and Dean 2019). The boom in sending work to be performed in another country or countries has given us the term outsourcing (Ritzer and Lair 2007).

Words like these are shared by people all over the world and allow them to communicate with one another. Communication among people of different cultures is also easier if they share a mother tongue. As you can see in the simplified map of world languages in Figure 4.2, African cultures use a variety of official and national languages. People in countries where French is the official language, such as Burkina Faso and Niger, can transact their business more easily with one another than they can with nations where Arabic or Portuguese is the primary language, such as Mauritania and Cape Verde.
Communication between cultures is never as easy or as clear as is communication within a given culture. For example, in the 2017 movie *The Big Sick*, Pakistan-born comedian Kumail Nanjiani and his American girlfriend experience numerous clashes over their culture differences. After she becomes seriously ill, Kumail faces cultural entanglements not only with her parents but also with his own parents, who wish to find him a spouse that conforms to their cultural expectations.

In a world dominated by consumption, communication between cultures also takes place through the viewing of common brands. However, brand names well known in some cultures may not translate well in other cultures. As a result, brands are often renamed to better reflect the cultures in which they are being sold. The following list shows the names of some well-known brands in the United States and elsewhere and the way in which they are translated into Chinese.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRAND</th>
<th>CHINESE TRANSLATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nike</td>
<td>Enduring and Persevering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMW</td>
<td>Precious Horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heineken</td>
<td>Happiness Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coca-Cola</td>
<td>Tasty Fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriott</td>
<td>10,000 Wealthy Elites</td>
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</tbody>
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While such name changes are common, some Chinese brand names are simply phonetic translations of the brands’ names into Chinese. For example, Cadillac is translated “Ka di la ke.” Although this name means nothing to the Chinese, the fact that it is foreign gives it an aura of status and respectability. However, if Microsoft had used a phonetic Chinese translation of the name of its search engine Bing, it would have been in big trouble. In Chinese, the word *bing* translates into “disease” or “virus.” To avoid being seen as disease-ridden or a carrier of a virus, Microsoft changed the search engine’s Chinese name to Bi ying. This has the far more appealing meaning of “responding without fail” (Wines 2011).

**ASK YOURSELF**

Have you ever been in a situation, such as a trip abroad, in which understanding and communicating were difficult for you because you were unfamiliar with the language and symbols around you? How did you cope? Have you ever helped someone else who was in a similar situation? What did you do?

Even when people share a language, communication may be difficult if their backgrounds and values are too
different. The TV show *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013) was enormously popular, award-winning, and influential (the current *Better Call Saul* is a spinoff of that show). In *Breaking Bad* a high school chemistry teacher, diagnosed with terminal cancer, decides to use his chemical expertise to become a crystal meth cook so that he can make money to take care of his family after his death. At least initially, he is befuddled by the norms, values, and language used in the world of illegal drug users, dealers, and killers. It’s a long way from the language of high school chemistry class to that of the world of illicit drugs.

**CHECKPOINT 4.2**

The Basic Elements of Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>General and abstract standards defining what a society considers good, right, or important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norms</td>
<td>Informal rules that guide what people do and how they live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material culture</td>
<td>Artifacts that are manifestations of culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic culture</td>
<td>Nonmaterial aspects of culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Cultural Differences

As you have seen so far, we can think in terms of the culture of a society as a whole (for example, American culture), and later in this chapter we will even conceive of the possibility of a global culture. But you have also seen that there is great diversity within cultures, from gang culture to internet culture and too many other variants of culture for us to enumerate. Studying and understanding culture becomes easier, however, with the aid of a few key ideas: ideal and real culture, ideology, subculture and counterculture, culture war, and multiculturalism.

Ideal and Real Culture

There is often a large gap, if not a chasm, between ideal culture, or what the norms and values of society lead us to think people should believe and do, and real culture, or what people actually think and do in their everyday lives. For example, as we have seen, a major American value is democracy. However, barely a majority of Americans bother to vote in presidential elections—only 60 percent of eligible voters voted in the 2016 election, about 1 percent above the figure four years earlier (United States Elections Project 2016; see Chapter 15). A far smaller percentage of those who are eligible vote in state and local elections.

Worse, very few Americans are active in politics in other ways, such as canvassing on behalf of a political party or working to get people out to vote.

In another example, the cultural ideal that mothers should be completely devoted to their children (Hays 1998) often comes into conflict with lived reality for many women who work outside the home and must balance their time between job and family. This contradiction is apparent in the incidence of breastfeeding, which at least for some women is once again a norm of motherhood (Avishai 2007; Stearns 2009). Breastfeeding is difficult or impossible for many mothers because it is labor- and time-intensive, and given work and all the other constraints women face in their lives, it is difficult for them to find the time and energy to do it. Despite its health benefits for baby and mother, under such circumstances breastfeeding can have adverse social and economic consequences for women. One study demonstrated that women who breastfed for more than six months suffered greater economic losses than those who did so for less time or not at all (Rippeyoug and Noonan 2012). Though some women who do not breastfeed can feel that they have failed to live up to cultural standards of being a “good mom,” others have developed resistance strategies to maintain a positive maternal identity, such as recognizing that the use of formula is not always an individual choice (Holcomb 2017).

Ideology

An ideology is a set of shared beliefs that explains the social world and guides people’s actions. There are many ideologies in any society, and some of them become dominant. For example, in the United States, meritocracy is a dominant ideology involving the widely shared belief that all people have an equal chance of succeeding economically based on their hard work and skills. Many people act on the basis of that belief and, among other things, seek the education and training they think they need to succeed.

However, even with dedication and adequate education and training, not everyone succeeds. Among many other things, some people are luckier than others (Frank 2016). Even though they don’t deserve it, some people succeed because of a lucky break; others who deserve to succeed don’t because they are unlucky. This reflects the key fact that not all ideologies are true. For one thing, they may come from, and be true for, some groups of people (such as those in the upper classes) and not for others (those in the lower classes; Mannheim [1931] 1936). For another, they may be outright distortions used by one group to hide reality from another group (Marx [1857–1858] 1964). In this sense, it could be argued that meritocracy is an ideology created by the upper classes to hide the fact that those in the lower classes have little or no chance of succeeding. This fact is hidden from them to prevent them from becoming dissatisfied and rebellious. If the lower classes accept the ideology of meritocracy, they may be more likely to blame themselves for failing rather than the upper classes or the American economic system as a whole.
We are accustomed to spontaneously forming straight, orderly lines to efficiently board an airplane, order food, gain admission to an athletic event, or attend a popular concert (Fuller 2014; Helweg-Larsen and LoMonaco 2008). Queuing up is a norm within modern American society.

Standing in straight lines is less normative in other societies, however, particularly those that are less developed and less modern. For example, in India, people might begin to form a queue, but when the line grows too long, new arrivals stand next to those already in line, forming what look like new limbs on a human evergreen tree. "They hover near the line's middle, holding papers, looking lost in a practiced way, then slip in somewhere close to the front. When confronted, their refrain is predictable: 'Oh, I didn't see the line" (Girdharadas 2010). To prevent such cutting, people (mostly men) end up standing very close to those in front of them, often close enough that they are touching.

There is a long history of queues in many other cultures, most notably British culture. However, although Hong Kong was a British colony for well over a century (as was India), queuing was not the norm at McDonald's when it opened in Hong Kong in 1975. Rather, milling crowds shouted out orders and waved money at the servers. McDonald's introduced queue monitors responsible for getting customers to form orderly lines, a practice that later became characteristic of middle-class culture in general in Hong Kong. In fact, older residents often credit McDonald's with bringing the queue to Hong Kong.

More recently in India and elsewhere, the queue is being challenged by the "market mentality," as many, especially the affluent, increasingly believe that they should be able to pay to get to the front of any queue or avoid it altogether. There are lines at Hindu temples, for example, but those who can pay get in much shorter VIP lines or avoid lines entirely. Indian clubs have "rope lines" for most visitors, but purchasers of premium memberships get in faster. At the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique at Disneyland, parents can pay an extra fee to have their kids get a princess or prince makeover, then skip the line in the castle area next door to meet the princess characters.

Such market-driven arrangements are more efficient for those who can afford them, but they complicate life for those who cannot, and they contribute to the creation of an increasingly stratified world.

**Think About It**

Do you think queuing up in an orderly fashion is a positive norm or a negative one? Why do you suppose there are no apparent social sanctions for paying extra to go to the head of the line?
Subcultures

Within any culture there are subcultures, or groups of people who accept much of the dominant culture but are set apart from it by one or more culturally significant characteristics. In the United States, major subcultures include the LGBTQ community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people), Hispanics, Hasidic Jews, hip-hop fans, and youth. Muslims are becoming an increasingly important subculture in the United States (especially in cities such as Detroit). They already constitute a major subculture in many European countries, most notably France and Great Britain.

Subcultures arise in the realm of consumption as well. For example, “brand communities” develop around particular brand name products (Todd and Soule 2018). Harley-Davidson motorcycle riders are one such subculture (called HOGS, for Harley Owners Group), with distinctive clothing, events, and norms. Brand communities have formed around a number of Apple products, such as the Macintosh computer (the “Mac”) and the iPad. The members of these communities share a number of cultural elements, including norms. In the case of the Mac, for example, some community members positively sanction “jailbreaking,” a method for hacking into Apple’s software to get around its restrictions and limitations.

Any society includes many subcultures, such as hackers or those devoted to fishing, that develop around particular styles of life and share special vocabularies. A great deal of attention has been devoted to “deviant” subcultures, such as those of punks, goths, and the like (Barmaki 2016). In Great Britain, “football hooligans,” those who often engage in violence at or in regard to soccer matches, constitute a deviant subculture largely specific to that society (Ayers and Treadwell 2012; Dunning, Murphy, and Williams 1988). However, there are also many “straight” subcultures, such as those who play online games (e.g., Fortnite) or “straight” fans of clean eating (e.g., the Whole30 program [https://whole30.com] or the Paleo diet; Wood 2006).

Another example of a subculture is the world of skateboarders. The majority of skateboarders accept most of the larger society’s culture, norms, values, and language, but they also differ in some ways. Many are more willing than most members of society to take physical risks, for example, by participating in the sport known as parkour, which involves using the body to overcome urban obstacles such as walls and ledges (Kidder 2012; Thorpe and Ahmad 2015). Skateboarders in general, as well as those who practice parkour, see such obstacles as enhancing the thrill of their activity.

Skateboarders also have their own vocabulary. It happens that one of my (the senior author’s) family members is

Skateboarding has developed a subculture with its own norms, values, language, and environments. Do you belong to any similar subcultures?
a skateboarder, so I am (vaguely) familiar with these terms. However, it took me a long time to understand them. When I did, I was able to get a better sense of skateboarding and its intricacies. Of course, my understanding pales in comparison to that of those immersed in the skateboarding subculture and its distinctive language.

**Countercultures**

Countercultures are groups that not only differ from the dominant culture but also adhere to norms and values that may be incompatible with those of the dominant culture. They may, in fact, consciously and overtly act in opposition to the dominant culture. The term *counterculture* was introduced by Theodore Roszak ([1968] 1995) in the late 1960s in reference to hippies, antinuclear activists, and radical students.

Computer hackers are a contemporary example of a counterculture. Many hackers simply seek to show their technical mastery of computers through relatively benign actions, such as writing free computer software, but a minority are devoted to subverting authority and disrupting the internet, and some are involved in stealing personal identification data (identity theft) and money (Alleyne 2018). They may write malicious code in order to interrupt or even shut down the normal operations of computers. In one famous case in 1988, Robert Tappan Morris unleashed what was thought to be the first worm that slowed down thousands of computers, making many of them unusable. Since then, many attempted and successful break-ins have threatened government and corporate computer systems (e.g., the Equifax break-in 2017); the hackers’ goal has been to steal secret or personal information (like consumer credit data in the case of Equifax). A rash of break-ins into corporate computers was aimed at stealing credit card numbers and account information. For example, in late 2014 the account information of 56 million Home Depot customers was compromised; information on 40 million Target accounts had been hacked the year before (Perlroth 2014). In mid-2015 hackers exposed the names of 30 million people who had accounts with Ashley Madison. This was particularly troublesome to the account holders because those who participated on the Ashley Madison website were interested in having adulterous affairs. The site’s slogan was “Life is short; have an affair” (McPhate 2016). Personal accounts have also been hacked and locked until the account holders paid ransom demanded by the hackers (Simone 2015). Hacking became a huge public issue in late 2016 when the Russians were caught hacking the accounts of Hillary Clinton and her supporters during the U.S. presidential campaign. Many believe that the Russians’ goal was to help Donald Trump win the election (Lipton, Sanger, and Shane 2016). Hacking became a huge public issue in late 2016 when the Russians were caught hacking the accounts of Hillary Clinton and her supporters during the U.S. presidential campaign. Many believe that the Russians’ goal was to help Donald Trump win the election (Lipton, Sanger, and Shane 2016). While there is clear evidence that the Russians did hack Clinton’s e-mail account, as well as those of others associated with her campaign, and intervened in the 2016 election in other ways, the Mueller report appeared to clear Trump of the charge of colluding with the Russians in this effort. However, we can expect more revelations about this in the years to come.

In the realm of consumption, an important contemporary counterculture is formed by those associated with or sympathetic to the “voluntary simplicity” movement (Elgin 2010; Pelikán, Galacanova, and Kala, forthcoming). Sociologist Juliet Schor (1993, 1998) has critiqued the dominant American culture’s emphasis on what she calls “work and spend.” That is, we are willing to work long hours so that we can spend a great deal on consumption and live an ever-more elaborate lifestyle. In addition, Schor (2005) points out the ways in which our consumer culture has led to the commercialization of childhood, with advertising pervading all aspects of children’s lives. As a countercultural alternative, she suggests that we both work less and spend less and instead devote ourselves to more meaningful activities. Living a simpler life means avoiding overconsumption, minimizing the work needed to pay for consumption, and doing less harm to the environment.

Globalization, especially economic globalization, has also spawned a number of very active countercultural groups. They are not necessarily antiglobalization, but they favor alternative forms of globalization (Kahn and Kellner 2007; Obara-Minnitt 2014; Pleyers 2010). In fact, many of them are part of the process of globalization. The World Social Forum (WSF) was created in 2001 following a series of antiglobalization protests, particularly one in Seattle in 1999. Its members come from all over the world. The WSF’s slogan is “Another world is possible.” That other world would be less capitalistic. It would also allow for more democratic decision-making on matters that affect large portions of the world’s population. Those who accept this kind of perspective are clearly part of a counterculture. They oppose the global spread of the dominant capitalist culture that prioritizes maximizing profits over democratic decision-making.

**Culture Wars**

In the 1960s, the hippies, student radicals, and Vietnam War activists vocally, visibly, and sometimes violently rejected traditional American norms and values. Among other things, they rejected unthinking patriotism and taboos against recreational drugs and sexual freedom. The term *culture war* was used to describe the social upheaval that ensued. More generally, a *culture war* is a conflict pitting a subculture or counterculture against the dominant culture (e.g., antievolutionists versus evolutionists; Silva 2014), or a conflict between dominant groups within a society. Culture wars sometimes lead to the disruption of the social, economic, and political status quo (Hunter 1992; Luker 1984).

In the United States today, the major culture war being fought is between those who place themselves on the conservative end of the sociopolitical spectrum and those who place themselves on the liberal end. It is largely viewed as a political battle over such things as government spending, taxes, social services, national defense, and environmental measures. Conservatives generally favor less government spending, lower taxes for the wealthy, fewer entitlements for the poor, aggressive national defense, and minimal environmental regulations. Liberals usually support higher government spending on education, health care, and services for the poor; less spending on national defense; and stricter environmental regulations. Today, this battle is epitomized by struggles between Donald Trump and his conservative allies in the Republican Party and liberal Democrats in the Congress.

There are important differences in fundamental values between these groups. Consider, for example, the long-running...
CHAPTER 4 CULTURE

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The political battle is over legal limits to abortion and contraception. However, the underlying values have to do with differing definitions of life and attitudes toward women’s role in society. Similarly, much heat is generated over “family values,” with conservatives worrying about the decline in the traditional nuclear family, the increasing prevalence of cohabitation and single parenthood, homosexual marriage, and the adoption of children by same-sex couples. They place more emphasis on strict moral codes and self-discipline, whereas liberals, in contrast, place more significance on empathy, openness, and fairness. Liberals tend to see the developments in the family as signs of greater acceptance of people’s differences and circumstances (Lakoff 2016; Wuthnow 2018). Within the field of sociology, in fact, there is intense debate between family scholars who argue that the family is in decline and those who feel that the concept of the family needs to be broadened to embrace the many ways in which people experience kin connections (Popenoe 1993; see Chapter 12).

The conservative–liberal culture war is debated endlessly in the popular media. The media themselves tend to be increasingly divided along conservative (Fox News) and liberal (MSNBC) lines. News reports on these stations are often wildly different, taking contrasting or conflicting positions and even featuring completely different stories or takes on the same stories. The leading media pundits (e.g., Fox News’s conservative Sean Hannity and MSNBC’s liberal Rachel Maddow) are often at war with one another.

Examples of culture wars are also to be found in the digital world. For example, open-source advocates believe that the internet, or at least large portions of it, should be protected from control by governments or corporations. They support free open-source software (e.g., Linux, Firefox, OpenOffice, GNU Image Manipulation Program) as well as free access to information. One of their models is nonprofit Wikipedia, where anyone can create entries and modify them. They oppose the dominant profit-oriented players on the internet, including Microsoft, Google, Apple, and internet service providers. These large corporations are seen as carving up the digital world and controlling access to generate huge profits. There is a constant low-level conflict going on between members of these two cultures and the groups that support them. More recently, a culture war broke out between those

FIGURE 4.3


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who want to give some corporations (such as Comcast and Verizon) control over the internet and those who favor “net neutrality,” in which the internet is free and open to all. The issue seemed settled when in mid-2016 a federal court ruled in favor of net neutrality, but it is far from dead. In late 2017 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted to eliminate at least some of the rules that made net neutrality possible. As a result, it is likely that large corporations will gain an even greater presence in, and control over, the internet.

**ASK YOURSELF**

Do you think that a culture war between political conservatives and liberals is inevitable? Why or why not?

### Multiculturalism and Assimilation

A great deal of attention has been paid in recent years to another aspect of cultural diversity—multiculturalism, or an environment in which cultural differences are accepted and appreciated both by the state and by the majority group (Pakulski 2014). The cultural groups may be based on race, ethnicity, nationality, or language. They may also be based on age and other dimensions of difference. People in the United States, for example, generally accept that young and old people have their own cultural preferences. Americans for the most part tolerate—sometimes even celebrate—the coexistence of different cultural groups within the larger culture.

When it comes to ethnicity and national origin, however, multiculturalism has not always been celebrated in this country. The dominant culture has been interested primarily in assimilation, or integrating the minority group into the mainstream. As a so-called nation of immigrants, the United States has always had to resolve issues of cultural diversity. Until late in the twentieth century, most immigrants to the United States were from Europe, especially eastern and southern Europe. Many of these groups did assimilate to a large degree, even if their assimilation occurred over a couple of generations. Today we do not think twice about whether Polish Americans or Italian Americans, for instance, are “regular” Americans.

But immigrants from the next large wave, in the 1990s and 2000s, have not assimilated so well. Figure 4.3 demonstrates that the largest flow of immigrants is now from the Americas, with another large—and growing—group from Asia. These immigrants, especially those from Mexico and China, often live in largely separate enclaves and often speak their native languages (see Figure 4.4 for a map depicting the percentage of the population speaking a language other than English at home). They also often retain their basic cultures, such as their tastes in food. It remains to be seen whether, and to what degree, these groups will be assimilated into mainstream
The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America (Princeton University Press, 2018)

Robert Wuthnow

What are the daily experiences of Americans living in rural areas? What values are most important to them, and how do these influence their political views? Is rural America homogeneous? Robert Wuthnow and his research assistants conducted in-depth interviews with over one thousand residents in rural areas to discover the answers to these questions. Their main finding is that rural Americans belong to moral communities and feel a special sense of place and obligation to each other. Most rural residents live in or near small towns, where they work, shop, attend schools and church services, and socialize. These towns are the physical spaces that reinforce the local norms and customs of moral communities, such as attending community events and interacting regularly with their neighbors. But moral communities are also imagined in the sense that although not all who belong to them personally know each other, they feel like they do and share the same values. Wuthnow (2018) argues that “rural America is not a homogeneous census bloc.” So we should be careful not to essentialize its residents (p. 5). However, most are white (85 to 90 percent) and politically and socially conservative. Therefore, their moral communities are often shaped by exclusion or “othering.”

Many moral communities in rural America feel threatened by social forces beyond their control. The population has been declining in most of these areas, which has resulted in local businesses and schools closing. In addition to a lack of jobs, lower education levels, higher rates of teenage pregnancy, and drug addiction are struggles that rural communities face to an inordinate degree. The moral communities that Wuthnow studies blame Washington, D.C., and Hollywood for the moral decline in America and fight to protect their culture and uphold their social norms. A vote against their economic self-interest is often a vote for their cultural—and in particular religious—beliefs.

edge.sagepub.com/ritzerintro5e
- Read an interview with Robert Wuthnow on Vox
- Watch Wuthnow discuss his book on C-SPAN.

culture or their culture will be accepted as a valued element of American culture.

In the past, Muslims have generally assimilated well in the United States (Freedman 2016). The future of their assimilation, however, is in doubt (Bulut 2016). This is a result of the current widespread hostility toward Muslims (especially toward radical Islamic extremists) because of their perceived association with 9/11 and terrorism in the United States and many other parts of the world. This hostility increased greatly during the 2016 presidential campaign and in the early years of Trump’s presidency when he suggested and then implemented a temporary ban on Muslim immigration to the United States. In mid-2018 the Supreme Court upheld the ban on immigrants, but only from five primarily Muslim countries. It remains to be seen how long this ban will remain in effect, but Muslims, as well as members and supporters of the rights of all minority groups, have every reason to be alarmed.

Muslims who have already assimilated may face more hostility in the future, and newcomers may have a harder time assimilating. This hostility toward Muslims in the United States (and elsewhere) exists even though many of the attacks by radical Islamist have taken place in Muslim-dominated countries and Muslims have constituted a disproportionate percentage of the victims (Barnard 2016).

Multiculturalism is a relatively recent issue for many European societies, particularly the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands. They have traditionally been almost monocultures, and even now, during a period of widespread global migration, they have a smaller proportion of foreign-born residents than the United States has. However, beginning in the 1950s, many European countries began to experience labor shortages (Fassmann and Munz 1992; Fielding 1989). Large numbers of people from poorer southern European countries, such as Spain and Italy, migrated to northern European countries. Later, migration flowed from less developed countries outside Europe, such as Turkestan; other largely Islamic countries; and many African countries. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought additional eastern Europeans from places
such as Albania. Many northern European governments had intended for these immigrant workers to stay only a short time. However, the immigrants built lives for themselves, brought their families, and chose to remain. The result is that European countries today are far more multicultural than they were several decades ago.

**ASK YOURSELF**

If you were born in the United States, imagine yourself as an immigrant to another country, one to which you have no cultural or genealogical ties and where you know no one. What would you do on your arrival in order to survive? Would you seek out other Americans? Why or why not? Would you try to assimilate? How?

More recent immigrants to largely Christian Europe bring with them very different cultures and very different religions (Islam, for example). They are also likely to be relatively poor. As a relatively small, monocultural country, the Netherlands has had trouble digesting its roughly 850,000 Muslim immigrants, and relations between Muslims and non-Muslims have grown increasingly polarized (Maliepaard and Alba 2016). The same is true in Belgium, which has sought to accommodate the burgeoning Muslim population by de-Christianizing its own holidays (for example, All Saints Day was renamed Autumn Holiday; Kern 2014). In spite of such efforts, concerns about the Muslim population in Belgium continue, epitomized by the coordinated attacks in Brussels in March 2016, which killed 35 people and injured hundreds of others.

Since 2014, France has experienced a number of terrorist attacks. Among them, perhaps the most infamous incident (at least so far) occurred in January 2015, when three Islamic extremists entered the Paris offices of Charlie Hebdo, a venerable French satirical newspaper, and shot and killed 12 people, including editors and cartoonists. In 2016, as a result of such acts of terrorism, the French authorities dismantled the Calais Jungle refugee camp, where almost 2,000 refugees—many of them Muslims—were living in makeshift shelters (McAuley 2016).

Southern Europeans, especially in Italy, are increasingly having difficulty in dealing with waves of immigrants from North Africa. In fact, many would-be immigrants are dying in accidents at sea before they even get to Italy as they seek to navigate the Mediterranean Sea in overcrowded and rickety boats. For years Italy and other countries sought to prevent migrants from leaving North Africa, especially the failed state of Libya. However, a 2012 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights stopped them from doing so. The resistance of Italy, Spain, and other southern European countries to such immigration, like that in northern Europe, is motivated in part by economics and the fear that immigrants will cost natives their jobs. However, it is also cultural in the sense that the different cultures of these immigrants are seen as a threat to Italian, Spanish, and other European cultures. In short, European countries today have more cultural diversity than ever. However, the situation is fraught with tension, conflict, and danger as people from very different cultures, religions, and languages struggle to find a way to live side by side. Given these recent developments in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere in the world, some are declaring multiculturalism a failure. States, and especially majority groups, are growing less appreciative of, and less willing to accept, groups that represent different cultures (Gozdeka, Ercan, and Knak 2014).

**Identity Politics**

While some majority groups have come to oppose multiculturalism, various minority groups have grown impatient with the dominant culture's limited view of multiculturalism and its unwillingness to accept the minority groups for who they are. Such minorities have asserted their right to retain their distinctive cultures and even their right not to assimilate, at least totally. In reaction, the majority group, especially whites in various parts of the world (including the United States), have reasserted themselves as an identity group (Mishra, 2018). Many minority groups have engaged in **identity politics** in using their power to strengthen the position of the cultural groups with which they identify (Appiah 2018). Identity politics has a long history; in recent decades it has included the black power, feminist, and gay pride movements in many parts of the world. The goal of such movements has been the creation of a true multicultural society, one that accepts minorities for who they are.

Identity politics has played out not only on the streets in the form of public protests and demonstrations but also in schools, especially in universities. In the latter, the central issue has been whether all students should be required to learn the “canon”—a common set of texts, sometimes referred to as the “great books”—a body of knowledge long regarded to be of central importance. For example, the works of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim are often thought to be the canonical texts in sociology. Minority cultures claim that the canon in sociology and many other fields reflects the interests and experiences of white middle- and upper-class males. They argue that alternative bodies of knowledge, such as those created by women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community, are at least as important. The result has been a proliferation of programs such as those devoted to black, Chicano, and feminist studies, where the focus is on those alternative texts and bodies of knowledge. However, such programs have been the subject of much controversy and political scrutiny.

**Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism**

Multiculturalism and identity politics are closely related to **cultural relativism**, which is the idea that aspects of a culture such as norms and values need to be understood within the context of that culture; there are no cultural universals, or universally accepted norms and values. In this view, different cultures simply have different norms and values. There is no basis for saying that one set of norms and values is better than another. Thus, for example, those in Western countries should not judge Islamic women’s
use of headscarves. Conversely, those in the Islamic world should not judge Western women who bare their midriffs.

Cultural relativism runs counter to the tendency in many cultures toward ethnocentrism, or the belief that the norms, values, traditions, and material and symbolic aspects of one’s own culture are better than those of other cultures. The tendency toward ethnocentrism both among subcultures within the United States and in cultures throughout the world represents a huge barrier to greater cultural understanding. However, to be fair, a belief in one’s own culture can be of great value to that culture. It gives the people of that culture a sense of pride and identity. Problems arise when ethnocentrism serves as a barrier to understanding other cultures, a source of conflict among cultures, or an excuse for one culture to deny rights or privileges to another.

CHECKPOINT 4.3

Some Comparisons That Define Cultural Differences

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<tr>
<td>Ideal culture: What our norms and values lead us to think we should believe and do</td>
<td>Real culture: What we actually think and do</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subcultures: Groups that accept much of the dominant culture but are set apart by one or more significant characteristics</td>
<td>Countercultures: Groups that not only differ from the dominant culture but hold norms and values that may be incompatible with it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiculturalism: An environment in which cultural differences are accepted and appreciated by the majority group</td>
<td>Assimilation: The integration of a cultural minority group into the mainstream</td>
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<td>Cultural relativism: The belief that different cultures have different norms and values and that none are universally accepted or better than any others</td>
<td>Ethnocentrism: The belief that the norms, values, traditions, and symbols of one’s own culture are better than those of other cultures</td>
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Major Types of Culture

In this section we focus on three major types of culture: global culture, consumer culture, and cyberculture.

Global Culture

There are certainly major differences within American culture, such as those that exist among subcultures. Yet few would dispute the idea that it is possible to talk about American culture in general. However, discussing a global culture, a culture common to the world as a whole, is not as easy. Some elements of material culture, including hamburgers, sushi, cars, and communication technology, have spread widely around the world. However, the global diffusion of nonmaterial culture—values, norms, and symbolic culture—is somewhat more problematic.

The Globalization of Values

We have already discussed how values differ, sometimes greatly, from one society to another. How, then, can we discuss global values—values shared throughout the world? Some scholars argue that global values exist because all people share a biological structure that produces universal tendencies, including common values. Others contend that while particular values vary from country to country, the underlying structure of values is much the same across societies. However, the most persuasive argument for the existence of global values is traceable to the process of globalization. Global flows of all sorts of things—information, ideas, products, and people—produce realities in most parts of the world more similar than ever before. If these realities are increasingly similar, it seems likely that what people value will come to be increasingly similar throughout the world.

In fact, the globalization of values has been the subject of the World Values Survey, discussed previously in this chapter and in Chapter 3. One of the major findings of this research is a wide-ranging global shift from valuing economic prosperity and material success to valuing more quality-of-life issues such as lifestyle (free time to enjoy the activities and company that one prefers) and self-expression (the opportunity to express one’s artistic talents). Other emerging global values are egalitarianism, especially as it relates to men and women, and liberalization of sexuality.

However, do these changes signify the emergence of truly global values? While they probably hold for the most developed societies in North America, Europe, and Asia, do they apply to most of the less developed world? Probably not! For example, there is little evidence that all societies (especially Islamic societies) are becoming more accepting of greater equality between men and women and more liberal sexual values. There are also generational differences within many societies, even those that are highly developed, with younger people being more likely to accept these quality-of-life values than older generations (Welzel and Inglehart 2009).

In short, we can agree that globalization has brought with it greater acceptance of some values in a larger part of the world, but that is a very long way from saying that we have a global value system. For example, although many societies have welcomed greater access to information from around the world through the internet and other digital media, China has erected what has been called the “Great Firewall,” seeking to restrict the ability of its people to view the entire range of internet sites and therefore the global values on view in at least some of them.
Cultural Imperialism

Many have the strong view that what affects global culture most of all is cultural imperialism, or the imposition of at least aspects of one dominant culture on other cultures (Inglis 2017; Tomlinson 1999). Cultural imperialism tends to undermine, even destroy, local cultures. Let us look briefly at two examples of cultural imperialism in contemporary India.

- Saris are a key element of Indian material culture. Indian saris have traditionally been made of silk and woven by hand in a process that can take as much as two months for each sari. Elaborate designs use silk interspersed with strands of gold thread. However, India’s roughly one million sari makers are now threatened by the availability of machine-made saris, especially from China (Wax 2007). A culture that emphasizes inexpensive, machine-made products is imposing itself on a realm in another culture that has emphasized local products, practices, and indigenous skilled workers. In the process, the local sari-making culture is being destroyed, and the sari itself, a distinctive Indian product, is losing its unique character.

- There is also a long tradition in India of professional letter writers, men who place themselves in prominent locations (e.g., near train stations) and offer their services writing letters for poor, illiterate migrants. Many of these letter writers are able to survive on the pittance they are paid for each letter. However, the adoption of elements of Western culture—the cell phone, texting, and so on—is rendering the professional letter writers, and the cultural traditions associated with them, obsolete.

There is certainly a great deal of cultural imperialism in the world today, much of it associated with the United States (Crothers 2017; Kuisel 1993). The process of Americanization includes the importation by other countries of a variety of cultural elements—products, images, technologies, practices, norms, values, and behaviors—closely associated with the United States. One example is the American movie industry. The popularity of American movies around the world has decimated the film industries of many countries, including Great Britain and France. (India is one exception, with its thriving Bollywood productions, including the 2009 Academy Award winner for Best Picture, Slumdog Millionaire [Rizvi 2012].) Another successful U.S. cultural export is Americans’ taste for food, especially fast food and the way in which it is eaten (quickly, with one’s hands, standing up or in the car). McDonald’s is a prime example, but another of note is Starbucks (Simon 2009), which has been surprisingly successful in exporting its model of large, slowly consumed cups of coffee. In contrast, in France and Italy and other countries, the historic preference has been for tiny cups of espresso quickly consumed (although the first Starbucks opened in Italy in 2018). There are now more than 28,000 Starbucks stores located around the world, in more than 70 countries.

Cultural imperialism certainly exists, but it would be wrong to overestimate its power. Local cultures can be quite resilient. Not all cultures suffer the fate of French movie producers and Indian sari makers and letter writers. Consider the following:

- The powerful process of Americanization is often countered by anti-Americanism, which is an aversion to the United States in general, as well as to the influence of its culture abroad (Huntington 1996; O’Connor and Griffiths 2005).

- Many cultures—Chinese and Islamic cultures, for example—have long, even ancient, histories. These cultures have resisted at least some impositions from other cultures for centuries. They are likely to continue to resist changes that threaten their basic values and beliefs.

- Local cultures modify inputs and impositions from other cultures by integrating them with local realities and in the process produce cultural hybrids that combine elements of both (Nederveen Pieterse 2015). Hybridization occurs when, for instance, British people watch Asian rap performed by a South American in a London club owned by a Saudi Arabian; another example is the Dutch watching Moroccan women engage in Thai boxing. In the fast-food realm, McDonald’s sells such hybrid foods as McChicken Korma Naan, which caters to those in Great Britain who have developed a taste for Indian food (including the many Indians who live there); McLaks, a grilled salmon sandwich served in Norway; and McHuevos, a hamburger with a poached egg served in Uruguay.

Thus, cultural imperialism needs to be examined in the context of the counterreactions to it, counterflows from elsewhere in the world, and the combination of global and local influences to produce unique cultural elements.

Consumer Culture

Recall that in Chapter 2 we discussed Thorstein Veblen’s (1899 1994) concept of conspicuous consumption (Schor 2015). When this idea was introduced at the turn of the twentieth century, its focus was on the wealthy and their desire to demonstrate their wealth by flaunting their mansions, yachts, designer clothes, and especially their leisure time. According to Elizabeth Currid-Halkett (2017), Veblen’s leisure class has been transformed into the aspirational class, a new cultural elite that demonstrates its class position through the acquisition of knowledge. This transformation has occurred because the democratization of conspicuous consumption has made it difficult for the elite to signify its status through material goods. The aspirational class prefers more “subtle status markers” and often engages in inconspicuous consumption, purchasing inexpensive or moderately priced goods that are not ostentatious and do not symbolize materialistic values. The aspirational class places more value on shopping at local boutiques than at Bloomingdale’s and would more likely drive a Prius than a Range Rover (Currid-Halkett 2017). Rachel Sherman (2017) found similar instances of inconspicuous consumption in her study of affluent New Yorkers. Many described their consumption as “ordinary” and “normal” instead of “excessive or materialistic” (Sherman 2017, 93). Due to anxiety over
their privileged economic positions, some tried to hide their wealth through inconspicuous consumption. For example, one woman in Sherman’s study removed the price tags from her clothes (and a $6 loaf of bread) so her nanny would not see how much they cost.

Whether it is conspicuous or inconspicuous, consumption is clearly highly valued in the United States (and elsewhere; see Nwachukwu and Dant 2014). That makes American culture a consumer culture, one in which the core ideas and material objects relate to consumption and in which consumption is a primary source of meaning in life (Berger 2015; Slater 2015; Wiedenhoft Murphy 2017). In a consumer culture, meaning may be found in the goods and services you buy, in the process of buying them (in shopping malls, cybermalls, and so on), in the social aspects of consumption (shopping with your friends or family), and even in the settings in which consumption takes place (e.g., the Venetian or some other Las Vegas hotel-casino, eBay; Ritzer, Goodman, and Wiedenhoft 2001). There are norms for the consumption process as well. For example, customers should wait patiently in the queue for the cashier, gamblers at a Las Vegas casino should not flaunt their winnings in front of other gamblers and should tip dealers, and so on.

Contemporary consumer culture is unique (Trentman 2016). In the past, culture has generally focused on some other aspect of social life, such as religion, warfare, citizenship, or work. In fact, in the not-too-distant past in the United States and other developed countries, the core ideas and material objects of culture related to work and production. People were thought to derive their greatest meaning from their work. This was true from the Industrial Revolution until approximately 1970, when observers began to realize that developed societies, especially the United States, were beginning to derive more meaning from consumption (Baudrillard 1970; 1993). Of course, work continues to be important, as do religion, warfare, and citizenship, but many people in the world now live in a culture dominated by consumption.

The roots of today’s consumer culture can be traced further back in history, to when popular settings of consumption, such as large expositions, world’s fairs, and department stores, began to arise (Williams 1982; 1991). France in the mid-nineteenth century was particularly important to this development as home of the trendsetting Le Bon Marché department store and several world’s fairs, including the first truly international exposition. In these settings, consumption became democratized. It was no longer restricted to the aristocracy and to men. It became popular with the middle class and, as their ability to afford consumption improved, with the working class as well.

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Children in a Consumer Culture

The most controversial aspect of consumer culture may be the involvement of children (Sparman 2015). In a consumer culture, it is important that children be socialized into and become actively involved in, consuming (Cook 2004; Pilcher 2013). Consumption by children has not always been valued, however. In fact, there were once strong norms against it. Children were not considered to be able to make informed choices about consumption and were therefore seen as even more susceptible than adults to exploitation by advertisers and marketers.

An important change began to take place in the mid-nineteenth century with the advent of department stores. Some stores offered supervised play areas so that parents could shop more easily. A key development by the mid-twentieth century was children’s sections in department stores; they were eventually subdivided into shops for babies, children, and teens. Also during this period radio programs, movies, and TV shows were increasingly directed at children. Disney was a leader in this trend. TV shows of the 1950s, such as the Davy Crockett series (*King of the Wild Frontier*), prompted the sale of hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of simulated coon-skin caps and other merchandise for children. More recently, children have come to be targeted directly by advertisers on Saturday-morning TV shows and cable channels such as Nickelodeon that specialize in children’s programming.

In fact, marketing aimed at children is now pervasive. This is portrayed in detail in the documentary *Consuming Kids* (2008). For example, the Walt Disney Company directly markets baby products, and thus the Disney brand, to new mothers in maternity wards. In schools, branded products are sold at book fairs, and corporate sponsorships adorn everything from sports stadiums to classroom supplies. Brands and logos are woven into textbook problems and examples. Market researchers observe the way in which children use and respond to products and advertising messages not just in focus groups and in the lab but also in natural settings such as school and the home. Marketers have also discovered the importance of the “pester power” of children. This is the ability of children to nag their parents into buying things. It is effective not only for selling children’s products but also for getting children to influence their parents’ purchases.

Overall, children are much more immersed in consumer culture today than ever before. They learn at an early age to value it as well as the norms involved in participating in it. As adults, then, they will fit well into a culture with consumption at its core.

Nontraditional Settings for Consumption

An interesting aspect of consumer culture is the way in which it has spread beyond the economy to other aspects of society. For example, higher education is increasingly characterized by consumer culture. Students and their parents shop around for the best colleges and the most conspicuous degrees or for the
best values in a college education. College rankings, such as those published by Kiplinger and U.S. News & World Report, are a big business. In spite of a great deal of criticism (and some recent failures) for-profit colleges have become a booming industry. Enterprises such as the University of Phoenix and Kaplan University enroll hundreds of thousands of students who pay for the opportunity to earn their degrees on a flexible schedule (Cottom 2017; see Trending box in Chapter 13). Not long ago, students were largely passive recipients of what educational systems had to offer, but now they are more active consumers of education. For example, college students shop for the best classes, or the best class times, and regularly rate their professors and choose classes on the basis of the professors’ ratings. They are also much more likely to make demands for up-to-date “products” and attentive service from their professors and colleges, as they do from shopping malls and salespeople.

A key site of consumption is now the internet (Miller and Slater 2000; Zuev 2015). A good portion of the time people spend online is related to consumption, either directly (by purchasing items on sites such as Etsy or Amazon) or indirectly (by buying things on game sites such as CastleVille Legends with real dollars). Among the changes wrought by the internet is a great increase in consumer-to-consumer sales on sites like eBay. In 2000, only 22 percent of Americans had used the internet to buy products online, including books, music, toys, and clothing. By 2015, 79 percent of Americans shopped online (Smith and Anderson 2016). The growing importance of online consumption is reflected in the increasing amount spent each year on “Cyber Monday” (the Monday after Thanksgiving). Cyber Monday 2018 set a new record for online shopping, generating almost $8 billion in sales. Significantly, consumers used their mobile devices to generate over $2 billion in sales. In addition, in a process known as “contextual advertising,” advertisements are often woven seamlessly into the content of internet sites—even into games designed for children. Beyond that, many websites carry pop-up ads for goods and services targeted to the interests of the individuals viewing the sites. More specifically, if you use Google to shop for shoes or Amazon for books, ads for shoes and books will pop up for days, or even months, later on many of the sites you visit.

YouTube offers several innovations in consumption, including “shopping haul” and “unboxing” videos. In shopping haul videos, consumers, often women, show viewers the results of their recent shopping trips. Haulers describe and display clothing, accessories, and cosmetics from popular chain stores (such as Superdry, Bebe, and Victoria’s Secret) in malls and shopping strips around the world. Prices and bargains are mentioned frequently. Unboxing videos are a curious hybrid of unofficial marketing and product demonstration. Technology unboxes might demonstrate the features of new iPhones or computer games, while toy unboxes film children playing with various toys. Unboxes might assemble Lego kits, break open Disney Frozen-themed chocolate eggs, or open up McDonald’s Happy Meals and then have children play with the toys.

It could be argued that people in general, and especially children and teens, are becoming more immersed in consumer culture as they become more deeply enmeshed with the internet. This is even more the case now because we increasingly carry the internet—and the ability to shop there—with us all the time on our smartphones. As a result, consumer culture has become an even more inescapable part of our daily lives. Furthermore, consumption on the internet is increasingly wedged to the material world. You can pay for parking and rental cars using smartphone apps. An app allows a driver to open the doors of her rented Zipcar with her phone and honk its horn to locate it. The Hunt app brings into play a community of fashion-minded people to help us hunt down desired fashion items.

**ASK YOURSELF**

How much of the time that you spend online is devoted to shopping or purchasing? Try keeping a log of your internet use for a few days. Note how many times you went online and on how many of those occasions you bought something or browsed sites devoted to consumption. Are you a typical internet consumer? Why or why not?

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### A Postconsumer Culture?

Many people are now doing something that would have been unthinkable only a few years ago—saving money. The personal savings rate in the United States has changed over the past few years. In late 2007 it dipped to close to 3 percent of disposable income. At the height of the Great Recession in 2008 and 2009, it spiked to more than 8 percent. By late 2018, even though the economy had improved considerably, the personal savings rate was still a comparatively high 6 percent (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis 2018). People who are saving more of their money are obviously using less of it to consume.

These changes in the behavior of consumers and their attitudes speak to a change in the larger value system. Consuming less is a sure indication of at least a temporary decline of consumer culture. It may even be the beginning of a postconsumer culture. Among the characteristics of such a culture, beyond buying less and saving more, are sharing more things in the “sharing economy” (Belk 2014; Sundararajan 2016), renting consumer items (such as dresses on sites like Rent the Runway), taking pride in buying less expensive or even recycled items, buying less showy brands (a Kia rather than a BMW), dining at home more often than eating at restaurants, and showing a greater concern for the environment in terms of what we buy and, more important, do not buy. It is not clear that we are in a postconsumer culture, and if we are, it is uncertain how long it will last. However, just as we entered what is best described as a consumer culture in the last half of the twentieth century, it is at least possible that we are entering a postconsumer culture in the first half of the twenty-first century.

### Culture Jamming

Another chink in consumer culture has been created by organized groups actively seeking to subvert aspects of both consumer culture and the larger culture. The success of Burning Man is one indication of such subversion.
Begun in 1986, this annual weeklong event in Nevada’s Black Rock Desert today attracts 50,000 participants who commit themselves during their stay to self-expression, decommodification (for example, cash transactions between participants are banned), and community building (Chen 2009; Jones 2011). This is an example of culture jamming, which radically transforms mass media messages, often turning them on their heads completely (Kuehn 2015; Lasn 2000). It is a form of social protest aimed at revealing underlying realities of which consumers may be unaware. The hope is that once people are made aware of these realities through culture jamming, they will change their behaviors or perhaps even band together to change those underlying realities.

The best examples of culture jamming are to be found in the magazine *Adbusters* and the media campaigns it sponsors. The magazine’s main targets are in the realm of consumption, especially web and magazine advertisements and billboards. The idea is to transform a corporation’s ads into anticorporate, anticonsumption advertisements (Handelman and Kozinets 2007).

The following are some additional examples of the ways in which culture jamming turns commercial messages inside out:

- “Tommy Sheep” is a spoof of a Tommy Hilfiger ad, with sheep (presumably representing the conformists who buy such clothing) pictured in front of a huge American flag.

- “Absolute on Ice,” spoofing an Absolut vodka ad, depicts the foot of a corpse (presumably someone killed by excessive alcohol consumption) with a toe tag.

- People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) used the Burger King logo with the phrase “Murder King” to raise awareness of animal brutality in the beef industry.

- FORCE, a feminist organization, culture jammed Victoria Secret’s “Pink Loves Consent” advertising campaign by using social media to troll the company’s online brand community with the goal of starting a meaningful conversation about sexual consent (Madden et al. 2018).

- Brandalism, an activist artist movement, subverted advertisements with art at bus stops during the 2015 United Nation’s climate conference in Paris to promote environmental sustainability (Lekakis 2017).

These examples show the hidden realities (sickness, death, sexism, environmental problems, and other miseries) and goals (conformist consumers, obscene profits) of corporations. A broader objective is to show viewers the folly of consumer culture, which encourages the consumption of numerous harmful substances (e.g., cigarettes, alcohol) and wasteful goods and services (e.g., expensive clothing). In addition to advertisements, culture jammers create memes to spread ideas and information that challenge the status quo (Lasn 2012). For example, one meme designed by culture jammers depicts a photo of Walmart with the following words: “One of the biggest companies in the world owned by one of the richest families in America … holds food drive for needy employees instead of paying them a living wage” (CursedByTheDiceGods 2017).

**Cyberculture**

The internet is, as mentioned before, one site for the proliferation of consumer culture and perhaps postconsumer culture. It is also the site of an entirely new culture—cyberculture (F. Turner 2008). That is, the internet as a whole (as well as the individual websites it comprises) has the characteristics of all culture, including distinctive values and norms.

Some of the distinctive values within cyberculture are openness, knowledge sharing, and access. These values have their roots in the open-source software that emerged before computing became an attractive commercial opportunity. They are also rooted in the knowledge sharing and continuous improvement that were the practice when early computer professionals survived through reciprocity (Bergquist 2003). These roots have been maintained through the open-source software networks.
Netiquette

Social media websites are developing faster than the norms that can help guide and regulate the behavior of their users (McLaughlin and Vitak 2011). Online etiquette, or netiquette, tends to be implicit—there are few if any formal rules on how to use Snapchat or Instagram. Norms for these sites often emerge when users directly sanction the behavior of each other and content they feel is inappropriate. They may flag a sexually explicit photograph or hide a person from their Facebook feed who posts too many status updates. Our understanding and practice of online norms typically reflect the habits of our close friends, whom we are more likely than acquaintances to confront with norm violations. For example, if our friends are discreet about the photos they post of us, then we will likely reproduce this norm of being considerate when we post photos that include them (McLaughlin and Vitak 2011). Reciprocity, or sharing, is one of the most important norms currently guiding online behavior. Adherence to these norms allows us to build trust and gain access to information.

Netiquette can be complicated, considering the diversity of our online audience—what might be appropriate for our close friends to read or see might not be acceptable to our teachers or bosses. Furthermore, some sites might encourage people to behave in ways online that might not be acceptable in the real world. Snapchat can automatically delete photos, which might encourage users to post inappropriate or unflattering pictures of themselves or their friends. The legality of such practices has become an issue with teenagers when they send sexual images of themselves to each other. In some states this is considered to be the distribution of child pornography. In addition, cyberbullying occurs on a variety of social media sites, such as Tumblr, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, prompting some people to question whether these digital means of communication are making cruelty more normative.

Engaging the Digital World

Select one social media site and list five norms that are regulating, or you think should be used to regulate, the behavior of the site’s users. Explain what you think should happen if a user violates each of these norms. Are any behaviors so extreme that they should result in the user’s being denied access to the site? Have you ever tried to directly sanction the behavior of someone on a social media site? If yes, what norm did this person violate, and how did he or she respond to your sanction?

movement, through actions against censorship, and through organizations such as the Free Software Foundation and the “copyleft” movement. In line with the values of a postconsumer society, these “cyber-libertarians” favor user control of information and applications and free products (Dahlberg 2010; Himanen 2001). They are in conflict with the more dominant values of profit maximization and control of the internet by large corporations. This conflict of values, a culture war by the definition offered earlier in this chapter, goes a long way toward defining the internet today.

Various norms have also come to be a part of cyberspace. Internet users are not supposed to hack into websites, create and disseminate spam, unleash destructive worms and viruses, maliciously and erroneously edit user-generated sites such as Wikipedia, and so on. Many norms relate to desirable behavior on the internet. For example, creating and editing entries on Wikipedia is supposed to be taken seriously and done to the best of one’s ability. Once an entry exists, the many people who offer additions and deletions are expected to do so in a similar spirit. Those who purposely add erroneous information on Wikipedia will suffer the stern disapproval of other contributors to, and users of, the site. They may even be banned from the site by those who manage it.

There is, of course, much more to the culture of the internet. For example, in addition to a general cyberspace, there are a number of cybercultures that vary from nation to nation. But the point is that cyberspace, like all culture, is emerging and evolving as other changes take place within and around it. The biggest difference between cyberspace and other cultures is that, because the internet is so new and the changes in it are so rapid, cyberspace is far more fluid than culture in general.

People need to be socialized in order to learn how to use the internet, and they increasingly interact online rather than face-to-face. In Chapter 5 we turn to a broad discussion of the sociological perspective on socialization and interaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAJOR TYPES OF CULTURE</th>
<th>KEY CHARACTERISTICS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumer culture</td>
<td>Conspicuous consumption, marketing to children, nontraditional settings for consumption, postconsumer culture, culture jamming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global culture</td>
<td>A culture common to the world as a whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberculture</td>
<td>Openness, sharing, access</td>
</tr>
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SUMMARY

Culture encompasses the ideas, values, norms, practices, and objects that allow a group of people, or even an entire society, to carry out their collective lives with a minimum of friction. Values are the general, abstract standards defining what a group or society as a whole considers to be good, right, or important. Norms are the rules that guide what people do and how they live. Culture has material and symbolic elements. Material culture encompasses all the objects and technologies that are manifestations of a culture. Symbolic culture, the nonmaterial side of culture, is best represented by language.

We are surrounded by cultural differences. Subcultures include people who may accept much of the dominant culture but are set apart from it by one or more culturally significant characteristics. Countercultures are groups of people who differ in certain ways from the dominant culture and whose norms and values may be incompatible with it. Culture wars pit one subculture or counterculture against another or against the dominant culture.

Many societies tend to be ethnocentric—those living in them believe that their own culture’s norms, values, and traditions are better than those of other cultures. In many cases, newcomers are expected to assimilate, or to replace elements of their own culture with elements of the dominant culture. Groups that do not want to assimilate entirely may engage in identity politics, or try to use their power to strengthen the position of the cultural groups with which they identify. A society that values multiculturalism accepts and even embraces the cultures of many different groups and encourages cultural diversity. Multicultural societies often embrace cultural relativism, or the belief that there are no cultural universals.

Key forms of culture are global culture, consumer culture, and cyberculture.

KEY TERMS

Americanization, 98
anti-Americanism, 98
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culture jamming, 101
culture war, 92
cyberculture, 101
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REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you and your peers think of Juuling? Are you considered “cool” if you Juul? If you don’t Juul?

2. How and why might the American value of democracy have created tensions in Iraq and Afghanistan?

3. As part of our material culture, what values do smartphones reflect? In what ways have “brand communities” or other subcultures formed around smartphones and their use?
4. Consider the terminology that has developed around the internet. How does this language reflect changes in the world around us? In what ways does it shape the world around us?

5. Skateboarders constitute a subculture because they have certain cultural differences (in language, dress, values) that set them apart from other groups in society. What is another example of a subculture in the United States, and what elements of this culture (both material and symbolic) make it unique?

6. How does a counterculture differ from a subculture? Is it reasonable to say that computer hackers are part of a counterculture? Can you think of other examples of countercultures?

7. What is the difference between assimilation and multiculturalism? Would you say that the United States is an assimilationist or a multiculturalist society? Would you say that multiculturalism is more a part of the ideal culture or the real culture of the United States? Why?

8. What are some of today’s important culture wars? In what ways and to what degree are you engaged in them? Even if you are not active in them, how is your life affected by them?

9. What do we mean by the term *global culture*? Do you think the evolution of popular social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter is related more to the evolution of a global culture or to Americanization? In what ways are these sites reflective of cultural hybridization?

10. To what extent are you and your friends embedded in a consumer culture? How has the development of technology (the internet, smartphones, and so forth) contributed to the development of cyberculture? What is the relationship between consumer culture and cyberculture?